

Homework: Salvation and Transformation

The word *salvation* comes from the Latin root “salvus” and means to save, but it also has the same root as our word “salve,” with a meaning of health or wholeness. By what are you saved? What does salvation mean to you? Is transformation important as a part of salvation?

By what are you saved? And how?

Saved like a bit of string,

tucked away in a drawer?

Saved like a child rushed from

a burning building, already

singed and coughing smoke?

Or are you salvaged

like a car part—the one good door

when the rest is wrecked?

Do you believe me when I say

you are neither salvaged nor saved,

but salved, anointed by gentle hands

where you are most tender?

Haven't you seen

the way snow curls down

like a fresh sheet, how it

covers everything,

makes everything

beautiful, without exception?

—Lynn Ungar (*used with permission*)

Almost everyone agrees that we, as humans, make mistakes and “miss the moral mark”—otherwise known as committing a sin. How we choose to deal with this state of sin varies.

Christians use the word *salvation* to describe their belief that Jesus died for our sins. For fundamentalists, who believe that to be saved you must “know the Lord Jesus,” salvation is seen as a ticket into heaven. Buddhists find salvation (from suffering) in achieving non-attachment.

UUs, as you might expect, are all over the board with this term, *salvation*.

- Historically, the “Universalist” part of our Unitarian Universalist name carried the belief that *all* people would find salvation with the divine, not just those who believe in Jesus Christ.
- Other UUs don't believe in an afterlife and focus primarily on the here and now.
- Some UUs reject the idea that we need “redemption,” a term that means being saved from an outside force, and they go about changing/saving/transforming themselves.
- Some people see salvation as movement toward maturity, as seen in the Jungian idea of individuation. Others see salvation as our connectedness within ourselves, with others, and with larger purposes of life.
- UUs with a scientific bent declare that we are creatures of our evolutionary heritage, perhaps not needing salvation at all.

What saves you? In a sermon on salvation, Christine Robinson states, “Whether the road you are on seems a direct route to what you most want your life to be, or whether you can see that some course adjustments would get you closer to your goal, you are saved. You are saved by grace like a snowstorm that blankets all anew; saved by works that endure through the generations; saved by your own will to grow, learn, and understand; saved by those who salve you when you are most tender and by the ones you care for in their times of need. You are saved by bells, by children, by faith, hope, and love. Choose your road; our Universalist forbears said that every single one leads, eventually, to salvation.”

All this talk of saving souls.
Souls weren't made to save,
like Sunday clothes that
give out at the seams.
They're made for wear; they
come with lifetime guarantees.

Don't save your soul.
Pour it out like rain on
cracked, parched earth.
Give your soul away, or
pass it like a candle flame.
Sing it out, or
laugh it up the wind.

Souls were made for hearing
breaking hearts, for puzzling dreams,
remembering August flowers,
forgetting hurts.

These men who talk of saving souls!
They have the look of bullies
who blow out candles before
you sing happy birthday,
and want the world to be
in alphabetical order.

I will spend my soul
playing it out like sticky string
into the world,
so I can catch every
last thing I touch.

—Linda Underwood

Questions to Ponder

- Do you need saving? What are you being saved from? A hard life, addictions, physical problems, poverty, yourself? Is it something “out there” or something within you?
- What transforms you to health and wholeness?
- The deep listening and deep sharing periods of our covenant groups are sometimes called a transformational experience. How has this group been transformational for you?
- What are some other ways you might understand the word *salvation*?