

CELEBRATING MYRTLE

In Celebration of Unity Co-Founder Myrtle Fillmore's Birthday

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August 6th is the anniversary of Unity co-founder Myrtle Fillmore's birthday. She'd be a whopping 180 years old. And I wanted to highlight the person that really is the reason that we are all here today: that we have Unity churches around the country and around the world ... and the person whose own experience with healing through positive prayer and affirmations and time in the silence created the foundation for Unity's teachings and the Unity movement.

And it's funny because she actually never wanted the attention. She never wanted the spotlight on her. She only wanted the spotlight on the teachings and the healing power of prayer and meditation. And yet, here we are! But she said this about herself and her husband, Charles. She said, *"We have never cared to interest folks in our individual lives. It makes no difference who we are or what we have done. What is important is that we are doing what God has given us to do according to our best light."*

And yet, her story is how the Unity movement came to be. Her story forms, as I said, our teachings and our prayer work, and has done so for over 136 years.

So, I feel the need -- especially when I found out that August 6 was going to be a Wednesday night and I begged Rev. Richard Maraj, *"Please let me do it! I need to honor our Myrtle Fillmore!"* So, here I am to share with all of you all about Myrtle Fillmore, who's known as the mother of Unity.

So, Myrtle Fillmore was born on August 6, 1845 in Pagetown, Ohio. Her birth name was Mary Carolyn Page. Myrtle was the nickname her father gave to her. She was one of his favorites. She was seventh of nine kids and she was one of the favorites. So she got Myrtle and it stuck. But the family was pretty strict Methodists, and they really frowned upon amusement. They really liked to be pretty serious. But every once in a while they would do some dancing in their parlor, especially if the children -- especially the older children -- wanted to go out to a dance. The father would say *"No,"* and then he would start a dance in their own living room. (And, of course, if I was a teenager, I don't know that that would make it for me!) But ... it was a pretty strict household, but they tried to have some on every once in a while.

But Myrtle, when she was young, she had chronic respiratory issues. They believed she had tuberculosis pretty much all the time. She was considered an invalid. The family would always say, *"She's very delicate; she has to be protected; she can't overdo it."* They really treated her like a little glass doll, if you will. And so the programming that she received growing up was that she was sick and weak.

Now, she loved nature. She loved being out in nature, and she just felt like that's where she experienced God and saw God, because the earth was so beautiful and magical to her. And so, it really did form her opinion of God being a loving God. And even when she went to Sunday school in the 1800s, where they were talking to the kids about hell, and she said, *"I just don't believe it. I believe God is a loving God, and I don't believe in hell."* Even then, when she was a little girl.

She went on to attend Oberlin College, which was pretty rare for women back then, and she became a teacher. But at the age of 29, she became really, seriously ill. She had a pretty severe tuberculosis/malaria. Again, today we're not quite sure what we'd probably call that, but back in the day they said it was tuberculosis and malaria. And her doctors warned her that, if she didn't find warmer weather, she may not live through another Ohio winter.

So, she moved, at the age of 29, to Texas and she opened up her own private school. And it was in Denison, Texas, that she meets Charles Fillmore, who was nine years younger than her. I know! I like the

“oohs”! [Congregants laugh] And they meet at a literary club, which I think is adorable. Because what other entertainment do you have in the 1800s? I don't know. So, they go to this literary club where people, you know, they sit around; they share books and poems. Sometimes they wrote short stories or poems that they read. And she's standing up and she's reading something, and he walks in and he sees her and he knows immediately he's going to marry her. In fact, he later tells the story that he heard a voice within him say, *"There's your wife, Charles."*

Now she ended up moving to Missouri and he, about a year later, moved to Colorado. But during that time, they were writing letters back and forth to each other. They loved, again, books and authors and poems ... but also science. They talked a lot about science, even before they started to move around and write letters. They would walk and talk about science and literature. But in fact, they did get married, March of 1881, in Clinton, Missouri.

Now, I always think this must have been an interesting duo. Because here she is, at the time, very weak and sickly. And he had one leg that was four inches shorter than the other one, because he had been in an ice skating accident when he was seven. So, to imagine this duo, right? Here she's very sick and weakly and ghastly white, and he's limping. But they make it through.

The day after they get married, they take a train to Colorado. They were there for a few years. Then they go to Kansas City, Missouri, where the real estate market was booming at the time, and so Charles went into real estate. They eventually had three sons during this time, all of whom later on went on to be a big part of Unity and help the Unity movement.

But it's in the 1800s -- mid-1880s, I should say -- that they began to follow a new movement called the Metaphysical movement, or the New Thought movement. There was ... Emilie Cady was one of their teachers. Ernest Holmes was one of their teachers. Mary Baker Eddy was someone that they corresponded with.

And in 1886, at the age of 41, Myrtle goes to a lecture: a speech by Dr. E. B. Weeks. And that's where she hears the words, *"I am a child of God; therefore I do not inherit sickness."* I'm a child of God; therefore I do not inherit sickness. This is the first time in her life that she hears this idea that wholeness is her birthright. Because remember: her whole life she's been told she's sick and delicate. And she keeps looping this around and around in her head. And she tells people afterwards -- friends and Charles -- *"That was meant for me. When he said that, that was meant for me to hear."*

Now, of course, probably all of us have sat on a Sunday or a Wednesday night and said, *"What you said was just for me!"* Right? So that's how she's feeling, right? She's like, *"That message was meant for me!"* She walks out of there a changed person. The Myrtle that walked in that night was not the Myrtle that walked out. That walked in, that walked out. Different people. Her life's changed!

Charles walks out of there -- and maybe some of you with partners can understand this; he wasn't impressed. [Congregants laugh] He's like, *"I don't know; maybe."* Now, he goes on to really study world religions and philosophy and how religion and science come together: the overlap there. So, he's also starting to do some of this work that comes into become a foundation of Unity, as well. But in that moment, he's not really sold.

But Myrtle now is on fire. She takes this and she starts using this every single day. And she starts to realize that life is energy. And she starts thinking, *"Well, how do we communicate with life? We talk."* *"So, I'm going to start talking,"* she says, *"to every part of my body."* And that's exactly what she does.

For two hours every day, she goes into the silence or meditation and she asks her body for forgiveness. She blesses every body part. She gives thanks in advance for healing.

She says this: *"I went to all the life centers in my body and spoke words of truth to them; words of strength and power. I asked their forgiveness for the foolish, ignorant course that I had pursued in the past."* She asked her body for forgiveness for all the things that she had said to it.

So, it takes her two years of daily affirming this truth: for sitting in the silence; for knowing she doesn't inherit sickness; to know her wholeness; to bless her body; to speak kindly to her body; and, even more so, to give thanks in advance. And she heals herself in two years.

So now she's 43 years old. Well, there's no Facebook, Instagram, TikTok back then, so she can't put out the news. But the neighbors notice! They start seeing Myrtle has a pep in her step, and they're like, *"What is she doing?"* So, the neighbors start asking, *"What are you doing?"* And suddenly now there's a line out their door because everyone wants to pray with Myrtle Fillmore in this new prayer method: not beseeching, not begging, but absolutely affirming divine life, divine wisdom, divine intelligence in every single cell of the body, and giving thanks in advance for the healing, knowing that the healing has already happened. That's a new way. It's a new thought.

Now, of course, by this time, Charles is like, *"Well, okay, I see my wife has made a difference."* He's on board! Right? He has seen the change, himself.

And so, they start to publish a monthly paper called "The Red Papers" -- because it was printed on red paper -- with a prayer that they asked people to sit down at the same time every night and read the affirmative prayer.

They move into an office in downtown Kansas City. This is now 1890. And they start the Society of Silent Help, which later on gets a name change to Silent Unity, a prayer service that, to this day, still exists. It's a 24-hour prayer service. Originally, they answered letters; then they installed telephone lines. Today, we even have an app. And you can still call. I looked this up because someone asked me. Because during COVID, they had stopped. But over 135 years, 136 years, it was 24 hours a day, seven days a week of prayer. And it still is now. So, you can call or you can write into the Be Unity app and have someone pray with you in affirmative, positive prayer, just as Myrtle started way back in 1890.

And here's what's interesting. Silent Unity's motto is, *"The light that shines for you."* And the way it got its name was because of this 24 hours of prayer. Some of the prayer workers would come in and they would see at night, you know, the light in the room of where the other Silent Unity prayer workers were praying. And they started feeling like, *"Wow! Doesn't that symbolize what we're doing? This light that shines for you?"*

And to this day, that's not only Silent Unity's motto, but -- on the campus at Unity Village; Unity headquarters in Lee's Summit, Missouri; Unity Village outside of Kansas City -- that building still has a light that shines 24 hours a day right over where those Silent Unity workers pray for millions of prayers every year.

So, the foundation of all this positive, affirmative prayer was modeled after Myrtle, herself, and how she healed and changed her own life.

Eventually they go on to create lectures, first on Wednesday. This is why a lot of Unity churches have Wednesday night services, because originally they did Wednesday nights because they felt like people might want to go to their regular church on Sunday, and this was a supplement. Then they realized people really wanted this on Sundays as their spiritual nourishment during the week. So, they started Sunday services, as well.

They grew to having students and, eventually, or ordaining students, as well: ministers. They had more and more publications. One of their first publications was called "Wee Wisdom," a magazine for children.

Growing up in Unity, I can remember getting my "Wee Wisdom," and I absolutely loved it. It was just this sweet magazine, and it was all about I think seeing the goodness: the goodness in our children and reminding them of that goodness.

Myrtle had heard in a vision or a meditation one night ... she saw herself surrounded by all these children and she heard herself say, *"Who should take care of these children?"* And then a voice replied, *"You are to take care of the children. This is your work."* So, she started a Sunday school class that met right before their Sunday services. And then "Wee Wisdom" magazine that started in 1893. And it wasn't even financially profitable. It wasn't even financially a great time to start a magazine, but she was very, very dedicated to the spiritual support of children; of giving spiritual tools to children; to comforting children. And it went out all across the country.

Well, in the late summer/early fall of 1931, there was a couple months where Myrtle was directing her secretary to make sure everything was in order. And on October 4th, she -- or beginning of October -- she climbs four flights of stairs with lots of energy. She's in a cheery mood. She's up in the writer's room, because, again, they have all these publications. And she says to one of the workers that she wants to make a change. And he says, "Well, that's fine; what kind of change do you want to make?"

And this is how she responds: she says, *"I believe that it would be easier for me to do the work that's ahead of me from the invisible plane."*

And he says, *"No; no! Myrtle! We need your help, your inspiration, your spiritual guidance here."*

And she just calmly smiles and said, *"You know you're going to have that anyway."*

So, this woman who healed herself goes out a day or two later to the orchard and picks some fruit off the trees. And it's a damp day. She catches a cold, she goes to bed, and two days later she makes her transition. It's October 6th, 1931. At 86 years old -- 45 years after that lecture. A woman who cured herself of chronic respiratory diseases, illnesses, being an invalid.

Yeah. So, she is now known as the mother of Unity.

But here's the thing, everybody. She loved ... Myrtle loved life! She loved nature. She saw beauty in everything. She saw beauty in every person. And her main purpose was to help others. How? By teaching the power of positive prayer. By teaching the power that our ... the point that our thoughts and our words and our positive prayers can heal us. The importance of taking care of the children and the next generation.

Here's what she said about the positive power of prayer. She said -- and I know I've shared this before, because it's one of my favorite quotes. Myrtle Fillmore says, *"Prayers are not sent out at all."* Now, really think about that. *"Prayers are not sent out at all. Where would we send our prayers? We should direct them to our minds, hearts and affairs. Prayer is an exercise to change our thought habit and our living habits so that we may set up a new and better activity in accordance with divine law."*

And then she goes on to say, *"It's not enough to pray. It's not enough to pray. You need to think of the all-powerful Healer as being already within you in every part of your mind, heart and body."*

She gave instructions on prayer. She said to breathe evenly. To be happy that you are taking in God life: this universal God life energy, and that it's being used by every cell of your being. And she instructs over and over again, in all of her writings and all of her lectures: focus on what you want, not on what you don't want. She says, *"Don't let anxiety and worry seep in. Keep your focus on the good. Keep your focus on gratitude."*

And also -- and I like this one! -- she says, *"Don't have expectations. Don't say a prayer and then look for signs for the response."* We do that, don't we? We pray and then we're like, *"Okay, where's the answer?"* No! She says, *"Pray and then release it; let it go."*

And also, she says, *"One can stay in silence too much. So dear ..."* -- that's her words -- *"So dear, watch that you do not remain too much alone, too much in silence, too much in contemplation and adoration, and not enough in the practical use of what the walks and talks alone with God would give."*

In other words, be a part of life; enjoy life; enjoy nature. Dance; play; sing. Sometimes we get too serious and focused about our spiritual studies. But part of it is about applying it and really being a part of the joy of life.

And on the power of healing, two words that Myrtle stressed/emphasized the most as far as the healing process of prayer: patience and perseverance. Because remember: it took her two years ... and she was in meditation for two hours a day for two years! A lot of times we hurt ourselves and, by the end of the week, we're like, *"Well, I've prayed five minutes a day; why am I not healed?"* Patience and perseverance, it takes as long as it takes but keep on going.

And again, she emphasizes that prayer is for us to keep our thoughts away from the fear and onto the good that you know will appear. To hold our minds and hearts in accord with the outcome that we're wanting or desiring.

And at the beginning of her healing process she said, *"Spirit said to me, 'You have looked upon your faults; now look upon your virtues.'"* How often do we criticize our bodies or even ourselves? But what she heard was: instead of looking at what's wrong -- *"My knee aches; my back hurts; I'm getting old"* -- instead of *that*, we look at what's going right. *"What are my virtues?"* Celebrating what your body is doing well for you.

She says, *"As I gained real poise and the ability to keep my thoughts and feelings truly free, I was healed and restored to strength and normal functioning."*

See, she learned to talk to her body in loving ways, in compassionate ways, in positive tones. And, in response, her body gave her new health and vitality.

And the Fillmores were not against doctors. Because, again, if each and every one of us is an expression of the divine, then that divine wisdom, that divine intelligence can work through *all* of us, including doctors. So, they weren't against that. Yet, they demonstrated that focused prayer and gratitude works. That, when we look for the good in every situation and be expectant of that good, it heals our body, minds and our emotions; our hearts.

And then on caring for children in future generations, she emphasized in all of those "Wee Wisdom" magazines that heaven was on earth *now*. She really encouraged their enchantment, their grace, the beauty; that that was theirs in every moment. She told them to place their focus on all the good in the world; to keep their imaginations alive and open, because then they could manifest whatever they wanted to manifest. She wrote, *"You are kings and queens in the realm of mind, and there is nothing too beautiful or too good to be true."*

And here's what's also very interesting. I was thinking about this lately/recently, as well, and then I came across this writing. It said that Merle believed that if children and the homes they lived in were filled with harmony and love and focused on good, that the world, itself, would experience more harmony and love and goodness. That what we see in the world starts in the home. So, to take care of the children and even the child within each of us.

So, we often see Myrtle Fillmore as very matronly and, I think, serious maybe. But I came across, for the first time, some really fun stories. One from the *Myrtle Fillmore: Mother of Unity* book. Apparently in 1915, the Unity workers sent around this pamphlet that had little prompts, like your favorite dessert, your favorite this. And she filled one out.

So, her one extravagance, she says, was movies. My mascot: she wrote omnipotent courage. My favorite superstition: a man is known by the thoughts he keeps. My unlucky day: she says, one of fruitless effort. My favorite dish: a dinner of herbs, where love is. My secret sorrow: a lazy pen. My unconfessed weakness: cookies. [Congregants laugh]

Same! [Congregants laugh]

There's also a description of the first time she sees an airplane. I mean, isn't that amazing? She's putting the laundry outside of her home and she looks up and she says, *"A great fat fish was like circling you know up in the sky!"* [Congregants laugh] And she says, *"It was amazing!"* She felt like she could yell and scream up to the people and wave and they'd see her!

And she got really excited about this idea that she could fly from Missouri to California in one day and go be on the beaches of California. And then, in fact, one of her followers/fans in California said, *"I can do that!"* Raised money actually for her to go to California and then she said, *"Well maybe I don't want to do that."* [Congregants laugh]

But she did want to take trips and fly around. And, in fact, here's something interesting I also found: she said she wanted to visit Arizona one day! In the book it says this ... Oh, wait for this quote! It says, *"She glowingly described Arizona as a state coming into its own, and she praised its climate and pure air, and she talked of visiting one day."* Clearly, they don't have the weather app back then! [Congregants laugh] Because then she wouldn't see it was 114 today. But I thought, *"How cool is that? Myrtle wanted to come visit Arizona!"*

Myrtle Fillmore referred to herself as an executive of God. And she saw herself and her purpose as manifesting the perfection that an executive of God would demonstrate. Again, she didn't like adoration; she didn't like any limelight. She was very clear that all of her healing work that she and Charles did was really God.

In fact, someone was at a lecture kind of pouring adoration on them and she said, *"It is not me. I had nothing to do with it. It is not the Fillmores. It is the Christ. All praise to him; we are simply the channels."*

See, she knew that wherever we focus our attention/our consciousness ... And when we do so, we put that consciousness on the Christ -- or that divine consciousness within each of us -- then any of us can do the same as they were doing; as she did. This is what Jesus taught, as well, right? What I can do, you can do. This is what they taught, as well: You have that divine consciousness. Tap into it and use it.

And in another book about Myrtle and her own writings ... Actually, I think this was from the *Healing Letters* ... so her words. And it was about helping others. And she wrote this: *"Think of God as everywhere-present light, love, peace, power and life. Think of all men, all women, and all children as abiding in God's presence and expressing God's qualities. Spirit will respond as you expect it to, for the Spirit of God is in every person."*

What if we all walk through life with that on our hearts? That the Spirit of God is in every person?

So, in celebrating the life and legacy of Myrtle Fillmore, see the good: see the good in yourself; in your life; in others. Expect the good: be expectant of all the goodness that there is -- that you can bring into your life -- because wherever you place your energy, that's what you'll experience in return.

And praying ... When you pray, pray from that divine nature that is within you, that is around you, that you *are*. And be an example for the children. Our children are watching , everyone! They're watching! So be God's love. Be God's harmony. Be God's wisdom on earth. Be kind. Life will respond in kind.

And lastly, be sure not to take yourself in life and your spiritual path and studies too seriously. Make sure you go out and play; you run barefoot in nature; and you eat all the cookies. [Congregants laugh]

And so, for that -- for that beautiful legacy and the lessons that we've learned from Myrtle Fillmore -- we say, *"Thank you, Myrtle Fillmore, and Happy Birthday!"*

Thank you, everyone.

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