

Shoreline Unitarian Universalist Society  
Online Worship Service  
October 18, 2020

**The Fury of the Dove and The 8<sup>th</sup> Principle**

*(The 8<sup>th</sup> in a series of worship services about our Unitarian Universalist Principles.)*

Rev. Jeanne Lloyd

Since last spring, we've been on a journey. It has been a challenging journey as we've grappled with a pandemic, a troubling election process, and the "coming home" of racial issues that for many of us have been invisible for centuries. It's a lot to take on, especially all at one time.

And so, during this same time, we have deliberately been on a journey to deepen our faith and our grounding in it.

We do so in order to find the strength to carry on, in order to remember what hope feels like, in order to remind ourselves that words and character do matter, that aspirations do count, that actions can make a difference; and that all this, our words, character, aspirations and actions are the foundation for a meaningful life, especially now.

PAUSE

At the intersection of all these issues are justice issues, and in particular racial justice. Next week you will hear from our Racial Justice Team about the work they've begun in order to help this congregation reflect and act on the issue of racism.

Today I want to share a broader, more abstract perspective on racism in America. Let me start with a story.

PAUSE

When I was in seminary I learned about a concept that no doubt, many of you already understand well. It is about the outcome of institutionalized racism. It is the concept of: "*internalized oppression.*" I remember the author describing it as a cage within which a bird lives. But, it is a special kind of cage. Its bars are invisible, and the bird doesn't know the bars are there. So, no matter how hard the bird tries to fly out – its 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: an outcome of institutionalized oppression.

PAUSE

At the same time, I also heard a song called, “The Fury of the Dove” by Carolyn McDade. The lyrics that caught my attention 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)  
(Emphasis added)*

As a seminarian and religious professional, I had problems with this song. I couldn’t quite grasp its meaning. I couldn’t reconcile in my own mind 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

It was also while I was in seminary that I worked with a community minister in Chicago. Together we visited the neighbors and children of one of our few inner city congregations. The people living in the neighborhood were nearly all African-American. Mostly I met with the women in the neighborhood. 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’d watched grow up were selling drugs on “her corner”, she went out and set the record straight with them. She was deliberate in her action.

PAUSE

She and I 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 God, of Jesus, allowed her to step outside the cage that was trying to imprison her.

PAUSE

While there, I also met one too many African Americans suffering from multiple strokes, and I was conscious of the disparity between our lives. High blood pressure was just a concept, until it happened to me. Of course 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. That is an invisible privilege.

In Chicago, 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, some simply don't consider the possibility of treatment, because there is no perception of choice.

PAUSE

I was struck with how young they were. Maybe in their fifties - not much older than me at the time. And, too 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 from a stroke. 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 other dates . . .

PAUSE

All those issues of health and poverty were not new then, they were just not visible to those outside the invisible birdcage. But . . . in this year . . . in the middle of everything else, and perhaps because of everything else, we are beginning to see through the invisibility of racism, it is emerging out of the fog of privilege and we are at last beginning to see it with eyes wide open. We, as a people are beginning to understand the breadth of oppression that exists in this country, and for those of us who are white, we are beginning to understand our complicity. At

last, the issue of racism is touching our souls, and changing our perspective. It is an awakening long overdue.

PAUSE

After Chicago, and after these past several months, I am again learning to appreciate the power of that song called *The Fury of the Dove*. Those of us who used to think that we do not live within a system of institutional racism, but who are now beginning to see, with horror, that we do, *should* feel anger. We *should* be angry that systems exist that shorten the lives of whole classes of people, simply because of their skin color, poverty, or heritage. We *should* be angry when our health care system systematically offers better treatment to some and not others. We *should* be angry when sacred life is sacrificed under the dual swords of differential economics and racism. In particular, we should be *angry* that there are those among us who are so frightened by what they might lose, that they are fighting as hard as they can to preserve the systemic oppression in which we all live. Indeed, we *should* be angry that for too many, some are caught in the cage of that oppression, and expect nothing better, because for them, that is all that life is.

PAUSE

In Unitarian Universalism we are guided by our 7 principles. Now, another principle is being recommended for our adoption:

The eighth principle:

*“That our congregations will covenant to affirm and promote:*

*Journeying toward spiritual wholeness  
by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community  
by [acting to] accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions  
in ourselves and our institutions.”*

Note the word “journeying” . . . this is a path, a long path, one that requires commitment and persistence even in the face of failure.

Note the words “spiritual wholeness” because we cannot be whole, when we allow tradition and the abuse of power to separate us.

Note the words “to build a diverse multicultural community” because in this faith, multiculturalism does not yet exist (even though it has improved a bit), and in this country, too many oppose diversity.

And, note the word accountability, because it is not enough for us to opine on how to fix racism, from a sheltered place of position. The word accountability means we must work as allies with Black and Indigenous and all people of color. It means to step back and let them lead, while working together for justice and freedom.

PAUSE

Last spring, after speaking on George Floyd's death, someone asked me if I supported the riots where damage was happening to personal property. My answer was, I don't recommend the destruction of property, but I understand it.

I understand how after centuries when human beings were stolen from their families and land, and then legally defined as property, and then treated inhumanely, with lives and families destroyed . . . the current destruction of only other's property is the least one might expect.

PAUSE

So, how do we get out of this mess? How do we fix it, even if we are starting to understand it? And, what's faith got to do with it?

Remember my story about Chicago? Remember when that woman who was struggling to keep her community safe, said,

*"fear is not as important to me as living my faith"?*

When she said those words, I was humbled by hers and her neighbors' sense of community and commitment to G\*d<sup>1</sup>. They live out their faith, in their relationships with each other. They take action 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; to watch after others *because* they feel watched over by G\*d. They have a personal relationship with G\*d. They have faith that G\*d empowers and protects them.

PAUSE

So, too, there is a Truth, a Spirit of Life, a faith in each other embedded in our Unitarian Universalist principles that call us beyond of our "normal lives", even when sometimes we would prefer to keep doing things just the way we always have.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 . . .

But, we are learning. We are learning that it is that way of life that perpetuates systemic oppression.

PAUSE

With these last few months, we begin to glimpse what it is like to be caught in a bird cage where the bars are invisible. Perhaps we are caught in our own birdcage, too? We begin to understand the value of anger, and how it helps **you** know the limits of your patience and helps **us** know that the time comes when **we** must begin to act to change the way things are. Unless we have the capacity to recognize and value our anger, we cannot act on it constructively, we cannot change things. Without the recognition of anger, we end up simply being a cog in the machine that perpetuates a system that denies not only others' voices and beings, but ours as well.

PAUSE

Our Unitarian Universalist principles in general and, the 8<sup>th</sup> one, in particular, call us to identify and untangle ourselves from systems and habits that entrap all of us. They call us to forge ahead in our world, to pursue the difficult-to-understand, hard-to-accept Truths that will undoubtedly change our identity. They call us to find the Truth that lives between us and upon which we must act together so that no one . . . no one needs to live their whole lives in a cage.

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 because . . .

***“fear of the unknown is not as important as living our faith.”***

May it be so.