

**Service from UU Montclair
February 7, 2021
“What a Piece of Work Are We”**

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 Julia Crafton.

We Would Be One, #318

O What a Piece of Work Are We, #313

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

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

I'm Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael, she, her, hers.

I'm Rev. Scott Sammler-Michael, he, him, his.

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

Today's service titled "What a Piece of Work We Are" which is an invitation to humor and humility, two essential elements in any beloved community. You may have caught in that opening hymn a lot of praise for humanity "What a Piece of Work Are We." This service invites a softening of that enthusiasm raising

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

And please take a moment this week to visit our new website! With gratitude for Laurice Grae-Hauck who worked tirelessly to build our site and all of the volunteers and staff that edited and guided the development. It is time for our congregation to have a new virtual front door... and now we have a beautiful one!

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 and Remembrance Info -

Something on My Face: Learning How to Be in Community - By [Karen G. Johnston](#)

[skit]

Intro to Remembrances - Intern Ali

Called, now, by this Time for All Ages into worship with humility and joy, 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 Scott

Chelsea, Anthony and their children are leaving soon to be with Chelsea's father in Tulsa, OK. Chelsea's father has pancreatic cancer and a few months to live. Hold the Showalter family and Chelsea's parents in your thoughts as they complete this journey together.

Debbie Ann Tripoldi lights this candle of remembrance for Richard A Carroll-Dickon, a former co-worker at the Nutley Sun and a longtime friend. Richard died on Jan. 30 after battling bile duct and liver cancer.

We light this candle of gratitude for Diane Specht who reached out to members of our congregation to help them through the intricate and difficult process of signing up for Covid vaccinations. This good work was a ministry of love that enticed other members to do the same for those in their circles of care.

This candle recognized with gratitude the many volunteers whose incredible work and resilience through this time of challenge has sustained our congregational home. Thank you for your tenacity. Thank you for your presence. Thank you for your love.

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.

(Silence: 10-20 seconds)

May our listening bring forth acts of love.

Prayer - Intern Ali

Our prayer comes from the writings of the Rev. Maureen Killoran. She calls this prayer “A Celtic Lorica.”

[Prayer]

Prayer Response: Somebody’s Hurting My Sibling

Offering - Dionne Ford Kurtti

No... no we won’t be silent any more.

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.

Reading - Dionne Ford Kurtti

Our reading comes from the text “Held - Showing up for Each Other’s Mental Health” by Rev. Barbara Meyers. The following story is from the Rev. Mark Morrison Reed. In it Reed conveys an example of beloved community in his congregation.

What follows is our Anthem - Ysaye Barnwell’s “We Are” performed by Ysaye Barnwell and the Unitarian Universalist Virtual General Assembly Choir.

Anthem: “We Are” from the General Assembly Sunday Service, 2020

Homily

For each child that's born a morning star rises...

Child.

That's a word I use for myself when I need remembering.

When I need to remember the original blessing of my life.
Deeper and more resilient than any of its attendant complexities.

Child -

Child, I will say - Child of God.

It could be 'child of love', or 'child of the universe.'

It's a name I give to myself as if I were my own great, great-grandmother, looking down from a high perch with the wisdom of ages, speaking a universal truth to my human power.

Child, rest.

Child, Reflect.

Child, still yourself.

No one called me this in my family. It's how I imagine god would speak to me....

It's a name that brings me to my knees - humble.

Remembering that I was birthed here, into this - into this mess and beauty.

And oh what a piece of work it... this world is.

But it is also ours and we are of it, part and parcel.

The original people, the aboriginal people of Australia, I've read, had a name for the colonialists.

They would call them "line people."

Line people - because we of the Western way tend to live our lives in a headlong forward march.

As if life were a straight line... go. Go. go.

A headlong race toward the next goal, in search of progress.

They called us line people, we who didn't have the same sense that they did of being a part of a great circle of life.

I call myself 'child' when I need to remember that great circle.

And / need to do this because...

I am an unabashed, undeniable, unrelenting, uncompromising, unapologetic line person!

Give me a goal. *I will* race.

Give me a project. I will finish.

Give me an issue. I will fight.

Give me a meal... I will clean my plate.

...Tell me I have something on my face and I will struggle with it. I'll struggle because I'm not there yet - not to that elusive finish line. Not done. Not complete, and certainly not perfect.

And line people have had hell to pay of late.

As we have stalled or lost ground on building the beloved community, stalled or lost ground on environmental protection, on LGBTQIA rights, on just about everything I care about...

Not only are the challenges more numerous than ever - it feels like we have gone backwards by fathoms, that we are farther away from that elusive progress than ever.

What a piece of work are we indeed!

A bunch of backsliders!

Child.

Says the great, great-grandmother that is speaking both from an exalted height and from somewhere deep within -

Child, you are a part of this and it is a part of you.

It's time you see the circle - the circle of life, not only the line of supposed progress.

That story that Dionne read, the one from a beloved colleague, Rev. Mark Morrison Reed speaks of the circle.

Morrison Reed, a black Unitarian Universalist, who has done more work than anyone in our faith movement on our white supremacist failings, Morrison Reed who uplifted black pioneers too long forgotten, Morrison Reed whose own path in the ministry is a testament to his incredible fortitude - this Morrison Reed unearthed a Beloved Community, right there, right in the middle of his imperfect congregation, in an ordinary moment of time.

As his story shares - members of his congregation had come together and they were conversing about that troubled man, Nate, who sat in the front pew moving his legs and rocking back and forth.

Nate entered their conversation first as an anathema - when the host asked Rev. Morrison Reed "I don't know how you put up with him..."

But Morrison Reed didn't need to answer because the community rose up for Nate - Speaking of Nate's challenges, his pain, and then of their own understanding.

"I was once institutionalized" said one.

"My son has similar troubles" said another.

They pulled Nate out of the center of their judgement and into the heart of their circle.

Not by saying - we need to accept him - that wasn't it at all.

They pulled him into the heart of their circle by saying:

I understand him.

I am him.

He is us.

We are Nate.

Child, don't you know, you are part and parcel of this, all of this, mess and beauty.

Beloved community isn't right over there, right across that line. It is right here... right here when our shared struggles remind us that the circle of life holds us all.

As Jesus is remembered as saying "The Kingdom is here, the kingdom is upon you."

And as the Gospel of Matthew shares, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own?"

... inviting us to build the beloved community by stepping out of judgement and into recognition.

And Father Gregory Boyle, a Roman Catholic, asks us to focus on kinship.

He says that we need "to achieve a certain kind of compassion (a kind that) stands in awe of *what* the poor (the challenged) have to carry rather than in judgement at *how* they carry it."

We need to stand in awe, he says, not in judgement.

Just like the members of Morrison Reed's congregation had done with Nate.

Boyle continues "For the measure of our compassion lies not in our service to those on the margins but in our willingness to see ourselves in kinship with them..."

In kinship. That's a powerful word.

Not us and them.

Just us.

The question for me... for this line person... is can I fight to change the world, to fix what ails it, even as I recognize myself within it, a part of it... broken, just like it is broken?

Hey Child, says my great, great, grandmother -

Hey, you... child... there's something on your face.

...Yes, thank you. I've been washing it away, bit by bit, but I guess some of it is stickier, stickier than I thought.

There is work to be done, righting wrongs, but I am a fool if I think there isn't work to be done right here - with my own self.

I have washed away a lot of my own ignorance over the years and I have washed more away in community than I have in any other container... certainly more than I have pondering my failings in isolation. ...like that works!

There is a conversation I recall, one I had early in my training for the ministry. I was at an anti-racism training, in a small group. We were talking about systemic racism. And it was the first time I had heard of the concept of white privilege. ...I wanted to talk about everything else. Sexism, classism, bullying. I didn't want to hear about the privilege ingrained in my very visage, stuck on my face.

I grew tedious. Tedious.

And the strings of relationship between the other small group participants and I grew tenuous.

I felt myself on the edge, unacceptable, retreating.

Then... a few weeks after that gathering I received a note from a group participant, calling me back into the circle - not with false praise or weak acceptance, but by holding me accountable for my willful ignorance, holding me accountable in community. Holding me accountable in love.

You have work to do child, and we are here to do it with you.

I can feel that note as I share this today. It is still with me... deeply.

The writer of that note trusted me with the truth of my willful ignorance and... and here's the kicker... with the potential of my growth. By calling me to account they called me back into the circle of beloved community. Saying you are one of us - flawed and capable of transformation.

Beloved community isn't where we are perfect. It is where we consistently and compassionately wipe the mess off one another's faces, just like we wipe it off of our own.

It's interesting for me to look back, to look back to that time early in my seminary journey. I have come to a place in my life and ministry where many trust me for my justice leadership especially regarding our work to dismantle white supremacy. I am called by colleagues as a Good Officer in our Unitarian Universalist Minister's Association to mediate situations of conflict with a specifically anti-oppressive lens. I have been contracted as a mentor to a new minister who wants to learn how to be a

white ally and a white accomplice. I am elected by diverse leaders to advocate on public stages for abolition and reform.

But I wouldn't have gotten here without that note.

I wouldn't have gotten here without airing my original willful ignorance in community and then...

I wouldn't have gotten here without that kindred who saw that I was struggling, but that I could grow.

That is beloved community.

Holding one another accountable and being willing to be held.

That is beloved community - seeing ourselves in the very people that most trouble our sensibilities.

That is beloved community.

And perhaps...

Perhaps accountability is the kindest embrace.

Not judgement, but accountability.

Perhaps accountability is the kindest, the most beloved, embrace.

Amen.

Reflection Question -

Will you reflect with me ...

What is difficult for you about being held accountable? What is difficult for you about holding others accountable? How might you lean into these challenges?

Hymn - Jazz Alleluia- Hymn 1050

Benediction

This is beloved community.

Holding one another accountable and being willing to be held.

This is beloved community - seeing ourselves in the very people that most trouble our sensibilities.

This is beloved community.

And perhaps...

Perhaps we will grow to know accountability as the kindest embrace.

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 check out our new website with the same URL, the same website address.

And... you have something on your face...

And so do we!

Until we meet again,

Virtually or otherwise,

You are in our hearts.