

Full Text of the Service at WBUUC
Sunday 2 August 2020

PRELUDE MUSIC

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

Deep River - Thaxter Cunio (WBUUC Choir)

Wade in the Water (with Dean McGraw)

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 include Amy Peterson Derrick, Rev. Jack Gaede and supported by Anna Gehres and 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, Ken Stewart will be lighting our chalice.

LIGHTING THE CHALICE

VIDEO

What stories will be told for future generations of what's happening in our country these days? How it all got ignited, watching the murder of George Floyd live on television, [and] so many other murders before him. What stories will we tell for future generations of lessons that we've learned today? I light the chalice for future stories.

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

HYMN

All This Joy

STORY

By Elie Wiesel, from *The Gates of the Forest*.

When the great Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem-Tov saw misfortune threatening the Jews, it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light the fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished and the misfortune averted.

Years later when a disciple of the Ba'al Shem-Tov, the celebrated Magid of Mezritch, had occasion for the same reason, to intercede with heaven, he would go to the same place in the forest and say: "Master of the Universe, listen! I do not know how to light the fire, but I am still able to say the prayer," and again the miracle would be accomplished.

Still later, another rabbi, Rabbi Moshe-leib of Sasov, in order to save his people once more, would go into the forest and say, "I do not know how to light the fire. I do not know the prayer, but I know the place and this must be sufficient." It was sufficient and the miracle was accomplished.

The years passed. And it fell to Rabbi Israel of Ryzhyn to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God: "I am unable to light the fire, and I do not know the prayer, and I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is tell the story, and this must be sufficient." And it was sufficient.

MEDITATION

For just a few moments, let's hold silence together.

Amen.

OFFERING INTRO

In these times your congregation needs you more than ever. With gratitude and gladness, we'll receive the offering to support the work and vision of this community.

OFFERTORY What a Fellowship

READINGS

“Thirteen-Year-Old American Negro Girl” by Marilyn Nelson

My face, as foreign to me as a mask,
allows people to believe they know me.
Thirteen-Year-Old American Negro Girl,
headlines would read if I was newsworthy.
But that’s just the top-of-the-iceberg me.
I could spend hours searching the mirror
for clues to my truer identity,
if someone didn’t pound the bathroom door.
You can’t see what the mirror doesn’t show:
for instance, that, after I close my book
and turn off my lamp, I say to the dark:
Give me a message I can give the world.
Afraid there’s a poet behind my face,
I beg until I’ve cried myself to sleep.

In a Time of Peace by Ilya Kaminsky

Inhabitant of earth for fortysomething years
I once found myself in a peaceful country. I watch neighbors open

their phones to watch
a cop demanding a man’s driver license. When the man reaches for his wallet, the cop
shoots. Into the car window. Shoots.

It is a peaceful country.

We pocket our phones and go.
To the dentist,
to pick up the kids from school,
to buy shampoo
and basil.

Ours is a country in which a boy shot by police lies on the pavement
for hours.

We see in his open mouth
the nakedness

of the whole nation.

We watch. Watch
others watch.

The body of a boy lies on the pavement exactly like the body of a boy--

It is a peaceful country.

And it clips our citizens' bodies
effortlessly, the way the President's wife trims her toenails.

All of us
still have to do the hard work of dentist appointments,
of remembering to make
a summer salad: basil, tomatoes, it is a joy, tomatoes, add a little salt.

This is a time of peace.

I do not hear gunshots,
but watch birds splash over the backyards of the suburbs. How bright is the sky
as the avenue spins on its axis.
How bright is the sky (forgive me) how bright.

MUSIC

You Gotta Move

REFLECTION

No Need for Silence

First...a story about the Young Adult novel *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson. It is a strong story, incredibly relevant to this post-MeToo moment that we're in. The main character is a young woman who is assaulted the summer before her 9th grade year. She loses all her friends and slowly retreats inside herself. She forms a thick shell of defenses--fortified by her near-total silence. She barely speaks more than four lines of dialogue before the end of the book. Her story is screaming to get out of her, and she constantly bites her lips, trying to keep it in. When she finally tells the story of her assault to one person who believes her, everything changes. She tells her story, and the effect ripples throughout the whole school. This story is powerful precisely because of the silence she embodies throughout most of the novel. When she finally shares her story, one person pays attention, listens, hears. And that telling of the story (accompanied by the hearing) marks the beginning of her healing.

Now in this story, it might be easy to imagine yourself as the friend that lends your listening ear and believes her. We often want to write ourselves into the story as one of the good characters, but how do we handle these stories in real life? We live in a city of joy and sorrow, city of promise and pain--surrounded by fellow citizens suffering abuse, oppression and mistreatment. Some of that

suffering is individual and personalized, some is systemic, and some is nationwide. How do you respond when you hear about the lived experiences of your neighbors who experience this abuse and oppression? How do you hold such a grand scale of pain in your own body, mind, and spirit? How do you change your understanding of fairness when you find out life's not fair or when the so-called "criminal justice" system isn't just? How do you incorporate new stories into your broader understanding of American life?

If you follow the multi-colored intertwining threads and complex, overlapping fabrics, you will find the quilt of our shared collective stories. Sometimes hearing them can be painful, and sometimes the stories we hear are in direct contradiction with other stories we have heard. It takes a great deal of thoughtfulness and care to parse out the differences and weigh the merit of conflicting accounts, and it might feel easier just to tune them out. But poet Ilya Kaminsky challenges us to think about what happens when the citizens of a country no longer hear one another. He is hard-of-hearing himself, and he has made the bold claim, "The deaf do not believe in silence. Silence is the invention of the hearing." He highlights the need to stay attuned and listen deeply to the pain of the world around you despite the desire to focus on peace. In his poem, he repeats the phrase "It is a peaceful country" while simultaneously interspersing moments that challenge that peace and that perception of peace. Of course there are wishes for peace, but we cannot turn a deaf ear to the moments of war and of violence--of black men dying in the street. He contrasts the killings of Michael Brown and Philando Castile with the making of a perfect, joy-filled tomato-basil salad. He denies hearing gunshots and focuses instead on the birds that he's watching splash in the backyards of the suburbs.

He longs for a few moments where it doesn't feel like he's in the middle of a war and that people are dying all around him. I could imagine a moment where he chooses to turn down his hearing aids and sink into a moment of bliss, a month of bliss, even a year. How long can he avoid the painful reality? Can you relate? I know I can.

To dream about a pre-pandemic life where social engagements aren't taken for granted. To close your eyes and imagine a world where the poor aren't dismissed as less worthy--a world where those on the margins are called into the center. I understand the desire to tune out for a bit. In fact, I just got back from a retreat, where I got to commune with nature. I actually watched birds splashing--not over the backyards of the suburbs but in the fields of rural Wisconsin. And while I was gone, pain and suffering went on, and I wasn't paying close attention to them. But that's okay...we all need occasional breaks. And we're in this together. I know that while I was gone, some of you were holding on to the reins. And now that I'm back, I can join the team again--continuing the work so that others of you can get some rest and rejuvenation. It is a marathon, not a sprint. And we must work together.

We also need a few tools to do this work: a thirst for continuing education, humility, and prayer. Now before you get worked up, let me offer you a new perspective on an old practice. Many people have been taught many different forms of prayer, but I want to highlight two life-giving aspects to prayer. First, it is an opportunity to remind ourselves that we are not the center of the universe and that there is something greater than us--whether you call that something God, Beloved Community, Source of Life and Love, Justice, or Mystery. Secondly, the act of thinking through what your heart or spirit needs and then naming it out loud is a powerful act on its own. There doesn't have to be a next step; there doesn't need to be a response. The actual act of expressing your need is affirming...it's like the main character of that young adult novel finally speaking instead of agonizing in her silence. There is no need for silence.

Expressing our needs might actually empower us to ask a friend for help, which is the first step toward a deeper relationship. And making that ask requires the recognition that one needs help--it requires humility. Humility involves admitting that you don't have all the answers--that you can't do it alone. There is something truly profound that happens within ourselves when we admit that we aren't

self-contained and self-sustained units. We are part of a grander fabric that involves so many interwoven strands.

This complex understanding of prayer is the one that I consider valuable, and I am pursuing a continuing education in it. How do we express our needs and hopes and dreams that live beneath the surface?

My face, as foreign to me as a mask,
allows people to believe they know me.
Thirteen-Year-Old American Negro Girl,
headlines would read if I was newsworthy.
But that's just the top-of-the-iceberg me.
I could spend hours searching the mirror
for clues to my truer identity,
if someone didn't pound the bathroom door.
You can't see what the mirror doesn't show:
for instance, that, after I close my book
and turn off my lamp, I say to the dark:
Give me a message I can give the world.
Afraid there's a poet behind my face,
I beg until I've cried myself to sleep.

In a discussion of her poem, Marilyn Nelson essentially boils down her message to what she calls her 13-year-old prayer: "Let me be a poet. Give me something to share." This was the prayer behind her face--the part of her that the mirror doesn't show--the secret she spoke to the dark. What is that for you? What comprises the part of your iceberg that is submerged below water?

We all have this hidden part of ourselves that we only expose when we feel safe and when we trust the listener, and I think that this below-the-surface iceberg part is primarily stories--our mythology. And sometimes (as we heard in a previous chalice lighting) we need to re-author some of those stories, maybe change the framework from victim to survivor. And when we tell those stories, we are exposing more of the iceberg. We are leaning in toward deeper connection--like trees whose underground roots in reality form an interconnected system of mutual support.

Okay...one more story for the folks who see the effects of racism in our society and want to pin them on a few bad apples...or only on individual incidents of racism and who fail to see the systemic interplay at work. In her book *White Fragility*, Robin DiAngelo warns her white readers about this exact misunderstanding and how dangerous it could be. For example, in the case of George Floyd, I could potentially rest assured that if there's a good/bad binary, I'm on the good side and the four officers are on the bad side. Hence, they're the problem, and I don't have any need to grow or change. Additionally, if I only look at those individual acts, I will forget that there are many interlocking systems in place that give privilege and access to some people and negatively affect others. I will potentially make things unnecessarily flat and two-dimensional. I might even paint the story of George Floyd's death in broad enough strokes to make four villains and a city full of heroes (including me), since so many of us protested his death. We have many reasons to want to valorize ourselves and ensure that we're on the good side of the good-bad binary, but what if it's not that simple?

I actually know one of the four officers--I worked with him at a previous job. I care about him and consider him a friend. Even if I had wanted to, I never had the privilege or possibility to demonize him. I know Tom, and I know his wife. I've had many conversations with Tom, including heated disagreements about the way police handled the deaths of Jamar Clark and Philando Castile. We do not agree, yet I have never doubted his inherent worth and dignity. And this is where I'll ask you to join me in the complexity of overlapping narratives and conflicting stories.

I have a deep desire to understand Tom's story but without giving it more merit or weight than George's story or the story of police brutality in this country. I also don't want to feed into the mistake of individualism where an individual holds the guilt and weight of a broken system. But I'm especially aware that I need to be able to hear and digest stories of the oppressed **and** stories of the oppressor, because we all have these stories inside ourselves too.

Neither Tom nor I are the main characters of George Floyd's story, but we are still the main characters in our own stories. And our stories involve learning about and responding to other people's stories, which in turn shape us and our future stories. We get to name and claim the moment that a story of oppression really hits us and changes us. This is the radical and powerful act of telling our stories.

But how do we handle all this brokenness? My retreat leader Karen Hering taught me that sometimes when an old analog watch has stopped working, its brokenness cannot necessarily be repaired by returning inner gears to their old alignments. We might require new alignments, new stories, and new systems. Like we heard earlier from Amy's story, we might not be able to light the fire, we might not know the exact prayer or the exact spot in the woods, but just telling the story might suffice. We've spent many weeks exploring the practice of telling our stories. Yes, we are changed by the telling...and yes, we might re-author the story a bit and tell a truer story as we plumb the depths of our stories. But the telling is not the only good to be accomplished, listening to and savoring the stories of others is also vital. We will have a chance to do that shortly during Cyber Social Hour--I hope you'll join us.

In his book *My Grandmother's Hands*, Resmaa Menakem discusses trauma and the way trauma actually lives in our physical bodies. He offers a helpful framework where he wonders what it would look like to seek out the trauma lodged in your body and to break it down or process it (in other words...metabolize it). Just like how our bodies metabolize the food that builds up in our body and converts that food into energy and fuel. I wonder what it would look like to hear and metabolize the stories of others (especially those vulnerable stories that involve a person's pain). To break them down and learn from them and then to incorporate the lessons learned into the grand fabric of your own understanding so that you can walk out of that interaction a changed person with a more complete and complex narrative. Or as our dear musician Carol Caouette puts it, to catch all the stones that everyone threw, to catch all the sorrow that you could in a day, to take all these stones and to throw them away.

And isn't that at the heart of education? As we encounter new information, new narratives, stones or anger and injustice, we change our own narrative. You know that surprise when you wake up and realize that overnight your phone has updated its apps and its software? I've learned that this happens (in small ways) virtually every night. I propose that we think of ourselves in a similar fashion, getting a similar upgrade every night--finding a sufficient amount of memory and RAM to process all the new data. May we give ourselves the room to grow and learn and incorporate our new learning, assuming that we will wake up the next day with new stories metabolized and new connections created--refreshed and updated.

May we continue to hear new narratives that will push us toward new ways of being in the world--stories that might challenge us and bring more complexity to our understanding of our world. I'm sorry to say, but if you came here for answers, I'm afraid you might leave disappointed...and with more questions. But isn't that why most of us are here? We want to hear a new story. We want to hear some familiar stories too, but some of those stories need new endings. And those new endings might require your involvement and your action. I hope you can metabolize any stuck energy or built-up and unhelpful narratives inside yourself and use that energy to fuel your activism. May it be so and make it so.

A final reading from Arundhati Roy:

Whatever it is, coronavirus has made the mighty kneel and brought the world to a halt like nothing else could. Our minds are still racing back and forth, longing for a return to “normality”, trying to stitch our future to our past and refusing to acknowledge the rupture. But the rupture exists. And in the midst of this terrible despair, it offers us a chance to rethink the doomsday machine we have built for ourselves. Nothing could be worse than a return to normality.

Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next.

We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.

Please join me in singing our final hymn “Stonecatcher.”

HYMN Stonecatcher

This morning I woke up and I knew what to do
I'd catch all the stones that everyone threw
I'd catch all the sorrow (anger, injustice) I could in a day
Then I'd take all the stones and throw them away
Don't ask why say we must all be free
Don't ask when say you can count on me.

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. As Jack mentioned in his sermon, we will have a couple special focus questions today around the theme of story. We're going to get the opportunity to speak and to listen. The questions are these: What is a new story that you've been learning from lately? And what does it feel like to be in that learning? And I'll encourage you to take a few moments between now and 11:15 to sit and write. Our postlude today was written about our sanctuary in Mahtomedi. Feel free to imagine yourself sitting in that beautiful space as you ponder these questions.

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 Church of the Earth

The ceiling is high
To let your soul rise
Up to the angels who teach you to fly
And when you're weary of clouds
It helps you back down
And welcomes you home
To this hallowed ground
It's gilded in gold, gilded in rust
For heaven below and heaven above
The heaven we know here in this world
Here in our holy church of the earth
The windows are wide
So darkness and light
Mystery and Beauty meet you inside
And there's room enough
To hold all of us
Who gather in friendship
Gather in love
It's gilded in gold, gilded in rust
For heaven below and heaven above
The heaven we know here in this world
Here in our holy church of the earth
Church of the earth
Church of life
Ancient and bright
Life that inside us shines Life that we share
This is our prayer That we may al - ways find
The heaven we seek Here at our feet
Here in this sunrise In this heartbeat
It's gilded in gold, gilded in rust
For heaven below and heaven above
The heaven we know here in this world
Here in our holy church of the earth church of the earth