

Service from UU Montclair
February 14, 2021
“Beloved Stories”

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 leaders are Jennifer Rittner and Rae Dumont.

Love Will Guide Us, #131

We Would Be One, #318

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

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

Happy Valentine's Day.

Today is a service about love - titled, Beloved Stories.

It is a different kind of service for the beginning of our Pledge season, where we inspire you to pledge financial support for next year's programs and ministries.

We will tell stories about UU Montclair's inspiring history, how our DNA provides a mighty example of sacrifice and service.

For this service a special film was produced by Jerry Fried, and a musical treat will be shared from Paul Lombardo and Juliana Carr.

We will even have a time for All Ages!

Our story helps energize us to Reunite and Rise together, creating tomorrow's congregation today.

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

And just last week we shared our new Welcome Video. Commissioned by our Membership Team, and developed by filmmaker Scott E. Moore with Michael Drucker, Sheila Eby, and Beth Smith among many others, this video is an incredible way to share the good news of our congregation. You can find it on our website, YouTube page, and social media and we will send it again in an email soon.

Please spread the word by sharing the video with your friends, family and community members.

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.

Chalice Being Lit

TIME FOR ALL AGES - *Where Do We Come From?*

RS: Where do we come from? What are We? Where are we going?

RA: Our Time for All Ages is a chance to answer these questions as best as we can. First... "Where do we come from?"

RS: We... you and I, and all of the friends and visitors of our congregation. We come from smart women who decided they did not like the narrow minded religion being taught to children in most churches, so they gathered to form our congregation

RA: We come from the walls of this sanctuary, built by industrious ancestors in 1905.

RS: We come from the Spanish flu of 1918 when those who came before closed the doors of that beautiful sanctuary to their pandemic. Now... Who are we?

RA: We are the descendants of ancestors that also had to contend with a fire that torched the roof of their sanctuary home on March 2nd, some 102 years ago.

RS: We are the ancestors of a people who raised nearly the equivalent of a half million dollars to save their faith home. Now... where are we going?

RA: We are going in the direction that they taught us to go. We are serving the world, sustaining community - even now, when we too have been devastated by a pandemic. We are going in the direction they knew we must go - out into the world, and yet always also toward one another. Where do we come from?

RS: We come from builders, sustainers ~ fighters for truth, love and justice.

RA: What are we?

RS: We are this congregation - UUCM.

RA: Where are we going?

RS: Out into the world and yet always toward one another. Composing a story people one hundred years from now will celebrate and share with their children's children's children

Remembrance Intro - Rev. Anya

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 -

Judie Rinearson lights a candle of deep sorrow for her former Australian paralegal, Karen DenToll, who died last weekend after a brief battle with liver cancer. Karen graduated from law school and became a leading lawyer. Nick and Judie recently had dinner with Karen and her 9-year old daughter and are both heartbroken by this loss.

Shannon Gattens lights a candle of support and healing for her friend, Robert, whose father suffered a massive stroke last week and remains in critical condition.

We light a candle of healing for Judie Rinearson and her 3 sisters who are mourning the loss of their beloved Aunt Ceil, who died after a brief illness this week. Ceil, their mother's younger sister, was in her 90s, and was a spunky, fun, and loving aunt that they will all miss dearly.

We light this candle in witness and vigilance. Throughout this pandemic anti-Asian violence has spiked. Recent deadly incidents continue. This candle reminds us of our commitment to build a community where the kinship of all humanity is clearly visible and upheld.

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

I love you.

And not just because it's Valentine's Day.

I love you because it is love that weaves us together in community - bold love, bounded love, accountable love, covenanted love.

Sometimes I'm convinced that if the holy had a singular name it would have to be love.

Will you join me, beloved, in a spirit of prayer.

Love knows that we are not always kind -
Not always prepared -
Not always receptive.
Love knows we falter.

...Love remind us that we are already forgiven.

And love knows that we struggle -
That we stumble -
That we ache.
That we lament.

...Love remind us that we are connected.

And love knows that we are trying -
That we work hard -
That we push through exhaustion -
That we wake up and reach out.
...Love ~ remind us to rest in your constant embrace.

Amen.

Prayer Response: Somebody's Hurting My Sibling

Offering - Nina Cooke John

May we all find the courage to keep our neighbors and siblings free from harm ...
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 February Sharing Our Riches recipient is UU FaithAction NJ. FaithAction is a social advocacy network representing the Unitarian Universalist Congregations of NJ, and has been supported and often led by our congregations members. Working for 11 years with coalition partners, FaithAction acts as a moral voice in the public square, supporting environmental justice, immigration rights, reproductive freedom, criminal justice reform and gun violence prevention, while recognizing that all issues must be viewed through an anti-racist, anti-oppressive lens.

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.

This Sunday is the first Sunday of the 2021 Pledge Campaign. Please enjoy this video which tells important stories about our congregation's history, inviting us to dream how

we hope to honor that history with our donations of time, talent and treasure as we Reunite and Rise together, creating the community of tomorrow today.

Pledge Video

READING - from "*the Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*," by Jonathan Gottschall

In his book, "The Storytelling Animal," Jonathan Gottschall writes:

[Reading]

Today's Anthem is *Wonderous Stories*, composed by Jon Anderson, first recorded by his band, Yes, in 1977.

Playing their special adaptation for us are our own Paul Lombardo and Juliana Carr.

Anthem: Wonderous Stories - Jon Anderson

Homily

I bid to return to hear your wonderous stories...

As our reading shares, human beings are storytelling animals.

I come from a rich storytelling tradition;

my family's particular slice of Irish heritage includes a love of telling long, detailed stories - sometimes with little point beyond the sheer joy of telling the stories themselves,

that unparalleled delight of watching people be entranced or amazed at a good tale spun well.

Ask Reverend Anya sometime about how easy it is to lose an hour when someone asks my brother and I a simple question about, well, anything - there is always a story attached.

Is not the currency of our congregational life beloved stories?

Today, we will hear wondrous stories about this congregation.

Our tale is informed by the work of Nancy Knoerzer, our archivists Becky Doggett and Irene Sanderson, and others ...

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Montclair dates from February, 1897, when a few women met to consider the feasibility of forming a Unitarian Society to provide a liberal religious education for their children.

These women included Martha Brown, Nettie Hemphill, Susie Louise Dix and Abby Angell.

Calling themselves the Women's Alliance, they began a Sunday School in their homes almost immediately.

Sunday school commenced here before preaching.

They called Rev. Arthur Grant as their first minister in 1898, renting a loft on Bloomfield Avenue, and afterwards adding Sunday services for adults.

They bought land in 1903 and in January, 1905 they dedicated our current sanctuary at 67 Church Street; our name then was Unity Church Montclair.

“Nothing Human is alien to me” was the motto of our congregation in those early years. Our congregation’s deep feminist roots are shown by the fact that Mother Jones, the famous labor organizer, was among many women who also spoke here in those early days

Our 10th anniversary sermon, in 1907, was preached by the Rev. Anna Garlin Spencer, one of the very few women ministers at that time!

In 1906, Rev. Edgar Swan Wiers became minister, serving for 25 years.

Dr. Wiers helped establish Unity Concerts and a Lecture Series - the Unity Forum - featuring eminent thinkers and authors, such as Langston Hughes, Clarence Darrow and A. Phillip Randolph, and Mother Jones.

Keenly interested in the cultural life of the broader community, Rev. Wiers began screening a series of movies here, the popularity of which caused Montclair to rethink its restrictive blue laws and issue a license to open a movie theater.

Under Reverend Wiers’ leadership our congregation also addressed the high cost of living by inspiring the church to open a cooperative grocery and butcher shop; they began a pioneering series of classes teaching Sex Hygiene.

The congregation built a playground, in its backyard over by Valley Road, when they saw children had few places to play.

Our congregation developed a reputation as a group standing for freedom and independence in religious thought in the service of all humanity.

When Rev. Dr. Wiers died suddenly, in 1931, he was mourned by the church and the township alike.

During his ministry our congregation not only helped revise the town, they transformed themselves.

A crucial part of our story, one to which we can all relate in the time of Covid, began in October 1918 -

when our congregation was forced to shut down in response to the Spanish Flu pandemic for six months ~ scheduled to re-open on April 1, 1919.

But on March 2, 1919, our building caught fire when the library next to us, the building housing our main offices and the Peierls room today, was burning its rubbish in an open flame, a practice not uncommon back then.

The fire jumped onto our roof, and our sanctuary was devastated.

Our entire roof burned and collapsed inward, as you saw in today’s film.

The building was less than 15 years old.

Reverend Wiers and our congregation quickly regrouped.

They began meeting in people’s homes, in rented commercial spaces ~ and even outside, on Packanack Mountain, near Wayne, when weather permitted.

Percy Grainger, the popular Australian pianist, had already been scheduled to play a concert that April as part of the reopening festivities.

So our ancestors repurposed the event so the entire proceeds of the sold-out concert were donated to start a rebuilding fund.

Two months later, the fund had reached \$32,000 - half a million in today's dollars - and we were able to engage Leslie Walker, the original architect, to plan the renovation.

~ Beloved, Wonderous stories.

When our spiritual ancestors rebuilt, they built it back bigger and better.

They imagined how they could better serve their mission;

So they added Fletcher Hall, our Kitchen, and the Alliance Room, named after the women pioneers who were the true founders of this congregation.

Try and place yourself in their shoes, in this wondrous story

Our spiritual ancestors, following a fire; soon after the First World War - where a member of this congregation, Paul Gannett Osborne, was the first American killed; Suffering through a global pandemic ~ they dug deep and built the congregation of their tomorrow.

They stretched, donating their own money -

and created income streams from outside their community.

And in so doing provided us with this beautiful inheritance.

Less than a year after the fire, Sunday, Feb. 1, 1920,

they rededicated our facility and moved back in.

This is a beloved story - and it is our story, yours ...

Just as there are still charred timbers in our attic - relics of the fire - there is also the wonderous DNA our spiritual ancestors instilled in us.

We are the inheritors of this legacy of vision and generosity.

We are the beneficiaries of their sacrifice and toil.

And today, we are asked to do something very similar, to reach and live up to their example.

Today's beloved story echoes theirs in many ways.

2021, 101 years after our congregation reopened, we imagine how we might rebuild our congregation, creating the community of tomorrow today.

After a polarizing presidency that encouraged White Supremacy, homophobia and insurrection, some of us feel we have emerged from a great war -

We remain in the midst of a shutdown due to the greatest public health crisis since our congregation closed back in 1918 - we still do not know the date we can reopen.

We have seen our economy get fractured due to a venal disregard for people in need, worsened by government dysfunction ~ And still - we have remained faithful.

We have remained engaged in the ministries and programs of this congregation.

We have remained focused on the needs of our community - offering our sacred spaces during this pandemic as a daytime warming center for our town's homeless.

We have remained keenly aware that our facility, our infrastructure is necessary in order for us to be of service.

This is our story - your story.

Our historic house and grounds, though admirable, are not there merely to be admired; I refer to this as the 'mother ship' enabling us to live out our mission
So our facility needs to be upgraded in order for us to serve the needs of a congregation worthy of our ancestors.

We have begun some of those improvements already -

The Drucker/Elms project installing the equipment and infrastructure so we can easily produce Live Streaming Tech, keeping us connected with the dozens of folks who have found us since our sacred space moved online.

This sermon is recorded on that very equipment.

We are installing technology to make it easier for folks to engage our Children's RE program online - classrooms will be outfitted to stream our classes easily.

We are improving sound and lighting in the Sanctuary and Fletcher Hall.

We are engaging the tough work of dismantling white supremacy and other oppressions - the difficult introspection and truth-telling required to enable reconciliation and build beloved community.

~ What else do we need to install? To teach? To provide?

Well, that is a project for all of us to decide, together -

To compose together the next chapter of our beloved story.

Today we seek nothing short of rebuilding and rising together to create the congregation of the next century -

a congregation that will serve the unique needs of a freedom-loving, emotionally literate, intellectually honest, socially relevant, oppression-dismantling people for the next 100 years.

So I challenge you - come, and go with me -

Know this story and embody its becoming

Go with me as we dig deep and we give like never before

Dig deep and give because we know what we do saves lives as it transforms us

Help us find other revenue streams - so we can more effectively live into our mission of duty and service.

This pledge season Reverend Anya and I are increasing our pledge to \$7000 - 6.5% of our pre-tax income.

We know we have fewer bills than most of you;

we have no children

We know some of you cannot give much money at all -

and please know we love and cherish you -

we know you give whatever time and talent you can in service to the greater good.

And we know there are some who can and will give more.

Beloveds - We have been presented with an opportunity to live up to the bright example of our spiritual ancestors.

I know you will answer that call so our story will be told a hundred years from now with similar feelings of awe and glory and tears.

So come, be a part of this wondrous story we build together.

A story of a people so bold they toil headlong towards the promise of our great mission, not knowing the details of the outcome, but trusting in the faith we have in our mission and each other ~
knowing that what we do together, in covenantal love, what no one could ever do alone
- build beloved community.
Amen, and Blessed Be

Reflection Question -

Will you reflect with me ... ?

How do you hope the Story of UUCM will be told one hundred years from now?

Join us as we sing together the African-American Spiritual, Come and Go With Me

Come and Go With Me, #1018

Benediction

Come and go with us to a land of glory and awe,
a wondrous story we compose together

To enable that story, please pledge today -

go to the link, send an email to our administrator, Danielle Carlo, or mail in your pledge brochure.

You can always change or stop your pledge at some later date - but pledge soon so we can get to the work of building our budget, and we give our amazing pledge volunteers, led by Nicole Rinklin and Domingo Martinez, a break, knowing their task is accomplished.

Together, let us compose the beloved story of UU Montclair's next one hundred years

And know, that you have greatness beyond your wildest imaginings -

A greatness that will emerge when we rise to the example of our spiritual ancestors, reunite our community in joy and service,

And create tomorrow's community, the congregation of the next century, today

Chalice Extinguishing Video

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

Sign-Off - Rev. Scott and Rev. Anya

Join us right after this for Connection Cafe

And register your children for our innovative Religious Education programs, and

Until we meet again,

Virtually or otherwise,

You are in our hearts.