

# **WHAT DOES BELOVED COMMUNITY MEAN FOR US?**

**Unitarian Universalist Church of Yakima**

**Sunday, February 14, 2021**

## **Description for Newsletter and Update:**

### **What Does Beloved Community Mean for Us?**

Beloved Community calls for commitment, conflict resolution and hard work, particularly in encouraging, accepting and sharing with those who are “troublesome” for us. The challenge can be reframed in realizing that to others any one of us may be one of the “difficult” members. We are required to believe not only that others are worth our effort but also that we will be worth the effort in the eyes of others! As imperfect people engaged in imperfect efforts to build Beloved Community, we are in a battle not just against the division between us, but also the doubt within us. Our struggle may be not just believing we can create Beloved Community, but also believing we can count on it. Susan Kaphammer shares this message drawn from resources in the Soul Matters Series.

### **Spiritual Snack**, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The person who loves their dream of community  
will destroy community,  
but the person who loves those around them  
will create community.

## **Zoom Service**

**Tech Host: Bill Jacob**

**Celebrant and Message: Susan Kaphammer**

### **Tech Intro and Reminders - Bill**

*Watch and allow entry to zoom session. Introduce self.*

Please remember that although we are each in our own homes, this is a Sunday service. If you need to move around, you can turn off your video to avoid distracting others. You will need to unmute yourself if you wish to speak during joys and concerns or during discussion. At all other times, check that you are muted.

## **Welcome: - Susan K**

Welcome to our Zoom experience of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Yakima. Whether you come with a heavy heart or a joy-filled spirit today, we are glad you are here.

Good Morning. I am Susan Kaphammer, celebrant and speaker for today's service.

Today, I'm sure you realize, is Valentine's Day, I wish you all a happy and love-filled day. Our service today will deal with love, but not in an expected Valentine's Day way. The love which is the focus of this service is not merely romantic love (what the Greeks called eros); it is not merely a sort of reciprocal love between friends (which was known as philia). It is more akin to agape, the Greek word that means a creative, redemptive good will for the community of all people.

## **Call to Worship – Susan K.**

In this service we will seek meaning for us in the term, "Beloved Community," and we will find several circles of community to which we belong and which we create. I call us to worship this morning with words that speak to this, our congregation of members and friends, as a caring, accepting, supporting beloved community for us.

## **One Love**

*Rev. Hope Johnson*

We are one,  
A diverse group  
Of proudly kindred spirits  
Here, not by coincidence--  
But because we choose to journey--together  
We are active and proactive  
We care, deeply  
We live our love, as best we can.

We ARE one  
Working, Eating, Laughing,  
Playing, Singing, Storytelling, Sharing and Rejoicing.  
Getting to know each other.  
Taking risks  
Opening up.  
Questioning, Seeking, Searching...  
Trying to understand...  
Struggling...  
    Making Mistakes  
Paying Attention...  
    Living our Answers  
Learning to love our neighbors  
Learning to love ourselves.  
Apologizing and forgiving with humility  
Being forgiven, through Grace.  
Creating the Beloved Community--Together  
We are ONE.

**Chalice Lighting – Susan K. speaks; Bill shares screen for words.**

We set aside this time together by joining Unitarian Universalists around the world in the ritual of lighting our chalice with our familiar words:

We light this chalice in deep respect  
for the mystery and holiness of life;  
with honor and gratitude for all who have gone before,  
with love and compassion for all who dwell among us,  
and with hope and faith for the generations to come.

**Opening Song: Susan K. introduce; Bill play**

We build and maintain this congregation of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Yakima as a mutually beloved community. But that is not the extent of our calling. As Mark Morrison-Reed reminds us:

The central task of the religious community is to unveil the bonds that bind each to all. There is a connectedness, a relationship discovered amid the particulars of our own lives and the lives of others

Our opening song, “We Belong” by Namoli Brennet, reminds us all who are part of this central and sacred task.

***We Belong*** by Namoli Brennet (4:00)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yAKXi47qPmg&list=PLvXOKgOQVYP4X1rIBAPoYr49-EhKcvtMz&index=19>

### **Sharing Joys & Sorrows – Susan K.**

As we journey through life, each of us reaches high and low points. By sharing the peaks and valleys of our journeys and other significant events in our lives, our sorrows are lightened and our joys enhanced.

Let us know if you have a joy or sorrow you wish to share and unmute yourself to speak briefly.

Let us acknowledge and honor the joys and sorrows that were spoken, and those that are unspoken but kept in the confines of our hearts and minds.

### **Sharing our Generosity and Commitment – Susan K.**

Imagine now, that baskets are passed to collect our contributions of time, energy and intentions, represented by our financial giving. Remember to continue, as you are able, giving to the church in the spirit of love and sharing. Rod’s House is one local agency we support through “Share the Plate” -- in particular, we are collecting funds to support the making of lunches and dinners for Rod’s House clients. If you wish to contribute in addition to your pledge giving, forward the donation to the office and indicate that it is a “plate” contribution or a donation to support the Rod’s House meal program.

### **BEGIN RECORDING SERVICE – Bill**

## **Message – Susan K.**

First a note about the presenting of my comments: I have drawn from the Soul Matters worship resources and from an article in the Winter 2019 issue of *UU World*, both publications of the Unitarian Universalist Association. In order to allow smoother flow of the ideas in this spoken message I will not identify each source as I excerpt, paraphrase or quote from the source. Instead, I list them here, and in my written version I will key the material to its source by number: (1) “The Call of Our Faith” by Nancy Palmer Jones and Karin Lin, from *UU World*, Winter 2019; (2) Post: “Beloved Community: The Now and Not Yet” by Rev. Christine Robinson, May 22, 2013; (3) “All of Us Need All of Us to Make It,” by Megan Foley and Theresa I. Soto; (4) “Something on My Face: Learning How to Be in Community” by Rev. Karen G. Johnston; (5) “Beloved Community is...” by Alex Kapitan and Rev Mykal Slack; and (6) “Blessed Are We” by Andrea Hawkins-Kamper.

Our opening song celebrates that we all belong. Do we all belong? This is a very large “WE,” that includes you and me and our neighbors and those we pass on the street, and those we see in the news, those we have met, those we have not yet met and those we may never personally meet; those who are like us in appearance, education, interests, income, talents... and those who are not like us in appearance, education, interests, income, talents, political views...those who are the “other.”

## **Song – Susan K. introduce; Bill play**

What lines are drawn between our lives and the lives of the “other” especially the “other” delineated by race.

Listen now to the song, “Across the Lines” by Tracy Chapman.

**Tracy Chapman - Across The Lines (3:46)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEHXyFmdVel>

## **Message continued – Susan K**

From the song: “Across the lines / Who would dare to go / Under the bridge / Over the tracks / That separates whites from blacks Choose sides...”

Our Unitarian Universalist principles call us to erase such lines: “We affirm and promote... The inherent worth and dignity of every person; Justice, equity and compassion in human relations; Acceptance of one another...; the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all...”

Yet, Unitarian Universalists have struggled and continue to struggle with not just “affirming and promoting” such ideals, but with living these ideals as individuals, in our congregations, and in our Unitarian Universalist Association.

Historically, their faith, “led some Unitarians and Universalists to participate in the nineteenth century abolitionist and twentieth century civil rights movements... On the other hand, most local and national Unitarian and Universalist institutions did not follow suit.” (1)

Unitarian Universalist members and congregational representatives meet annually in a General Assembly – “GA” for short – to affirm and further the business and the practices and principals of Unitarian Universalism. In this arena, the struggles within our denomination with race relations are exposed. Over 50 years ago at the 1969 GA, competing approaches to supporting Black empowerment were represented by the UUA Black Affairs Council, and the UUA Black and White Action, an integrated organization. UUA’s decision to split financial support between the two groups developed into a rift that prompted “hundreds of African American delegates, other people of color, and many white allies to leave the building,” and many left the denomination. These events came to be called “the Empowerment Controversy.” (1)

As I consider this history and try to understand the dynamics – plus, importantly, its meaning to me, to us, today – I take a clue from the term “Empowerment Controversy.” Empowerment, in the meaning to give or share power, is in

conflict with the empowerment meaning of coming into power, assuming inherent power. I'll return to this subtle but powerful difference later in today's message.

"With [our] plurality of theologies and multiple sources of wisdom and spiritual practice, Unitarian Universalists tend to be more interested in how beliefs make us act than in what the beliefs are. Ours is a practical theology. If we take this faith seriously, it must have a real and discernable impact on how we live." (1)

Dr. Mtangulizi Sanyika, a UU minister in 1969, more currently a Presbyterian elder, was one who left that General Assembly. He returned in 2017 with this message:

Unitarian Universalism at its best is a transformative agent for justice and liberation and peace in the world. At its best! But it can't do that if it marginalizes humanity. If it leaves anybody out at the table, you cannot fulfill that mission. You cannot fulfill that mission by being partial to some and not fair with all. Justice and equity must define who you are and what you do with who you claim to be. [– Who you are and what you do with who you claim to be. –] Because it's not just *saying* what you believe that matters, it's what you *do* with it. (1)

The tension, the space between saying what we believe, and doing what our beliefs call us to do is the space for our spiritual calling. This is where we find not "either / or" – the dividing of people into good or bad, sinner or blessed, worthy or worthless – instead we find "both / and". "All humans have this streaky nature, a mix of beauty and brokenness." (1)

Our difficult calling is "to look through the masks and the fog that cloud our ability to see the world as it is, in order to be more present and to serve the world." This calling is for "...those who have traditionally held the center – the dominant white culture – [to] turn and rediscover the faith at its edges. ...through the recognition of pain and disillusionment, of voices too long silenced, and of the fierce hope these people embody, all Unitarian Universalists just might find, once again, reason to dance, in body or in spirit." (1)

For our sakes, for our spiritual health and wholeness and the for fulfillment of our principles, an Eighth Principle is proposed to join the existing seven:

*“We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote: journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions.”*

The term, “Beloved Community,” held significant meaning for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It originated, however, with an earlier American Philosopher named Josiah Royce. “For Royce, Beloved Community was a goal. It was the best of everyone, working for the best of all humanity... It starts with a community loyally working toward that end, ever expanding... It is something that we can make real in our own lives, in our current world, even as we accept that the work will not be complete in our lifetime.” (2)

Royce challenged, “Every proposed reform, every moral deed, is to be tested by whether and to what extent it contributes to the realization of the Beloved Community...When one cannot find ‘beloved community,’ she needs to take steps to create it and if there is not evidence of the existence of such a community then the rule to live by is To Act As To Hasten Its Coming.” (2)

In Martin Luther King, Jr.’s vision of Beloved Community, “people all over the world [are] sharing the earth’s riches, eliminating poverty, hunger, and homelessness; eradicating racism, discrimination, and all forms of oppression; and solving disputes through peaceful reconciliation and nonviolent conflict resolution.” (1)

“Beloved Community is not held within our church walls. As soon as you begin to think like that, you have moved into the exact opposite of beloved community, because...you have necessarily created *otherness*.” (2)

Such sense of otherness withers when we truly understand that our differences are our challenge, but our differences are also our need, and, if we allow, our joy.

*All of us need all of us to make it.*

This is why Unitarian Universalists support the Black Lives Matter movement. Please take a moment to center the struggle for Black lives in your thoughts.

Say it with me, loud or soft: "All of us need all of us to make it."

In a world where some of us are targeted for struggle and brutality, where others of us benefit and flourish, we pray:

*"All of us need all of us to make it."*

In a world where powerful people of ill will and indifference make us fearful for our safety and our futures, we pray:

*"All of us need all of us to make it."*

In the excruciating space that lives between seeing and naming, and hearing and changing, we pray:

*"All of us need all of us to make it." (3)*

I want to bring this message back to us, here, now, with the idea of otherness in opposition to the concept of Beloved Community as expressed in another song.

### **Song – Susan K. introduce; Bill play**

The barrier of privilege can block us from a full embrace of all the "we" with whom we could belong. Listen now to "Children of Privilege" by Joe Purdy.

**Joe Purdy - "Children of Privilege" (4:28)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZblqsYbjcQ4>

### **Message continued – Susan K**

Privilege is a quality that we have not chosen; a quality of the happenstance of our lives that we cannot shed and we should not deny. Only by acknowledging the existence of our privilege, of our, dare I say, supremacy, can we set these aside to be with others in Beloved Community.

From a position of privilege let alone supremacy, we may deign to help those less fortunate, may help feed or clothe; may donate time and money, and these are not bad things. But they are not true to the spirit of Beloved Community without the understanding that the “helper” and the “helpee” are together in community and are equally worthy.

Recall the differences in understanding empowerment -- giving one their power versus coming into one’s own power. And correlate this with helping those “less fortunate” as doing for or doing to, rather than sharing with fellow members of an expansive beloved community.

The lyrics of “Children of Privilege” asks us to “not pretend / That you understand / All the troubles that others have been through / Don’t point your fingers and so freely judge...” Instead understand that “every human being will have their own story as / Important as the other who walks right beside...”

I remember many years ago visiting an organization of affluent young professional women as they talked about organizing a dinner of chili and cornbread for a shelter. To encourage participation, the leader said, “Come on, we can make it fun. We’ll deliver the food then go have a dessert at Gasparetti’s.” I have in the past relayed this story expressing an attitude of, can you believe those clueless ladies! Now, with some grasp of spiritual humility, I need to ask myself, how am I in community not just with the people in the shelter, but also with the ladies in the organization?

Joe Purdy’s humble, simple response to his acknowledgement of his privilege is, “I am just trying to have more compassion... I’m just trying to be better / Changing my own life / And look towards the future / And find understanding...”

I know that I need help to see when and how my own privilege may be playing out in ways that block my membership in Beloved Community.

“...Sometimes, when we are building community together, it’s important to listen to what other people have to say, even if we might not want to hear it

at first. But we do that because it's part of our covenant – our promise – to each other.

There are times when we need to hear news or feedback that causes us discomfort, but in hearing it and responding to it constructively, with curiosity and humility, we can more easily go about building Beloved Community. This is especially true when it comes to feedback about how cultural privilege -- along race, gender/gender identity, dis/ability, sexual orientation, class -- impacts others.” (4)

This “discomfort” was painfully real to me in my work in planning the last couple of Women’s Marches on Yakima. I felt offended, indignant, then after some time, thankfully reflective when my unexamined privilege and, I confess, arrogance in my own experiences and intellect were challenged by younger women who were upfront about their own experiences and priorities. The conversations were long past when I got over my “Harrumph.” I am still, more than one and two years later, processing my own feelings and what they tell me about how I consider myself separate from “others.”

In fact, beloved Community is not easy; Beloved Community is not for spiritual sissies.

“Beloved Community is when we say “we,” and we mean everyone.

Beloved Community is not homogenous. It can't be. When commonality is presumed, when we make assumptions about who's present and whether people are “like us,” or not, we're not practicing Beloved Community because Beloved Community doesn't make those assumptions. It doesn't presume commonality or a sense of being homogeneous.

Another thing... Beloved Community is not like-minded. Because we're not called to be like-minded in spiritual community. We're called to be like-hearted.

And, finally, Beloved Community is not devoid of conflict. And this one is also really hard. Beloved Community is not easy. There's nothing easy about practicing Beloved Community. When we avoid conflict in order to "get along," we're not practicing Beloved Community, because Beloved Community exists when we trust each other, we have the relationships, the strong enough relationships to actually disagree with each other, to be in conflict, even to risk hurting each other, and we can stay in relationship through those disagreements, and conflict, and potential hurt. That's practicing Beloved Community." (5)

The "Big We" of Beloved Community almost defies enumeration.

"...

Blessed are we: the heretics, the outcasts, the walkers of our own way.  
Blessed are we: the border-crossers, the refugees, the immigrants, the poor, the wanderers who are not lost.

Blessed are we: the transgressors, the trespassers, the passers-by, the cause-takers, the defiant, the compliant.

Blessed are we: the hand-extenders, the sign-makers, the protestors, the protectors.

Blessed are we: the trans women, the trans men, the non-binary, the cisgender, the multigender, the no gender.

Blessed are we: the friend, the stranger, the lonely, the hidden, the visible, the authentic.

Blessed are we who rise in solidarity, blessed are we who cannot, blessed are we who do not.

Blessed are we for this is our Beloved Community, and this is who we are."  
(6)

Or, at least, this is who we hope we are becoming. Because we as individuals, and our congregation and our Unitarian Universalist denomination are still "under construction." In changing "longstanding habits of culture...mistakes and misgivings, conflict and disappointment certainly abound. But miracles of joy and transformation are abundant, too. The journey itself; the companions who join in; the sometimes fleeting, often sacred sense of completeness that emerge in the

midst of the journey; the satisfaction that we are living our faith – these elements make the hard work meaningful and worthwhile.” (1)

### **Closing Song – Susan K. introduce; Bill play**

Listen now to our closing song by Lea Morris that remind us that we are “Building a New Way.”

### ***Building a New Way* by Lea Morris (1:56)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gmkrdqz90iY&feature=youtu.be>

### **Closing Words – Susan K**

I close with “Community Means Strength” by Starhawk, asking that you hear this with the concept of “we” to include all who we seek, hope for, welcome and accept as part of our Beloved Community, all members of whom deserve the strength, healing, friendship of our circle.

We are all longing to go home to some place  
we have never been—a place half-remembered and half-envisioned  
we can only catch glimpses of from time to time.

Community.

Somewhere, there are people to whom we can speak with passion  
without having the words catch in our throats.

Somewhere a circle of hands  
will open to receive us, eyes will light up as we enter,  
voices will celebrate with us whenever we come into our own power.

Community means strength  
that joins our strength to do the work that needs to be done.

Arms to hold us when we falter.

A circle of healing.

A circle of friends.

Someplace where we can be free.

**Extinguishing the Flame – Susan K. speaks; Bill shares screen**

We extinguish this flame  
but not the light of truth,  
the warmth of community,  
or the fire of commitment.  
These we carry in our hearts  
until we are together again.