

Chalice Reflection – Carol Martin – January 28, 2007

I light the chalice this morning in gratitude to this faith which is dedicated to raising the collective consciousness of its members to promote “justice, equity, and compassion in human relations”. My consciousness was raised in a curious way this past Monday as I traveled home from a trip to Calgary, Alberta, where Jack and I had been to visit with our daughter, son-in-law and two young grandchildren.

While we were waiting in Calgary to board a flight to Denver, where we would make our connection to Boston, a voice over the audio system asked that “Martin party of two” come to the ticketing station. There a pleasant woman explained that our flight from Denver to Boston had been over-booked. Would we mind being re-routed through Chicago on a plane that would bring us to Logan at almost the same time as our original flight? Oh, yes, and for being so cooperative, we would be flying first class all the way. Neither of us hesitated in agreeing to her offer.

There are no direct flights from Boston to Calgary and Jack and I have taken the trip enough times to know that at least a part of the way we are crammed into one of those tiny econo-jets - you know the ones - the doors look like they were just opened with a can opener, the average-size passenger when seated finds his or her knees grazing his chin, his legs and feet are constantly battling for equal space, and shortly after take off he or she is cursing the person in front when a relaxed seat back sends the snack tray straight into one’s mid-section.

Neither Jack nor I had flown first class before. On the first leg of our trip we found ourselves, legs stretched out comfortably in front of us sipping a cold beverage even before the passengers in economy had finished squeezing their carry-on luggage into overhead bins and under seats and attempted to fold themselves into a too-small space for the three and a half hour flight. Was I beginning to feel a few twinges of guilt? I really hadn’t done all that much to earn this wonderful treatment. And yet, sometime during our second flight from Chicago to Boston while I enjoyed a second glass of wine and munched on shrimp salad and while those folks in the back were nibbling on their miniature airplane-shaped crackers, I leaned over to Jack, smiled broadly, and whispered, “I could certainly get used to this!”

Now it is Sunday, and I am back in my pew at First Parish – plenty of leg room and a comfortable cushioned seat for the hour I am here. Here in this safe place where I am welcomed and affirmed, I need to be continually reminded that by simply being born an able-bodied white, middle-class, hetero-sexual female I have enjoyed an unearned first class ticket through life. Nor does my entitlement end there. I carry, as well, an invisible, weightless, traveling case of provisions I can draw upon at will because they have always been readily available to me – a universally accepted passport, ample provisions, blank checks, detailed maps and a guide book. And, lest I sigh comfortably forgetting that these are unearned entitlements, and begin thinking too smugly that I could really get used to the ride, my principled Unitarian Universalist faith and the work of our shared ministry remind me that if I chose to be a UU then I need to be actively engaged in the struggle for “equity, justice and compassion in human relations”. I am gratified by First Parish’s growing social consciousness: our recently formed workshops on *Soul Work*, our covenants of social outreach in our Shared Ministry groups, and the on-going projects of our Outreach Committee.

As a UU I have not earned the right to sit *comfortably* in my pew so long as any of my fellow travelers are flying economy, others are needlessly bumped from their flights, and while so many still remain by the side of the tarmac without the prospect of a journey, nor benefit even of a map or guide book.