



NEIGHBORHOOD UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

I'm Thankful for Yoko Ono

Rev. Hannah Petrie, Associate Minister

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301 N. Orange Grove Blvd. Pasadena, CA 91103 (626) 449-3470 information@uuneighborhood.org

The content of this sermon reminds me of Thanksgiving leftovers. But without the turkey. This sermon shall have no main course. I want to touch on many different things: on feminism, on peace and war, on family, and on cultural memory. This is a vegetarian sermon, with lots of gravy. The gravy is Yoko Ono. You can have Thanksgiving dinner without turkey, but you gotta have gravy. If John Lennon were Thanksgiving Dinner, he was not complete until Yoko came along.

For many Beatles fans, Lennon's love life was not as important as the Beatles staying together and continuing to make music. Yoko Ono has been an easy scapegoat for the Beatles' demise. But Lennon had a much higher goal than commercially pleasing the masses. John Lennon wanted to heal what was broken inside him; he wanted to overcome his fear of loving and being loved. This is why John and Yoko are worthy of sermon material: their partnership is multi-dimensional and about many things, but the deepest dimension that I see is this proof that love has the power to heal. As Yoko spoke about in her speech, our love and intention can be the source of a quiet revolution that heals the world. As Buddhism has it and also John Lennon, the healing of the world begins when we heal ourselves.

John Lennon was driven to heal himself, and he had a lot to heal. Many of us may also need healing, and Lennon's example should be an invitation to let our healing be as important to us. NPR and public television is my Glenn Beck, and if they are for you too, you know there's been an awful lot of coverage about John Lennon lately. He would have turned 70 October 9th. One of the shows I caught was produced by the Brits, a Masterpiece Theatre Contemporary show. After seeing this I came to appreciate how wounded Lennon's childhood was. He was very little when his parents split, and was effectively rejected by both of them. "Momma, don't go, Daddy come home," he sings and screams over and over at the end of his haunting song, *Mother*. He was left under an aunt's care, and saw little of Mum, and far less of Dad. Dad didn't reappear until he was rich and famous.

One scene was remarkably heartbreaking. After a meeting with lawyers and his first wife Cynthia to make *their* split official, he leaves his huge house and his first son, Julian, is playing soccer on the lawn. He kicks the ball to his father, and his father kicks the ball away and walks away, the rejection of his son and family history repeating itself all in one.

We can judge John Lennon here and say he was narcissistic and selfish. Beyond this, it's the behavior of someone who is broken. Not knowing love, he knew not how to love. It doesn't excuse it, but so often there is destruction involved in our healing. Have you experienced this? Have you ever had to go through hell, and destroy relationships in order to find health and wholeness? Sometimes we conclude the cost of our healing to others would be too great, and we have to find the courage to heal another way.

Perhaps Lennon lacked that courage, but it also took courage for him to open himself to what he would learn from Yoko Ono. When they left Britain for New York, it was the early 70's, and 3rd wave feminism was gaining momentum. It was the first song on one of his first solo records that 'Woman is the Nigger of the World' appeared, a song he co-wrote with Yoko. The use of the n-word was meant to be incendiary, to spark debate and further feminism. Music critic Anthony DeCurtis writes, "it is perhaps the first feminist anthem recorded by a prominent male rock star, and it marks both the impact his marriage to Yoko had on his evolving political consciousness, but also the deepening of his own understanding of women's role in the world – and in his life . . . For Lennon, *comprehending the world outside him was never a distinct process from understanding himself and his inner life.*" [italics are mine] That's a fabulously interesting concept I'd like us to think about more, but first, DeCurtis goes on to say,

"Consequently, his increasing awareness of the problems women face in the world triggered his deepening appreciation for their importance in his own life, and that process worked in the reverse as well. Yoko was the primary vehicle of that journey for him, but through her Lennon learned about all women – and, as feminism teaches, ultimately about men as well . . . in writing about women, then, Lennon composed songs

about love, about relationships, and about the frightening, exhilarating and exalting emotions that arise when two people attempt to drop their guard and surrender to each other. Those were feelings he had experienced in his marriage to Yoko," and luckily for us, "he was fearless in exploring them in song."

After a few failed attempts to have a baby, John and Yoko had Sean, and it appears that John accepted this as a second chance to be a better father to his 'beautiful boy.'

Return to concept, cultural memory – how can the major events of our world, the cultural transitions, intertwine with our personal growth? Where were you when you found out Kennedy was shot, when Lennon was, when 9/11 happened? Collective memory is a way of transcending the self, but it also must inform us as individuals, and how we seek to create peace in our own lives, and hence the world as well. What are some of the positive cultural phenomena you'll never forget, the gay rights walk on Washington, the summer of love.

End with the peace movement – for me, comprehending that we're accepting holding prisoners forever affects my inner life. It makes me feel trapped, and if enough of us recognize this, we won't put up with it.

* All Anthony DeCurtis quotations are from the booklet that came with a new multi-disk compilation of Lennon's solo work, called *Gimme Some Truth*.