

March 8, 2009  
Rev. Ann Benedetto

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## DON'T LET STEREOTYPES HOLD YOU BACK

### WELCOME:

Today is International Women's Day.

The idea of having an international women's day was first put forward at the turn of the 20th century amid rapid world industrialization and economic expansion that led to protests over working conditions.

In 1910, the first international women's conference was held in Copenhagen by the Socialist International Women's Conference. It was attended by 100 women from 17 different countries. In 1911, the German socialist Clara Zetkin organized the very first International Women's Day. This day in the U.S. also honors the 1908 march in N.Y.C. against child labor laws and women's suffrage. Demonstrations marking the International Women's Day in Russia proved to be the first stage of the 1917 Russian Revolution. However the holiday quickly lost its political flavor, and became an occasion for men to express their sympathy or love, to the women around them... much like the western Mother's Day and Valentines Day. In the West, International Women's Day was commemorated during the 1910s and 1920s, but then dwindled. It was revived by the rise of feminism in the 1960's. In 1975, which had been designated as International Women's Year, the United Nations gave official sanction by sponsoring International Women's Day. (This information thanks to Arlene Scala, professor at William Paterson University and wikipedia)

A special invocation for Women's Herstory Month.

As we light the Chalice, we want to create an ambiance of the feminine principle in our sanctuary for Womyn's History Month. Whether we are male or female, we can invoke the feminine within us. Women have smaller amounts of testosterone in their bodies and males have smaller amounts of estrogen in their bodies. We are connected in that way. For this service, I ask males and females to bring forth the feminine aspect of self. As Bill Wing, Beverly Little Thunder, indigenous leaders, Rev. Odun Lebron, Sandra Ramos and many others say, it is time to bring back the feminine principle on the planet. Some have even predicted the date of Her arrival into the consciousness of the people. As we call Her energy to us, we transform the energy in our sanctuary.

We light the Chalice. "We light our flaming chalice to illuminate the world we seek. In the search for truth may we be just in the search for justice. May we be loving, and in loving, may we find peace."

## SERMON:

I look SO look forward to the day when I do not have to read this proposed legislation because it will be the law of the land. I will read it every year until that her-storic moment. I read it as an affirmation, and I read it because many well educated folks still do not believe that women do not have equal rights under the constitution of the United States.

## READ: THE ERA

Section 1. Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on the account of sex.

Section 2. The congress shall have the power to enforce by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.

Section 3. This amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification.

I just read the entire text of the Equal Rights Amendment. All it says is that there will be equal application of the U.S. constitution as law regardless of sex. The ERA was written by Alice Paul in 1923, suffragist leader and founder of the National Women's Party. It was introduced into every session of congress between 1923 and 1972, when it was passed and sent to the states for ratification. There were extensions on time limits but the bottom line is they were three states short for ratification. It has been reintroduced into every session of congress since that time. And, every time it has been defeated. These simple words to legislate equality for men and women have been defeated over and over since 1923. Those bureaucrats must really be scared of our power. As Elaine Brown says, "Let's seize the time." ...Claim and exercise our power and magic to heal ourselves and all the relations of the world, including those who oppress us.

## INVOCATION:

I invoke the spirit of the Goddess. I invoke the ancient feminine symbol of the snake and serpent representing transformation. The snake sheds its skin to grow. I invoke the spirit of round bellied fertile Goddesses who were referred to as fat Venuses, a sex object by some male archeologists. I invoke the spirit of Goddesses; Oshun, Yemaya, Oya, Laxmi, and Mary. I invoke the spirit of all the ancient Goddesses I did not call by name. I invoke the spirit of the sacred womb, and the spirit of birthing. I invoke the spirit of the matriarchs in our individual families and personal lives. As we transform the energy today and call the feminine to us, may we have clarity of vision as we sit in our safe, nurturing, protected, sanctuary. We invoke the spirit of fertility this spring, to birth seeds, be it a child, a project, or a vision we hold. We, womyn and men, can tap into this fertile energy to bring forth our dreams into reality. And let us remember, and always to pay homage to the truth... that all human life on this planet "is of women born."

I highly suspect that most people who attend our services, are folks who never quite fit into the stereotypical mold society had waiting for us. I highly suspect that we probably never quite fit into the "stereotype of what it means to be a real man or a real woman." And some might say that some of us are probably not considered well behaved when it comes to social justice. I was fighting a quarry that was blowing up the mountain with huge dynamite explosives, without a license...illegally... and "I"... was labeled the eco-terrorist. How "they" twist things. Some of us are more diplomatic than others with our convictions and values, and probably all of us on some level challenge what is wrong with the status quo.

So what did it, and does it, take for us to emerge as individuals in a land mine of hostile stereotypes? When was the first time you said no to the status quo; I am going to be me and do it my way? I know that some of you are a walk on the wild side, and some of you are more gentle in self presentation. And, I know all of you, in your own way, as it should be, do some, if not many, things differently than the status quo.

Our walk on the wild side types, and you know who you are, may often be accused of being too much. Others observing and judging may say, "it's a good cause that you stand for and very noble, but you are taking it way too far." You are just too much. Those who have a more gentle approach, unintentionally may send off vibes that make the establishment nervous. People observe a gentle exterior, but they have an innate sense that there is something different. Both types, gentle... and walk on the wild side... threaten the establishment. While folks perceive a finite body, we stand with much more than that perception. We stand with our ability to think independently and question authority. We stand with our values. We stand with our spirit gifts. We stand with our soul and soul's purpose. We stand with a long line of ancestors. We stand with our connection to our family, friends and each other. We stand with our connection to community and the places where communities intersect creating a massive movement towards liberating truth for our freedom to be. We stand with our connection to all the positive forces of the Universe....so while "they" see a finite body, they suspect that something is up... for we stand for so much more with all this power.

Stereotypes shrink us into a mold severing the ties to our personal power. This is why it is so important to create community; a community that includes people from different stages of life.... the unborn, babies...children... youth... elders and the ancestors, as we all have something to learn from each other. A community based on non linear, non hierarchy principles. In this way, guided by the ancestors, with the elders as role models, community offers us an opportunity to have a venue... to be noticed for the spirit gifts we are blessed with. Each generation has something to teach the next. The young learn from the old and vice versa. That is why it is so important to have all the generations interacting with each other in a community. ( Sing: For each child a morning star rises, etc.) Community gives us an arena, a playing field, for our spirit destiny to fully express itself. Also, because we are honored and noticed for who we are... makes us accountable to the people in the community. It supports and helps us do the right thing with our behavior as human beings.

Stereotypes certainly feed the domineering culture. Wikipedia defines stereotypes as a preconceived idea that attributes certain characteristics to all the members of a class or group. Stereotypes are used to deny individuals respect or legitimacy based on membership to the stereotyped group. This is often the basis of prejudice and is used to explain imaginary and sometimes real differences. Childhood influences, learned from parents, teachers, peers and the media are often the most influential factors in creating stereotypes. Once a stereotype is learned it can be self-perpetuating, or what we term as an internalized oppression. We start to believe the lies that were taught to us about ourselves. Stereotypes justify untruths about specific groups, for people accept the stereotypes as fact. They also create social injustice because they put roadblocks and other measures to prevent people from succeeding; very fruitful for the domineering culture.

Stereotypes have been a challenge for me all my life. One of the blessings of getting older, as each age decade comes with new challenges and blessings... is that you don't give a hoot about stereotypes, or what people think, or say. We elders have earned the right, to do what we please... say what we please... and live exactly how it pleases us. Outside forces may present circumstances we can not immediately control; like health care and misogynous society dictates. In many of our worlds, as elders, we do have a new found freedom to be.

I felt good, strong and validated as a child until those teen years, when I was expected to behave certain ways now that I was becoming a woman. Beginning at puberty, for a variety of reasons, I never fit into the mold. People imposed negative stereotypes for behaviors that were totally accepted before I was twelve years of age. These outside imposed stereotypes made me very angry for I felt they were not fair. At 11, I wanted to play the drums. They said no only boys play the drums, you can play the flute. Images of strong women were not in the Spot, Dick and Jane school books. There were almost no images or role models of strong women. To be a woman meant to dress and act a certain way to catch a man, and you were not complete unless you had a man by your side. I tried on some of the stereotypes but mostly these did not work. I tried on gowns and high heels and jewelry and I never felt like that was me. It felt like decorations.

READ: (Revlon, Max Factor and Maybelline by Meg Barnhouse)

There is a positive evolution. The stereotypes of things I was chastised for in the 50s and 60s, like being athletic, outspoken, determined, opinionated, are quite acceptable for women today.

(Show Virginia Slims ad)

\*\*\*CONGREGANT TERRI: COMMENTS ON STEREOTYPES IN THE WORK PLACE AND PERHAPS BEYOND.\*\*\*

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Women have role models that were not presented in my history classes. Emma Goldman is one example of a woman in the late 1880's and the early 1900's who broke out of any stereotypical women's role to follow her passion and be her own person. She was a Russian, Jewish, anarchist who immigrated to the U.S. in 1885. She was attracted to the anarchist movement after the Haymarket affair. She played a pivotal role in developing anarchist philosophy in North America and Europe. Emma was a writer, a lecturer on anarchist philosophy, women's rights, and social issues, attracting huge crowds of thousands with her charisma and truth. She believed in free love although she had a life long lover and friend Alexander Berkman, among others.

Emma Goldman was known as a free thinker and rebel who addressed the social issues of her times, and set out to accomplish her goals regardless of what people thought, including her own family. During the worst economic crisis of her times, unemployment over 20%, she spoke to a crowd of thousands in Union Square. She told them to demand jobs, and if not jobs... demand bread. She said if you don't get bread... take bread. With these words she was charged with inciting to riot. There are disagreements as to the exact words of her speech. One of her famous quotes is that "the difference between anarchy and terrorism is consciousness."

\*\*\* CONGREGANT SANDRA TALKING ABOUT SHEDDING STEREOTYPES AND COMING INTO HER FEMINISM.\*\*\*

\*\*\* ANN SPEAKS TO STEREOTYPES IN MEDIA\*\*\*

The unhealthy patriarchal paradigm has subjugated women for its own agenda for centuries. Partnership societies were conquered and the scales tipped towards masculine domination over the feminine principle. Stereotypes are one tool used to create internalized oppression to keep masses of women subjugated in subservient roles. The unhealthy patriarchy has suppressed the bearers of life, for all humans enter this world from the loins and/or wombs of women. With the intention of restoring the Goddess energy and the Goddesses to their rightful place, we call the feminine principle to our hearts and minds eye.

\*\*\*READ: SUBVERSIVE BEHAVIOR by Meg Barnhouse\*\*\*

Women's struggle for equal rights and the end of oppression has been going on for centuries. Still on our plate with the women's movement are so many social issues such as: domestic violence, equal pay, child care, lack of housing, child custody issues, health care, feminization of poverty, longer prison sentences than men, injustice in the courts, and human trafficking to name a few. Stereotypes keep these injustices alive.

Even so, there are always those men and women, especially from indigenous culture, who follow traditional ways, who carry and keep the correct knowledge. Those people who hold the seeds of justice and harmony in their hearts, souls and consciousness. Those people who know that all forms of oppression must be eliminated from the planet for the benefit of all humanity, and life as we know it on Earth. We must listen to them for they

hold the key to our salvation. Audre Lorde, feminist African American poet said: "When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether or not I am afraid." It is human nature to be uncomfortable if we have to change or give up privilege. We need women with the courage to step outside the box to create positive changes. We need men who are willing to share their inherited power and privilege, and who will be pathfinders and teach their brothers better behavior. These changes will benefit all, for no one is free while others are oppressed.

I share comments from the following book because the information echoes that which I have heard from my ingenious teachers.

Bill Wing recommended a book *The Serpent of Light*, written by Drunvalo Melchizedek... Author of three books in 29 languages... world traveler and spiritual ambassador. Traveled for 35 years in the service of Mother Earth. Researcher in the 3rd dimension with natural products to heal Mother Earth and life forms. Gets the following information from the guardians of the Earth; many indigenous cultures.

He says, "The next few years will be the most important years in human history. We will survive these vast changes in human understanding with the help of Mother Earth as we have done before. Never before has the Universe opened to us as it will in the coming years. The secret is unconditional love that will present itself through human beings, and change life on Earth forever. Most of these Human Beings will be children or young adults who have found their way into their hearts. It will be the women, who understand and follow the children into their hearts, and take this new way of being into the world. Finally, with great trepidation, the men will join this transformation that will truly complete the cycle. It is the images or dreams that come from the hearts of these children that actually makes these changes. Children and women will be the first to enter into the act of creation, and change the world from within. When we realize who we are, the unity consciousness then, and only then, will lift the veil of slumber."

Indigenous people, following traditional ways carry the key and secrets to heal Mother Earth. There will be a death of these current ways that open the roads for a new way of life, with unity consciousness and an intimate healthy connection to Mother Earth and all her beings. Death begets life...Let the movement begin, and let it begin with us...

Blessed Be, Reverend Ann