

**Full Text of the Service at WBUUC**  
**Sunday 9 August 2020**

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**PRELUDE MUSIC**

Come Into This Place of Peace - Thaxter Cunio (WBUUC Choir)

Arirang - Thaxter Cunio (WBUUC Choir)

Ubi Caritas - Thaxter Cunio (WBUUC Choir)

**WELCOME**

Good morning, and welcome everyone, to White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church. We are a congregation in the free faith tradition, a community of youth, adults and children, dedicated to pluralism in the spiritual search and ethics grounded in action. We're grateful to share this space with you.

Service participants today are myself and Amy Peterson Derrick, supported by Erin Scott.

Today, after the service at 11:15, we hope that you will join us for Social Hour. We'll put the Zoom link and easy instructions in the chat box. Welcome to our church. Together we grow our souls and serve the world.

*Singing bowl*

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

Come in.

Come into this space which we make holy by our presence.

Come in with all your vulnerabilities and strengths,

fears and anxieties, loves and hopes,

for here you need not hide, nor pretend,

nor be anything other than who you are

and who you are called to be.

Come into this space where we can heal and be healed, forgive and be forgiven.

Come into this space where the ordinary is sanctified,

the human is celebrated, the compassionate is expected.

Come into this space –

Together we make it a holy space.

*Today, Kathleen Keating and Dick Haskett will be lighting our chalice.*

**LIGHTING THE CHALICE**

**VIDEO**

## **OPENING WORDS**

Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our great covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, and to help one another

## **STORY I - A Man, Two Tigers, and a Strawberry**

By Sarah Conover

*In Kindness: A Treasury of Buddhist Wisdom For Children and Parents*

Once, a man gathering wood from the forest floor looked up to find himself eye-to-eye with a ferocious tiger. He chucked his load of wood at the tiger, turned, and fled as quickly as human legs would move. He wove through the forest trees, dodged around boulders, and jumped over thorny bushes with the tiger as close as a shadow behind him. Just as the man felt the Tiger's hot breath on his neck and the nick of a sharp claw through his shirt, he came to the edge of a high cliff. Without a thought, the man grabbed a thick vine within reach and slung himself over the cliff face. Letting the vine slide through his hands he quickly lowered out of the tiger's reach. He heard his own heart pounding ferociously; he could barely catch a breath, but he felt so relieved to have escaped!

As the man looked around to take stock of a situation, he glanced down at the base of the cliff. There, with a tail snaking leisurely back and forth, sat another tiger-- her wide eyes intently fixed upon him as he dangled from above. Just then, the man noticed that the vine he held vibrated ever-so-slightly. He looked up to see a pair of mice poised on a mouse-sized ledge, nibbling away at the single vine on which his life hung. His truly desperate situation was dawning upon him, yet something shimmering and red caught his eye and made him investigate. He looked closely and found a luscious plump strawberry growing right out of a crack in the cliff. With one arm clutching the vine, he reached over with his free arm and plucked it.

It was the most delicious morsel he'd ever tasted.

We are going to sing together--the hymn is Spirit of Life, #123 in your gray hymnal

## **HYMN                      Spirit of Life**

## **REFLECTION I / MEDITATION**

So I bet you're wondering how the story ends. The man is holding on to dear life on the edge of the cliff and the vine, the last fragile connection to safety is slowly being eroded. And he sees and eats a most delicious strawberry.

That's the end. The end of that story, anyway. How does it resolve? This cliff-hanger (harhar) doesn't get a happy ending. It's not a TV show trying to improve ratings, enticing the viewer back after a break, it's not a book series that's setting you up for the next in the series. This is how this story ends: "It was the most delicious morsel he'd ever tasted."

Unlike entertainment, unlike in our fantasies, in life, there are rarely happy endings. There are certainly happy middles. Happy along-the-ways. But as we have learned in our lives, there is no

happily ever after. Nothing about happiness is long-lasting. Joy is momentary, and necessary, but fleeting. But we are lucky, because although joy is fleeting, so is suffering only temporary.

So what if we can let go of the story's ending – where do we find ourselves? In the middle. Right smack dab in the middle of it, just like we are now.

Here we are in an extended cliff-hanging – the tiger of the pandemic above, and the tiger of an unknown future – the world after the pandemic -below. There is great uncertainty. The only tool we have is imagination and curiosity.

We are clinging to the vine of masks and politics, school openings and shutdowns. We are clinging to the vines of a vaccine, or a treatment. We are clinging to the vines that we hope will someday help us climb back to “normal” when the tigers disappear.

And, as we prepare to wait out the pandemic tiger, we notice – we notice the mice slowly chewing away at that vine. We notice that no matter how much we wish we could cling to the vine of a vaccine, that the mice of research tell us that the antibodies we are counting on may not last very long. We notice that no matter how much we try to make other people care enough about the greater good, we can only control our own mask wearing.

We notice, maybe if we're looking hard enough, that the vines we are clinging to are actually grief.

Those lines that tether us to the past, to “normal” are the grief over the profound losses of our time.

We have lost SO MUCH lately. Not only the extraordinary – beyond conceivable – number of people who've died of COVID19 in six months, but the losses of normal itself. The loss of travel, the loss of seeing loved ones who are far away. The loss of rites of passage done in the way that feels good-together. But even simpler, the loss of just popping to the store, the loss of coffee dates, of going to concerts. The loss of the illusion of security that our routines and rituals give us.

We are living in collective and ongoing grief. We know that everyone grieves differently, we do things at our own pace. By now I am sure you're familiar with the 5 stages of grief described by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross: “Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance.”

Some people are still in denial, acting as if they are somehow protected or immune to the illness – it's a hoax or a joke. I think it also explains why so many people are reacting to mask laws with so much rage – they could be in the anger stage of grief. Some of us are trying to bargain our way out – “if only we could shut down the country, we would knock out this virus in three weeks.” Many of us are experiencing depression – including many celebrities – Michelle Obama, thanks for your vulnerability. But I think there are a few of us who are on the leading edge of acceptance.

Those are the people who are able to notice - to look at the world we are facing with curiosity, who look around and find the strawberry. The folks who are at acceptance can find the small joys in a dire situation. They reach out with one hand and take up the ripe fruit and savor it.

Remember, grief isn't linear, and we don't move through these stages one by one, we can experience one then another, then back to the first, before going onto a third, all in a short or over a long time.

Grief is complex and varied, and there isn't a final stage, that suddenly makes everything better. What I'm saying is acceptance in one moment isn't arriving somewhere.

Eating the strawberry doesn't mean we've let go of the vine completely.

Years into my personal grief and all of this communal grief stirs it back into the bargaining and depression stages again.

Kubler-Ross had a protégé David Kessler, who, after she died, added a sixth stage: making meaning. He recently did a podcast with author and cultural phenomenon Brene Brown, where he said: “The meaning isn’t in the death, it’s in me and what I do with it.”

The meaning isn’t in the loss, but it’s in how we wrap it around us – is it a shield that we use to deflect the world, or is it a garment woven-fine surprisingly light and warm at the same time? Is it a feather in our cap or a hanky that we share with strangers? Do we use it as a veil to keep the world at bay, or do we use it as a sheet to project our imaginations on?

“Making meaning”, Kessler said, “doesn’t make the pain go away but it cushions it.” Making meaning is turning the stages into action, not reaction. Turning denial into mindfulness, turning anger into revolution, turning bargaining into visioning, depression into compassion, and acceptance into transformation.

If you are wondering what the end of the story is – so am I.

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Join me in a time of meditation:

Find yourself in your body, find your center, find your connection to the earth. Hold on to that connection – feel the pulsing of your heart pumping blood through your veins. Feel your breath moving in and out of your lungs.

Unfocus your eyes, and let them gaze in whichever direction they choose to look. Take in the sounds that surround you.

Bring to mind your loved ones, the beloved companions of this earth, be it family members, good friends, furry companions – hold them close in your mind’s eye. Speak their names aloud. Whether far away or close by, remember that you are connected.

Let us be silent together for a time.

## **OFFERING INTRO**

In these times, your gifts are needed more than ever. With deep gratitude we receive your offering to support the work and vision of this community.

## **OFFERTORY Bridge Over Troubled Water**

## **STORY II The Worth of Cherry Blossoms**

By Sarah Conover

*In Kindness: A Treasury of Buddhist Wisdom For Children and Parents*

*In Japan two centuries ago, there lived a Buddhist nun named Rengetsu. Her life as a nun began tragically, after her husband and young children died. To support herself, she worked as a potter, a poet, and an artist. Her exquisite poetry gained her instant fame. She soon found herself moving from one home to the next, trying to avoid the constant press of customers.*

*Although Japan named her a Patron Saint of the Arts, she never held onto the money her art brought in-- she gave it to those who needed it most. More than a few times she parted with her warm kimono*

*to a shivering street beggar. When a robber entered her home during the night, she lit a lamp for him to see by, then fixed the thief a cup of hot tea while inviting him to discuss his desperate situation.*

*Rengetsu said she moved about like “a drifting cloud blown by a fierce wind.” Her poems are fresh with images from journeys through forests and mountains. On one such pilgrimage to a remote region, she had hiked since noon without having passed through a single village. But at last, as dusk descended, she came upon a small settlement along a riverbank. She knocked upon the door of an inn, humbly asking for a night's lodging. But the Inn was already full.*

*As she rested, stars appeared out of the advancing darkness. The village grew steadily more quiet. The sounds of families enjoying their suppers faded into those of preparing for the night. Rengetsu was tired, but not discouraged. Beyond the town she had earlier spied a forgotten orchard with lush, soft grass beneath the trees. She retraced her steps down the road and bedded down for the night under a cherry tree.*

*In the middle of the night, she sensed a bright light upon her face. It awakened her. When her eyes opened, a hazy, snowy Moon loomed in the cloudless sky. Directly above her, thousands of cherry blossoms had opened while she slept, and each flower now held bright moonlight in its pedal cop. It was so lovely Rengetsu gasped. She bowed towards the village, giving thanks for this unexpected gift: a gift of nature far more meaningful than a comfortable night in bed! Rengetsu then composed this poem:*

*Turned away  
at the Inn  
I take this unkindness as grace  
resting instead  
beneath the heavy moon  
and evening blossoms.*

**HYMN**      Every Night #17  
Every night and every morn  
some to misery are born;  
every morn and every night  
some are born to sweet delight.

Joy and woe are woven fine,  
clothing for the soul divine:  
under every grief and pine  
runs a joy with silken twine.

It is right it should be so:

we were made for joy and woe;  
and when this we rightly know,  
safely through the world we go.

## **REFLECTION II**

When my children were young, many hours of the long days were passed playing dress-up. We'd get lost together in imaginative worlds alongside our stuffed animal and doll and figurine companions. Together, we were benevolent rulers of kingdoms, we were master chefs, we were adventurers lost at sea, we were sometimes villains and sometimes heroes.

We know this work of imaginative play, to be the work of childhood-- study after study has shown pretend play to be essential to a child's development--and yet, to them, at least from the outside, it hardly seems like work at all. With nothing but their imaginations, buildings turn into robots, spoons are effortlessly fashioned into magic wands, they become masters at communicating with animals, they figure out how to save the world a hundred times over, and conquer their biggest fears in the process.

Through imaginative play, no matter how fantastical the worlds they have woven, children are also working to make sense of the tangible world that they observe so keenly around them every day. They are practicing the words, the rituals, the feelings they observe and experience. They are connecting the dots about life--often sorting out their own, sometimes very difficult, life experiences through play; wondering about life, death, and about big questions--answerable and unanswerable. The tangible world does not cease to exist as they play-- instead, children are taking what they know to be true and adding to it, making adjustments, wondering out loud "what if." And they are making it all up as they go along-- sometimes together with others--empowered as they find themselves, for once, in the drivers seat, weaving the story, deciding if the ending is happy....or not so happy... or if there is no ending at all.

And every once in a while, when we adults have nothing else in front of us begging for our attention, we might answer the call and allow ourselves to jump in, head-first, into those imaginary worlds right alongside the children in our lives. We might huddle down on the floor next to them, waiting for our next instruction-- or we gobble down the masterfully baked imaginary cake that was served to us at the tea party, or perhaps, it's our turn to play the villain and pretend to be asleep and snoring on the floor while the priceless jewels are stolen back heroically for the common good. ...or maybe we really are asleep, because sometimes, let's face it, we are exhausted.

But for a moment, just a moment, if we can manage to be fully present, and we can manage to assume the posture of imagination--Because there is a very specific posture we assume when we are intending to do the work of imagination, right? Maybe our bodies feel a little less tense, our hearts and minds might have a border sense of openness, maybe we feel a little more humility, maybe we are a little less protective of our egos or a little less worried about how silly we look snoring on the floor. When we assume this posture of imagination, in our body and spirit, we have the potential of being

transported, re-energized, empowered, reconnected with joy, reconnected with one another, reconnected with our own sense of hope for ourselves and our world.

Practicing this posture of imagination serves us well beyond childhood-- as Kirsta Tippet reminds us in her Commencement space at Middlebury college in 2019, "Imagination is our gift as a species to move purposefully towards what does not yet exist and walk willingly through the unknown to get there. It has a power to change what seems possible and so to shift what becomes possible."

Imagination is not about hiding from the world as it is-- Imagination requires us to see the world as it is, and intentionally, bravely move toward something else.

The buddhist nun, Rengetsu, who we just heard about in the story that Sara shared, reminds me of this. By the time Rengetsu was 33, she had experienced so much loss in her life, losing 5 children and 2 husbands, and others who were close to her. She then took her vows as a nun, poured herself into her art-- her poetry, her pottery-- and was known to go on long pilgrimages.

When I imagine Rengetsu in this story, I imagine that she is carrying the weight of her world-- her loss, her grief, as she travels. I imagine Regentsu might have felt disappointed or angry or even a little afraid as the inn turned her away; the day not ending at all as she might have planned. "A cloud blown by a fierce wind," as she says. And yet, "tired, but not discouraged. She is able to notice the villagers settling in for the night, the stars appearing in the advancing darkness, and is able to remember the orchard not far away. And as she rests, I imagine her as she settles into the ground beneath the tree; her body, her spirit settling into a posture of curiosity, of imagination; not ignoring the story that brought her to that place under the tree, but holding it while also moving intentionally toward the beauty she dares to imagine might be. And so, she notices the moon and blossoms-- it was so lovely she gasped.

*Turned away  
at the Inn  
I take this unkindness as grace  
resting instead  
beneath the heavy moon  
and evening blossoms.*

We each may find ourselves as clouds blown by a fierce wind, and the work of finding joy and hope in the midst of uncertainty, loss and fear might just feel impossible. How can we possibly move through the unknown toward a new world, when we feel so utterly exhausted by the one we live in?

We need stories and music that remind us of blossoms and the beautiful moonlight; we need tea parties, and daring adventures in far off kingdoms; and most importantly, we need companions that are willing to take the risk together to imagine, and to move through the unknown together.

We are going to sing one more time together: There is More Love Somewhere, #95 in the gray hymnal

**HYMN        There is More Love Somewhere #95**

There is more love/hope/peace/joy somewhere.

There is more love somewhere.

I'm gonna keep on 'til I find it.

There is more love somewhere.

**CLOSING WORDS**

May peace dwell within our hearts, and understanding in our minds

May courage steel our will, and love of truth forever guide us.

**FAREWELL**

Friends, thank you for joining us.

If you're not receiving our **EMAIL NEWS**, go to our website and sign up! We'll send updates twice a week about groups and gatherings, updates from the Board of Directors, and more. Call or write with questions, or to ask for help, or to offer help.

Please join us today for Cyber Social Hour. This is a wonderful opportunity to connect with others in the congregation, to make new connections or renew old ones. We hope to see you there.

We are sending love from WBUUC at all of our locations. Stay resilient and stay connected, everyone. So be it. See to it. Amen.

**POSTLUDE   Kwaheri**

Swahili:

Kwaheri, Kwaheri, Mpenzi, Kwaheri

Kwaheri, Kwaheri, Mpenzi' Kwaheri

Tut a o nanan ten a, Tu ki ja ri wa

Tut a o nanan ten a, Tu ki ja ri wa