

**Service from UU Montclair  
January 24, 2021  
“Summoning Better Angels: An Inauguration Elegy”**

**Introduction to Hymn - Markus**

Welcome! My name is Markus Grae-Hauck, I am the Director of Music Ministries here at our congregation. My pronouns are he, him, and his. We are about to sing our gathering hymn, joining virtually, together in song. And in a moment we will join together for our chalice lighting, where we will invite everyone to light your own flame, at home. To prepare for this, perhaps you will want to find a chalice or a candle, as we sing. Our hymn leader is Susie Roman Luna.

**Stonecatcher - Carol Caouette, Music Director for White Bear UU Church in Minnesota (This is a new hymn inspired by a story from the book “Just Mercy” by Brian Stevenson, founder of the Equal Justice Initiative)**

**We’ll Build a Land, #121**

**Welcome and Chalice Lighting - Rev. Anya and Rev. Scott**

RS: Today’s service titled “*Summoning Better Angels: An Inauguration Elegy.*” Together we will explore Wednesday’s peaceful transfer of power, examining concepts of liberty ancient and modern while praying our new Presidential administration approaches the hopes of unity, justice, accountability and inclusion we feel are required to build beloved community.

RA: Whoever you are, wherever you come from, whatever age, identity, history, ability, gender, or sexual orientation, you are welcome to bring your full self here.

RS: I am Rev. Scott Sammler-Michael, he, him, his.

RA: And I am Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael, she, her, hers.

Grounded in faith, we come together to nurture the soul, inspire hope, and bring into being a more just and loving world.

RS: If you have school aged children, please register for our innovative Children’s Religious Education program.

RA: If you are joining us at 10am, please continue with us for a virtual “Connection Cafe” beginning at 11am. Check your email and Realm announcements for the Zoom link.

It’s time to light our chalice, a beacon to guide us through these times together. Perhaps you have a chalice or candle at home... anything that you can illumine.

Let’s light our collective chalices as we share our chalice lighting affirmation.

**Invocation and Remembrance Intro - Intern Ali**  
**From Jalal al-Din Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks, adapted**

Called, now, by this invocation into worship, we turn to seek a soft meditation, a deep reflection, an ardent prayer. ...Each as we are called, yet, mystically, all together.

And we enter into this space by hearing the lamentations, the requests, and the remembrances of our community -  
Let us hear one another to heal one another.

**Candle Lighting - Rev Anya`**

Owen and Kieran Wells light a candle of mourning for their grandfather, John Wells, who passed away on January 17, at the age of 80. They will always remember their Pop-Pop with love.

Jane Gaertner is sad to share that her brother Louis' wife Terry Caraway died on January 20th from Covid-19 in Loma Linda hospital in California. In addition to Louis, Terry leaves two sons and Louis' four children and two grandchildren and many friends. Please hold this family in your heart.

Foxy Pullen and Ann Trip light a candle for Herm, Foxy's late husband and Ann's elder. January 25 is the eighth anniversary of his passing. They both miss him very much.

Intern Ali lights a candle for their father John and his wife Sarah. They have been admitted to the hospital with Covid-19.

We light this candle for the over 400,000 Americans that have succumbed to Covid-19. Many of these were our elders, those gifted with the wisdom of years. We ache with this loss and pause in silent witness to their memory. (Pause)

We light this final candle for the joys and sorrows that have not been spoken aloud. In the silence that follows, you are encouraged to speak the names of those you are holding in your prayers or meditations, or to write them into the chat. May we hold this silence as this silence holds us.

May our listening bring forth acts of love.

**Prayer - Rev Anya**

Will you join with me in prayer, in a spirit of focus, intention, and reflection.  
I welcome you to place your hand upon your heart and feel the beating of your being -  
the pulsing of your life.

In this beating is the testament of our survival.

It is the rhythm that has sustained, even when the world on which we depend has shaken.

It is the constancy that has remained, even as the structures of our national experiment have shown themselves weak and unsteady.

It is the vitality that has upheld, even as the foundation of our livelihood has threatened collapse.

Feel the persistence of your survival. Know it is the holy gift of life coupled with our communal will to live - a will that stems as much from our connections as our commitments to each other.

Know your struggle.

Know our struggle.

Know the challenge.

And give praise for the beating of your heart and the heart of your neighbors - Which has sustained, remained, upheld.

Amen.

### **Prayer Response:**

**Offering** - Kira Pipkins

*Help us keep on keepin' on until we find the love, hope and peace we need to bring about a more just and loving world for all ...*

Hello - my name is Kira Pipkins (pronouns) - I am the liturgist for today's service. We now turn to our offering. When you give to our offering, 80 percent of your gift will care for the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Montclair, and 20 percent will support our justice recipient.

Our January Sharing our Riches recipient is R.I.P. Medical Debt, Essex County - a campaign developed by the Montclair Interfaith Clergy Association. Together, we have the opportunity to eliminate the medical debt for hundreds of families and individuals in Essex County. We will be helping families who earn less than 2X the federal poverty level, have debts that are 5% or more of their annual income and those whose debts are greater than their assets. Through this campaign, every dollar that we give will abolish \$100 of medical debt.

You can text to give, mail us a check or go to our home page and click on the donate button. This is a time of need.

All of your gifts are worthy and they are all received with love.

## **Reading - Kira Pipkins**

Today's reading comes from "The American Creed: A Biography of the Declaration of Independence," by the late UU minister, Rev. Dr. Forrest Church.

Reverend Church reminds us of the many shortcomings of those who founded the United States - especially in the realms of gender and racial justice.

Yet, the words they composed as the foundational creed of our nation are ideals mightier and more divine than the flawed human beings who wrote them.

~ Church writes: [reading]

The Anthem that follows is "We Rise," from Batya Levine. Following in the path of her ancestors, Batya Levine uses song as a tool for healing and resilience. She believes in the liberatory potential of song to loosen what is bound within each of us, for the sake of all goodness ....

Batya wrote this song not long after the 2016 US presidential election, as a cry of resistance against a movement propelled by white supremacy and racism ascending to power. Batya and her crew recorded this song this last March in Philadelphia, and it is our pleasure to share it in worship today ~

## **Anthem: We Rise by Batya Levine**

### **Homily**

*In Hope, in prayer, we find ourselves here*

In hope, in prayer,  
we find ourselves on the other side of an Inauguration some feared might not happen.

I don't know if you are feeling it - but I am - cautiously relieved ~ in this moment

It is daunting to think we feared an election being overturned in these United States - something that, according to the American Creed is our birthright -

to have the government we duly elected peacefully handed the reins of power ...

But - alas - have we not trod a long and perilous journey?

Had the horrors of tyranny and treason painted across our televisions, and cell phones?

Learned how little regard many citizens, and some elected leaders, have for democracy - how they seemed to banish their better angels?

*~ In hope, in prayer, we're right here ...*

Thank God the American Creed has proven resilient once more.

Our Declaration of Independence teaches that a government "derives its just powers from the consent of the governed."

The Declaration also mentions that our founding principles are derived from "Nature and Nature's God" -

Principles like all are created equal; all have inalienable rights -  
The Declaration declares these bedrock American 'truths' so powerful, so eternal, that they are "self-evident" - they need no further proof than being spoken aloud.  
The Declaration also declares since we all have been endowed with divinity and liberty by our Creator, no human being can justly deprive us of those rights.  
America's Founding principles show our Republic unites the sacred and the secular - We are best governed by principles vested with divinity.

Despite these sacred aspirations, this week's Inauguration came after an insurrection like none seen since the Civil War.  
Indeed, it is fit and proper that we call to mind the Confederacy when explaining the treason of January 6th.  
The terrorists who stormed our Capitol believed lies which conveniently upheld white supremacy, sanctioning hatred of those unlike them.  
Was this not the predictable result of a rogue Presidential administration that can be seen as an attempt to establish a Second Confederacy?  
Why else would they say there were good people on both sides of the "Unite the Right" march in Charlottesville?  
Why else would they decry the removal of statues dedicated to traitors and racists?  
This was who their leaders were all along - Civil War revisionists furthering White Supremacy.

And this, my friends, is why we are dedicated to adopting the 8th Principle of Unitarian Universalism, which makes dismantling White Supremacy a faith imperative - This is a generational effort beginning in our hearts as it transforms all public and private institutions.  
Sacred goals need secular champions.

President Biden made a strong case Wednesday for Unity. "Politics does not have to be a raging fire destroying everything in its path," Biden preached.  
"Every disagreement does not have to be a cause for total war. We must reject the culture to which facts themselves are manipulated and manufactured."  
Unity is no easy task. Unity is enabled by accountability.

Let us recall what happened in Michigan, where for the last decade lawmakers made it 'legal' to disregard the vote of entire cities and counties - with majority black populations, of course.  
This assault on democracy resulted in the poisoning of thousands of people in the city of Flint.  
Michigan's Republican governor's appointed a 'manager' who over-rode the will of the duly elected city council of Flint, changing the source of Flint's water from the Detroit Water Authority to untreated water from the Flint River, long known as heavily polluted with arsenic, chromium and lead.  
The result was that an entire generation of children in Flint were exposed to heavy chemicals that will forever compromise their health.

This is how the New Confederacy functions;  
an oligarchy of greedy, self-appointed white overseers overriding the will of the people.  
Such infamy always leads to death - sadly, more so for black and brown people; at least  
some of those responsible are now being prosecuted ...  
Unity is enabled by accountability.

These New Confederates despise the sacred truths enshrined in our Declaration,  
Just as the Confederates in 1861 did.  
Alexander Stevens, Vice President of the Confederacy, wrote that the Declaration's  
ideals of human liberty "are fundamentally wrong."  
He said, "The Confederacy is founded upon exactly the opposite ideal on which [the  
Declaration's] foundations are laid."  
"Slavery," Stevens proclaimed proudly, "is the natural and normal" state of the world.  
Bosh!  
*That* Confederacy was vanquished in a war that claimed more American lives than any  
other.  
This is why Confederate statuary is removed from public land; no public place should  
ever honor racist treachery.

By contrast, Joe Biden's Inauguration was an exercise in Universalism, championing  
our sacred American Creed.

About the American Creed, Forrest Church teaches,  
"America is a union of faith and freedom, in which faith elevates freedom and freedom  
tempers faith."  
Essayist GK Chesterton once famously sang,  
"America is a nation with the soul of a church."  
What has evolved in the United States, despite white supremacy, is a diverse,  
pluralistic, multicultural gumbo, a people so various that the only thing that promotes  
truth and promises protection is a secular Universalism, one enshrined in Barack  
Obama's second Inaugural address, when he called into the circle of citizenship "those  
of all faiths and those of no faith."  
Obama also hailed the toil for liberty by those from "Seneca Falls, Selma, and  
Stonewall" - thereby uplifting gender equality, racial equality and LGBTQ equality in one  
sweet phrase.  
This is the only road approaching the promises of liberty contained in our founding  
documents.

The American Creed also sings through the 13th and 14th Amendments to our  
Constitution.  
These amendments abolish slavery, but also demand that all the effects and residue of  
slavery be abolished - and reparations made.  
They also proclaim "Equal Protection Under the Law" as the primary value in all public  
policy decisions.  
And sadly, as we know, these two amendments have largely been ignored,

and they are openly assaulted by the New Confederacy championed by the previous administration.

Unity is enabled by accountability;  
The sacred needs secular champions

There is an easy way to remind ourselves -  
and those who denigrate the American Creed -  
of the highest ideals of our national life.

~ Take out a one dollar bill. Go ahead ...

Turn it so you see its back.

On either flank of the word "ONE," you'll see the two sides of the "Great Seal of the United States."

On the right is an Eagle; above its head 13 stars, one for each of the original colonies.

The eagle clutches an olive branch and arrows -

But the eagle looks towards the olive branch -

Suggesting we favor peace, even if we're prepared to defend.

On the Left you will see a pyramid, built by human hands, with no capstone on top

In the capstone's place is the all-seeing eye,

An ancient masonic image for divinity

The phrase "Annuit coeptis" - hovers around the eye, implying - "God favors our undertaking."

Below the pyramid are the Latin words: "Novus Ordo Seclorum" - "A new order of the ages has commenced."

Secular and sacred united.

And in the center, above the word "ONE," is the phrase on all our currency,  
"In God We Trust."

And above the eagle's head are the words E Pluribus Unum - "out of many, One."

The American Creed is Universalist;

all are created equal; equal justice under the law for all.

Indeed, the sacred and the secular unite in our nation's founding ideals, its documents and its symbology,

Enshrined on something as common as a one dollar bill.

In this inauguration season, we are reminded once again it is our duty to move the reality of our secular world closer to the promise of the sacred ideals our founding documents outline for our government by, of, and for the people.

In his first Inaugural address, Abraham Lincoln famously appealed to the "better angels of our nature" - "so the chorus of Union" may "swell again."

We need those better angels now, don't we?

Like Joe Biden's call for Unity, Lincoln wasn't asking for traitors to be let off the hook - he was asking all Americans to rise up and embrace a Universal commitment to equality and democracy.

Lincoln called for all human beings to be brought into the circle of protection, freedom and prosperity.

He reminded us that this land belongs to all of us,  
And - All means ALL.

Amen ...

### **Reflection Question -**

Will you reflect with me ... ?

How will we inspire our leaders to be governed by the better angels of their natures?

How will we hold accountable those who profane the sacred, secular mission of our nation?

Our closing hymn, *This Land Is Your Land*, was written by Woody Guthrie.

Guthrie is a hero of mine, a man of the people and a dedicated freedom fighter -

This land, this America, is only what America can be when the full beauty of our pluralistic, multicultural identity is affirmed, when those too often marginalized can truly feel safe, knowing that they can call this America their Land.

### **Hymn - This Land Is Your Land - Woody Guthrie**

### **Benediction - Revs A & S**

On Wednesday President Biden asked Amanda Gorman, a 22-year-old black woman from Los Angeles, to share her ample gifts of vision and verse.

These words from that poem, "The Hill We Climb," are a fitting benediction for us this day:

"the hill we climb if only we dare it

because being American is more than a pride we inherit,

it's the past we step into and how we repair it.

We've seen a force that would shatter our nation rather than share it ...

But while democracy can periodically be delayed,

it can never be permanently defeated....

the new dawn blooms as we free it,

for there is always light if only we're brave enough to see it, if only we're brave enough to be it."

May we live into the beauty these sacred and secular notions promise.

### **Chalice Extinguishing Video**

**Song: "Our Worship Has Ended, Let our Service Begin"**

## **Sign-Off - Intern Ali**

Join us right after this for Connection Cafe  
Come back tonight at 7pm for our own Julia Crafton's Record Release Party, and ~  
Until we meet again,  
Virtually or otherwise,  
You are in our hearts.