

[RING SINGING BOWL]

I invite you to relax your body, bring your mind and your heart into this space of community, faith, reason and love. Center yourself . . . breathe deeply. Let us join together in communion as we listen to this prayer written by Deborah Weiner:

Pastoral Reflection

A Post-Election Prayer By Deborah Weiner¹

Loving and Transforming Grace, Source of creation who some know as God --
Be with us now.

[We] find ourselves looking inward, to each other, to all fonts of wisdom, for guidance.

. . .

Where do we go next?

How do we mend the wounds of this nation, borne out of an audacious and tentative experiment in democracy?

How do we become united once more?

On this day – on all days going forward, let us look to ourselves, into each others' eyes, . . . as we recognize that we must find ways to join together as never before if we are to build the future we dream of.

Alone, we will surely fail.

Separated, we face defeat.

But together -- summoning up those angels Lincoln spoke of long ago, we may yet redeem our country's greatest hope –
of one nation, respectful and loving of all people –

To give birth, again, to the dream.

Sung Meditation: Hymn #123 *Spirit of Life*

¹ <http://www.uua.org/worship/words/prayer/post-election-prayer> January 14, 2017

Offertory Words

Let us now take an offering to sustain and strengthen this [congregation], which is sacred to so many of us; [this] community of memory and of hope, for we are now the keepers of the dream. (Braddock Lovely)

Offering & Offertory Music *Melody, Op.68, R. Schumann*

Sermon *The Fury of the Dove*

Rev. Lloyd

I was 12 years old when I found myself riding my bike up the long bluff that overlooked San Francisco Bay. It was a beautiful day with crystal blue skies and sail boats scudding across choppy waters. Out in the middle of the bay was Alcatraz Island, still in use in the 60's, and to the left was the majestic Golden Gate bridge. All this and a lush green forest in the foreground that could be seen from that hill, upon which the General's house perched.

I had ridden there from our quarters on the Presidio of San Francisco. I had a letter to deliver to General Brown, on which I had written, "Private" several times, in my still childish handwriting. I rode up to his quarters, marveling at the luxury of the home in which he lived, and I left my letter to him in his mailbox. And waited.

The Presidio is a beautiful post. It was the fourth assignment we'd had in three years. My father had come home the day before, and said to my mother, "*How's your Presbyterianism today?*"

She said, "*Oh no, we've got orders. It must be God's will.*" Later, I saw her crying.

The orders were to Korea. Family could not go. And, we could not stay at the Presidio either - rules you know - we needed to move somewhere else to wait for him to return from Korea. Seventh grade would be at another school, and since he would be in Korea for a year, eighth grade would be somewhere else, yet again. And, as it turned out that would also be a 1 year assignment, so there would be a different school for 9th grade, too.

This had pretty much been my life - an army brat - with few if any rights in the matter. I'd become someone rather used to chaos, and comfortable with change. A chameleon in my new environments.

But, even so, this was little too much. Without thinking - I acted for the first time in my life and said in my own way, "No." Of course, I didn't say it to my father, I said it to the General (!) in the form of a letter.

PAUSE

Years later, in seminary I would learn about an abstract concept, called "internalized oppression." I remember the author describing it as a cage in which a bird lives. But, it is a special kind of cage. It's bars are invisible, and the bird doesn't know the bars are there. So, no matter how hard the bird tries to fly out - it's wings get caught by those invisible bars. And, after a while - although it doesn't know why it's so hard to get out, it just knows it is - and doesn't try anymore - and never finds the door.

"Internalized oppression". Big words. In my own way, I was trying to get out of my cage - only to find out it was not possible. In secret, I wrote my letter to the Commanding General of the post. As best a 12 year old could do - it was a polite letter requesting that we be allowed to stay on post, while my father was overseas. The word "private" written on the envelope tells me now that unconsciously, I knew I shouldn't be doing this. I knew that in my heart, but not my head. One day, my father came home to talk to me. The General had compassionately taken my father aside one day, handed him the letter, and said to him, *"I think you want this."* As far as I know there was nothing more said between them - though certainly there must have been. When my father came home he gently explained to me that I must never write another letter like that again. The reason? Because it would go on his performance record. Internalized oppression.

Now, it wasn't clear to me exactly what a "performance record" was, but I understood that somehow, I had threatened the family by threatening my father's job. Later, I found out that it was the practice of the military at that time, to include in a serviceman's performance evaluation, a report on the behavior of his wife and children. I learned that his career could be effected by my behavior. Later, I would understand that we could even lose our army housing over my behavior.

What I really came to understand was that getting angry could have serious consequences.

PAUSE

Last week, I spoke to you about Carolyn McDade, who has written songs that are meaningful to this faith. Quite a long time ago, I heard another one of her songs, called, "The Fury of the Dove." The lyrics that caught my attention then were:

*"I am enraged . . .
that "peace" can mean the threat that millions die . . .
that we invoke the voice of God
to bless our gold, our guns and rod . . .
that women, cast aside unheard,
are robbed of our word.
So thus in rage,
my heart doth leap,
my hands do rise
and I must choose
to care or despise.
If dare we see the fury within the dove,
then dare we . . . labor, friend, with love, with love." (McDade, 1991)*

I have to say that when I first heard this song I simply couldn't get my head around it. I couldn't reconcile nor translate the meaning of the words "fury and dove," "anger and love". They didn't make sense to me - they seemed anti-religious - and therefore somehow inappropriate. I asked myself "How could this great songwriter have gotten something so wrong?"

PAUSE

Decades pass and childhood memories come bubbling up to the surface when you least expect them. In the early 2000's I had the good fortune to be paired up with Rev. Michelle Bentley, the minister of Third Unitarian Church on the west side of Chicago, to do a combined community ministry and parish ministry internship. Rev. Bentley was the third African American woman to be ordained to the Unitarian Universalist ministry. Her call to ministry in this liberal faith, knew no bounds. She served wherever she was needed, in community ministry and parish ministry: as chaplain, community organizer, parish minister, interim minister, and UUA staff, across the course of her career.

Together we visited the neighbors and children of one of our few inner-city Unitarian Universalist congregations. The people living in the neighborhood were nearly all African-American. Mostly I met with the neighborhood women.

They knew anger well enough to know they needed to defend their homes. I watched as one neighbor kept an eye out on the street corner to make sure it was free of drugs.

If the young men she watched grow up in the neighborhood were selling drugs on "her corner", she went out and set the record straight with them. She was conscious and deliberate in her action.

We talked about whether she was afraid to act this way. And, she admitted that fear sometimes overcame her. But, she said,

"fear is not as important to me as living my faith."

Her understanding of faith, of G*d², of Jesus, allowed her to step outside that cage trying to entrap her.

While there, I also met one too many African Americans suffering from multiple strokes, and was conscious of the disparity between our lives. At the time, I had high blood pressure, and until it happened to me, it was just an abstract concept. Because I am white, and because I do not live in poverty, I knew I would get treatment. I didn't have to make the same difficult choices others make.

During my internship, I found out that others don't problem-solve the same way I do. One can only solve problems when one has choices. Instead others make different choices, such as medicine or food, treatment or housing. Choices within a closed system, within a birdcage.

Or, they simply don't think about treatment, because there is no perception of "choice."

I was struck with how young they were. Maybe in their fifties - not much older than me, then. And, so many had had strokes. Many, many strokes. I saw the evidence in one woman's eyes as she wandered outside of her house looking for someone or something she couldn't name. I saw it in the man who always sat in the same place watching TV in the dark - partially paralyzed. I heard it in a woman's voice, as we talked about her strokes in 1972 and 1986 and 1998 and . . . I don't remember all the dates.

And then, I understood the song. I felt anger. I am angry that systems exist that shorten the lives of whole classes of people, simply because of their skin color, poverty, or heritage. I am angry because we live in a system, where some people feel entitled to medical treatment - while others do not. That sacred life is sacrificed under the dual

² Rev. Lloyd does not spell out the word, "G*d," because the term is loaded with many misconceptions and preconceptions. That which is the spirit of life and community, the spirit of love and death, the spirit of humanity, cannot be relegated to one three letter word. Rev. Lloyd invites others to reconsider the meanings of this word, and, to contemplate whether it is a noun or verb. Is G*d Love? The reader is invited to expand their vision and understanding . . .

swords of differential economics and racism. Mostly, I am angry that some expect life to be this way. That some find that being caught in the web of oppression, is all that life is.

PAUSE

I was also humbled by these neighbor's sense of community and commitment to G*d. They live out their faith, in their relationships with each other. They take action where they can. Their goals are to keep their community together. To watch after their children, to watch after the ones standing on the street corner, to watch after the lost woman walking down the street - and to invite her in for tea, to watch after others because they feel watched over by G*d.

They feel the presence of G*d, with whom they have a personal relationship. It is a G*d that empowers and protects them.

PAUSE

I'm not sure if my stories are very remarkable or unusual. I only know they are remarkable in my life. There is something about our Unitarian Universalist principles that call me outside of myself, even when I would prefer to stay inside myself.

Though the systems under which I struggled were not as oppressive as those of poverty and racism, I understand what it is like to be caught in a bird cage where the bars are invisible. I have some sense of the value of anger, and how it helps you understand the limits of your patience, so that you can act to change something.

I now realize, that unless one has the capacity to recognize anger, one cannot act on it constructively, one cannot change things. Without the recognition of anger, one ends up simply being a cog in the machine that perpetuates the system denying your voice and being.

PAUSE

I have thought about why McDade chose the "dove" for her subject. Why not choose a lion, or a tiger, to be "furious"? Partly, I suspect it is because a dove often stands for peace. Partly, it may be because some believe that a dove was G*d's symbol of reconciliation with the world. But, I think perhaps it is because by using a dove she presents to us a paradox that we must sort out for ourselves.

A dove seems to be such a passive creature, a symbol of peace, incapable of rage. I think she wants to shake up our sense of what it means to be a peaceful people. To

internalize the possibility that even a normally peaceful and passive creature will need to draw on their anger to defend themselves, their loved ones, and humanity, to create change.

Ghandi, King and many others knew that human systems are not changed through passivity alone. Oppressive systems can only be changed by the concerted action and reflection of many, many people.

To do so, is not without risk to ourselves! When people come together to fight systems that are dehumanizing, we can anticipate change for ourselves as well. To do this work we must also be willing to come into authentic relationships with others who live in different life circumstances.

We must be willing to listen to the painful truths experienced in each other's lives, homes, and souls. We must stay in the relationship even when someone's Truth is uncomfortable.

And, in so doing, we risk what we are for what we may yet become. Oppressive systems will only change when we come together to say, ***"Fear is not as important as living our faith."***

Our Unitarian Universalist values call us to identify and untangle ourselves from systems and habits that claim to protect us, but that really entrap us. They call us to forge ahead in our world, to encounter the difficult to understand, hard to accept Truths that will undoubtedly change our identity. To call us to find the Truth that lives between us and upon which we can act together.

They call us to work together to change our corner of the world, so that no one . . . no one needs to sacrifice themselves to the whole.

They call us to be impatient with that which is unreasonable, that which cages our souls. They call us to live out our faith together.

"fear is not as important . . . as living [our] faith."

May it be so.

Post Sermon Blessing for Leadership

Eight years ago, I offered this blessing on the eve of the inauguration. I said then, *"we are standing on the threshold of history, between the past and the future."* What I said then is, *"Our new President is only a man. He is only a man, and institutionalized*

oppression and racism still exists. We, whose skin color is white are the ones who hold the invisible bars of the birdcage in place, and it will only be when we, as a people, act to remove those bars, that racism and oppression will, once and for all, cease to exist."
And, then I offered these words of blessing, written by John O'Donahue, for the President-Elect.

Though perhaps infused with different meaning now, I think these words still apply.

A BLESSING FOR ONE WHO HOLDS POWER³

by John O'Donahue

May the gift of leadership awaken in you as a vocation, [keeping] you mindful of the providence that calls you to serve.

As high over the mountains the eagle spreads its wings, may your perspective be larger than the view from the foothills.

When the way is flat and dull in times of gray endurance, may your imagination continue to evoke [the] horizon.

When thirst burns in times of drought, may you be blessed to find the wells.

May you have the wisdom to read time clearly and know when the seeds of change will flourish.

In your heart may there be a sanctuary for the stillness where clarity is born.

May your work be infused with passion and creativity and have the wisdom to balance compassion and challenge.

May your soul find the graciousness to rise above the fester of small mediocrities.

May your power never become a shell wherein your heart would silently atrophy.
May you welcome your own vulnerability as the ground where healing and truth join.

May integrity of soul be your first ideal, the source that will guide and bless your work.

Amen.

***Closing Hymn #121** *We'll Build a Land*, verses 1-2

³ John O'Donohue, from *To Bless This Space Between Us*

***Closing Words**

"We extinguish this flame, but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. We extinguish this flame, but not the power and meaning of our covenant, calling us to our highest ideals and ways of being with one another. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again. So may it be.

Extinguishing the Chalice

Closing Music *Song Without Words Op.85, No.5, F. Mendelssohn*



A Moment of Silence

Announcements

Neil Schultes
Board of Trustees

* Please stand as you are able and comfortable.
Latecomers may be seated.



WELCOME TO OUR VISITORS!

We are so glad you joined us today. Coffee hour immediately follows this service downstairs. An opportunity for sharing personal reflections about today's worship topic will be held after coffee hour between 12:00 and 12:30pm. Please join us in the sanctuary to share your thoughts.

