

HOLDING HISTORY

Unitarian Universalist Church of Yakima

Sunday, November 14, 2021

Description for Unifire and Thursday Update:

This service focuses on remembering our pasts as individuals, as Unitarian Universalists in Yakima, as Americans and world citizens. This service will include the opening of a “time capsule” set aside by youth of our congregation upon moving into our former home on 2nd Street. But a true “remembering” is more than celebrating and telling tales. Let’s prepare to remember, to grieve, to confess, to feel, to forgive. And perhaps to prepare to move forward. Susan Kaphammer shares thoughts and readings prompted by the *Soul Matters* series about the pain and rewards of history.

Spiritual Snack

Memory invites us to maintain our grip on the past, but it also calls us to pay attention to who we are in the present. Memory’s question is not just “Do you remember?” but “How do you want to be remembered?” -- *Rev. Scott Taylor*

PRELUDE

Call to Community: Susan

Good morning! Today’s service is about “Holding History.” I invite you into this time for seeking and sharing in community with “Let us be a people of not-forgetting...” by *Karen G Johnston*:

As we gather this morning,
let us be a people of not-forgetting.

Let us practice
holding collective memories
that might otherwise slip
into that enormous void
that sucks at and corrodes
any future we hold dear.

Let us practice honoring truth-telling
up from the past that must come fully into the now,
lest we falter and fail, lest the whole remain in pieces.

Let not our need for comfort or simplicity,
for easy forgiveness or false pardon
smother the heartbreak that still needs healing.

Let us practice resilience with reckoning.
Let us marry memory and promise.
Let us dance in the tension we find there.
Let us rest in the integrity we cultivate there.
Let us be partners with the possibility that emerges there.

It is good we gather.

Chalice Lighting

In fellowship with Unitarian Universalists around the world, we mark this time together in spiritual community with the ritual of lighting our chalice with familiar words printed in the Order of Service:

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.

Welcome

Welcome to this Sunday Service 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. I am Susan Kaphammer, and I am privileged to serve as celebrant and speaker this morning.

Spirit Hymn

Our opening song is #67, *We Sing Now Together*. The lyrics, printed in your Order of Service, speak to holding history. They express thanksgiving for the past ages -- the martyrs and heroes, the prophets, teachers and

dreamers, the creators and workers – who help and heal and hold us; who have expanded our lives to this “community now in the making.”

While singing with gusto is not recommended, feel free to hum or sing to yourself as Sunny plays.

Sharing Joys & Sorrows

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. If you have not already done so, you may light a candle. If you wish to share a joy or sorrow, please stand if able and 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

While Sunny shares with us her ministry of music, baskets will be passed to collect our contributions of time, energy and intentions, represented by our financial giving. We are invited to give to the church in the spirit of love and sharing. Also, we continue to “Share the Plate” of non-pledge contributions with local agencies helping to make our local community more just and fair.

Message – Susan

A note about my comments: My message is built around and contains many quotes, excerpts and paraphrases. In order to allow smoother flow of the ideas, sources will not always be identified in context if doing so interrupts the flow of ideas. When this message is printed or posted online, all phrases that are the words of others will be indented or enclosed in quotation marks and the author identified.

The description for this service indicated that we would be opening a UUCY Time Capsule that was discovered in our move from the 2nd Street building. It was prepared by many hands and closed in the year 2000 at the

dedication of that sanctuary as our church home after our purchase of the building. This past week, Linda King and I opened this lovely “ark” and found documents, pictures, directories, children’s projects, messages – a rich collection representing UUCY. It was apparent that opening, celebrating and sharing this Capsule deserves its own unhurried time. We will plan for another time a service or a special event dedicated to the Time Capsule and what it represents in the history of UUCY.

Meditation

The topic of “Holding History” is not just about looking back and remembering. It is about understanding our past to inform our present and to better craft our future. This connection between the three eras of time is articulated by Tania Marques in her “Call from the Past, Present, and Future.” I invite you to sit comfortably, listen carefully, hear the ideas, see the images.... We will conclude with a few moments of silence.

Call from the Past

From the heights of the Andes, the jungle, and the desert, from the depth of the sea, from a time that was, from a time that stretches beyond our memory, we are called.

Our histories stretch back to the first people, the first steps, the collision of worlds, to abrupt beginnings, all wanderers of this land. We have inherited the unfinished labor of our ancestors, of those that came before us. We are called to continue the work...

Call from the Present

The voices of our people call us now; the world harbors their joys and their sorrows. We hear the cries of our people demanding justice. In that call we recognize the voices of those who wander in the desert, the border-crossers, the navigators, the justice-seekers, the dreamers, and the hopeful. We weave our story to the story of our ancestors, right here, right now, we are in the midst of responding to the call that comes from all the corners of this land...from the south, the north, the east, and the west. We are called to sustain the work...

Call from the Future

The voices of those who will be, call us; a reminder of who we need to be. In the weaving of our story to the web of life, we must remember that we must not cut the strings, for there are others coming after us. Others with tender hearts and strong wills, with creative determination; those who will live in the house of tomorrow. Their vision escapes us. Yet, we are called to prepare the road, to leave behind possibility, and foundations upon which they'll build a better tomorrow. We are called to create new opportunities...

(After a few moments of silence, Ring Chime)

Message

"We weave our story to the story of our ancestors... We are called to sustain the work... We are called to create new opportunities..."

We are called, as Unitarian Universalists to apply our seven principles into our views of our past, our work in the present, and our plans for the future. There are lessons here for our nation and world, for Unitarian Universalism in our larger denomination and here in Yakima, and for our personal lives.

In each of these arenas, the importance of history includes but goes beyond the value expressed in George Santayana's familiar words, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

The Akan African word, Sankofa,

translates as 'return and collect it.' Sankofa reminds us of the need to search through the groves of the past and to bring back its lessons, principles and stories as seeds for the future....

Philosopher Georg Hegel, famously purported that Africa has no history and that 'it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit.'...

Embracing Sankofa is important not only because it allows us to debunk claims that Africa has no history, but importantly it may provide vision and help prevent us from repeating the blunders of the past. It also provides people with a sense of identity and saves us

from the laborious and pointless task of reinventing the wheel.
There's much the past and heritage can teach us; in as much as we strive to focus on the imminent needs of the present and of dreams of the future we should never forget that our history is a pivotal escort.
[*"Sankofa" and the Call to Return to the Past in Order to Move Fully into the Future* by Zahra Baitie, [Huffpost Blog](#).]

A "pivotal escort," perhaps, but that historical escort can be a slippery character, particularly for our world and nation. The oft repeated, "History is written by the victors," is further refined by Subham Jain's explanation, "First, history isn't set in stone. When new facts emerge, it gets revisited... You might win history for a certain time period, but that doesn't imply no one will question your actions in the future... History is written by everyone. The more accurate quote would be, 'History is temporarily twisted by people who're going to profit from it in the short term.'"

Sometimes, history, even accurately recalled, is a weapon. 40 years prior to Columbus "discovering" America – it's own twist on history:

European church leaders and monarchs had collaborated in a stunning series of proclamations, which became known as the Doctrine of Discovery. In 1452, a papal bull declared that the king of Portugal had the right to conquer any Muslim and pagan peoples and enslave them. A few years later, a second letter declared that all the Christian kings of Europe had the right to take the lands and possessions of any non-Christian people, and keep them in perpetuity. If the pagan inhabitants could be converted to the Christian faith they might be spared, but otherwise they could be enslaved or killed. The Doctrine of Discovery was also later claimed by England in 1496, authorizing English explorers to seize any lands not already discovered by other Christian nations.

The Doctrine of Discovery became the legal basis for the "discoveries" of Columbus and others, and for the resulting attempts to conquer and colonize the western hemisphere, unleashing genocide on its peoples. It was also the legal basis for the slave

trade. Its influence did not remain in that distant past — it's still a source of oppression to this day. It became the basis of U.S. Indian Law, beginning in 1823, when Chief Justice John Marshall ruled that "Christian people" who had "discovered" the lands of "heathens" had assumed the right of "dominion," and thus had "diminished" the Indians' rights to complete sovereignty as independent nations. He claimed Indians had merely a right of occupancy in their lands. This decision has never been overturned, and is still cited on a regular basis in Federal court.

Responding to the requests of Indigenous peoples, several religious denominations have passed resolutions to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery — including Unitarian Universalists, in 2012. ["A False Story of Discovery" by Myke Johnson]

1452 – to 2012, and still influencing today. History can hurt...deeply.

History is often at the least - altered, at worst – weaponized in service of the status quo that serves those in power and disenfranchises those in the margins whether due to race, gender, age, economic status or any of the many ways that people become "other."

How do we remember, mis-remember, or fail to remember our American past? We can certainly be happily unaware, as is the narrator of the poem, "The Density of History," by R. Erica Doyle:

I'm an AMERICAN
I like
to be happy...
so succulently
part of that
happy American culture
where we watched
Andy Griffith
till we felt nothing
but candy canes

Maybe not so happily unaware, as feeling “nothing but candy canes” is surely a nagging emptiness.

An article titled, “Germany Faced It’s Horrible Past. Can We Do the Same,” stated, “Historians often look to ‘collective memory’ — how groups of people typically recall past events — to help decipher a nation’s identity and soul. These memories can change over time, and there is evidence that people remember things that never happened. But collective forgetting can be just as revealing.”

The President of West Germany, marking the 40th anniversary of the end of World War II and all the evil perpetuated then remarked, “Anyone who closes his eyes to the past is blind to the present. Whoever refuses to remember the inhumanity is prone to new risk of infection.” [Richard von Weizsacher]

Perhaps you share my concern that in accord with this warning, our country is at high risk for and perhaps well into a new infection of inhumanity. There are so many political and social prompts to forget, and to close our eyes to what has happened... to what is happening.

Amnesia gets in the way of atonement in America. But amnesia is actually too benign a word because it sounds as though people just forgot about the horrors of slavery... in the way one forgets where they placed their car keys or their passport.

We’ve been through more than a willful forgetting; we’ve had instead an assiduous effort to rewrite history. We’ve built monuments to traitors and raised large sums of money to place the names of generals who fought against their own country all over highways and civic buildings. We’ve allowed turncoats to become heroes.... On a personal level, this false narrative about America is another act of cruelty, even a kind of larceny. [Quote by Michele L. Norris]

“We’ve allowed turncoats to become heroes...” Many are willing to recognize a young man illegally carrying an AK-15 as righteous and heroic;

and our American justice system may officially excuse – sanction? – his killing of two people and wounding of a third.

I somewhat ashamedly admit that there are times when I feel tired of sorting out the false from the true and determining good action, tired of keeping myself open to the signs of oppression, the evidence of racism, classism, sexism, agism – how many isms are there?! Sometimes I am tired of caring about ... everyone, it seems: those who are persecuted and the persecutors who may have their own hard histories; the open-minded and the close-minded who may deserve to be heard; the marchers for Black Lives, and the “thin Blue Line,” and perhaps even the neo-Nazies and the Proud Boys who are someones sons and brothers and sisters, who are human beings among us and somehow a part of this country we now live in.

Tired or not, I understand that this isn’t a time to crawl away from the calling of our faith to, “Affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person; justice, equity and compassion in human relations... acceptance of one another... a free and responsible search for truth and meaning...”

A “responsible search for truth..” is more important than ever in what is this current “Post-Truth Era.”

Jonathan Swift, observed in the early 18th century that, “Falsehood flies, and truth comes limping after it, so that when men come to be undeceived, it is too late.” But a more recent, challenging charge comes from George Orwell: “In times of universal deceit, telling the truth will be a revolutionary act.”

Discerning the truth in order to tell it, calls for a clear-headed examination of our history. A minister offers a prayer about our country and ourselves as UUs:

We acknowledge and confess
that some of our grandest of ideals were put into place
by those unable to perceive their own utter hypocrisies.

Equality was not, in fact, self-evident to them
and we continue to bear the weight of what they could not see.

We acknowledge and confess today
our grief, our anger, our confusion, our mistrust, our anxiety,
our shame, our hopes, our devotion, our aspirations, our faith,
our . . . our dreams.
Our dreams.

....
Restrain us from futile return to a false peace
that would only undergird a stifling status quo.
Renew us, renew us, renew us for the long journey ahead,
a risky, unnerving adventure out into an unknown,
toward a dream seen now but faintly:
that one day, one day our nation will rise up
and live out the true meaning of our creed:
that all, that All are created equal.

...
May we walk this challenging way with compassion.
May we no longer ignore or avoid the ways
in which we ourselves are impediments.
May we find the soul force that would sustain us
and the soul force that would propel us forward
toward that new day when justice will, at long last,
roll down like waters
and righteousness slake our thirst
with living waters from a mighty stream.
[Rev. James C. Leach]

This prayer acknowledges that we ourselves, as Unitarian Universalist, have been impediments to the justice and righteousness we seek. A painful event in UU history occurred at the General Assembly in 1993. To celebrate Thomas Jefferson, who attended Unitarian churches, the organizers of this national gathering scheduled a Ball and encouraged attendees to dress in period clothes. Surely, they were picturing lovely

colonial era gowns and dapper suits such as worn in Jefferson's time... by white people.

Rebekah Savage, a life-long UU and black woman, asked:

“What would I wear? Would I be a house slave, favored for my lighter skin and ‘good hair’?... Would I have had shoes on my work worn feet?... Would I be allowed to come through the front entrance or directed to the back, to enter through the kitchen with the other slaves and servants?... Would I be permitted to look a white person in the eye or even speak their name....

dear beloved UU's... Tell me: what I would have worn to attend this ball... to represent who I would have been in Thomas Jefferson's time?”

General Assembly “delegates challenged the appropriateness of this event,” but the decision was made that “the Thomas Jefferson Ball would proceed as planned.”

Rebekah Savage did not leave our denomination as many members of color did, but she wrote of this “deeply wounding moment in our shared UU history.” She understood that, “This ball was conceived by well-meaning people...who were able to identify welcome only through the eyes of white privilege.” This event, and other instances within our larger denomination, and perhaps within our local UUCY, indicate that “the healing is not done... We are called to fulfill the promises once made in the name of faith and proclaiming Beloved Community. We are called to match our words with our actions... We are looking at ourselves in the mirror and seeking a new way.” [“The Promise and the Practice: ‘The Healing Is Not Done’ Reflection” by Rebekah Savage]

Another example of often unwitting but nevertheless painful failures to understand history as UUs involved suggested re-wording of one of our hymns, *There Is More Love Somewhere*. As recalled by a religious

professional who had just led a morning worship service at the national General Assembly, a woman approached:

“You know what? I always sing that song: *There is more love right here.... There is more love right here.... I’m gonna keep on ‘cause I found it... There is more love right here....* I don’t understand why it is that we don’t sing that here at GA. We’ve already found a community of love.”

I thanked her [for trusting me with the question], and I explained that for those of us who live with the privilege of knowing love, it can be difficult to understand the perspective of one who lives without such a privilege.

I explained that it can be difficult to understand the lived experience of those who have trouble finding the evidence of love in their immediate vicinity; in their church; in their neighborhood; in their city; in their nation; even in their planet....

I offered that if we, as a spiritual community of Unitarian Universalists, populated by well-meaning people, are to mean anything to the lives and the deaths of people of color, we must begin by learning — not squelching — the forms of expression that arise from these living perspectives...

When we inhabit the music, the forms of expression of people who lived their lives along the margins of notice, we must notice that we have entered holy ground, a sacred space of learning; a sacred space of relationship.

This episode, and the recounting of the Thomas Jefferson Ball, were offered in the worship resources for Holding History under the heading, “On Holding on to the Hard Parts of UU History.”

What might be the “hard parts” of UUCY history? And how, around these issues, can we enter, “a sacred space of learning...of relationship?”

As a congregation, we find ourselves in an “in-between time.” We have left our church home of more than two decades and are located in this space that I don’t believe any of us consider our “forever” home. We have had professional ministry in the past, we do not now, we don’t know about the future. Plus, we are still living in a pandemic, between an old normal and a not-fully defined “new” normal.

If nothing else, this service should remind us that the past informs our present, and our future is created from the history we bring with us and what we choose to do now.

We need to honestly consider who we have been and what we have done, both proudly and regretfully... The good memories, the just getting along, and the times we fell short in promoting our principles, in practicing our covenant of right relations; times we individually or collectively diminished our community.

Forgiveness is called for, but not forgetting. We need to remember that we may learn who we are, how we got here and where we will be going.

The Rev. Victoria Safford reminds us, “Memory is fickle and human beings are complicated. How do you hold the wholeness of a person, and your own wholeness and injury and tenderness, anger and resilience, through the mystery of memory? How do we hold each other, see each other, and hold the complicated stories of our complicated living?”

We can trust that the answers will come as we take the time and intention to honestly know ourselves as a congregation.

We can draw inspiration from the words of Andrew C. Kennedy:

We come to love a church,
the traditions, the history,
and especially the people associated with it.
And through these people,
young and old,
known and unknown,
we reach out --

Both backward into history
and forward into the future --
To link together the generations
in this imperfect, but blessed community
of memory and hope.

I don't want to leave this topic of "Holding History" without considering the blessings and challenges of personal history.

Joan Didion wryly observes, "We are well advised to keep on nodding terms with the people we used to be, whether we find them attractive company or not. Otherwise, they turn up unannounced and surprise us, come hammering on the mind's door at 4 a.m. of a bad night and demand to know who deserted them." [from "On Keeping a Notebook" in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*]

"By some estimates, regret is the most common negative emotion in our everyday lives." [Podcast, "Looking Back: Reflecting on the Past to Understand the Present," *Hidden Brain*]

Regret is the feeling that a wrong choice was made. That somehow a better path could have been had, only if I had done something different or better.

But, consider that, "Memory is never a precise duplicate of the original... it is a continuing act of creation," [quote by Rosalind Cartwright]. Past painful, regretful memories may be, not forgotten, but re-created by "reframing," or "re-remembering" with forgiveness and understanding. Grant yourself the grace you would grant a good friend who is fretting about what has been done.

And cherish the memories that nourish you. William Stafford, in his poem, "Remembering" recounts a day of air and breath, climbing hills, following a gully, looking out through the grass to see snow in the mountains. His poem concludes:

Now I carry those days in a tiny box
wherever I go, I open the lid like this

and let the light glimpse and then glance away.
There is a sigh like my breath when I do this.
Some days I do this again and again.

Each of our personal histories will, most likely, include remembering those we've lost. Anne Lamott speaks meaningfully to this:

You will lose someone you can't live without, and your heart will be badly broken, and the bad news is that you never completely get over the loss of your beloved. But this is also the good news. They live forever in your broken heart that doesn't seal back up. And you come through. It's like having a broken leg that never heals perfectly – that still hurts when the weather gets cold, but you learn to dance with the limp.

For our nation and world, for our Unitarian Universalism and our Yakima congregation, and in our personal lives – we are called to hold history in service of the present and in preparation for the future. From the poem, "Here We Re-member Ourselves":

Give up the fight
For some other moment
Some other life
Than here, and now
Give up the longing
for some other world;
The wishing
for other choices to make
other songs to sing
other bodies, other ages,
other countries, other stakes.
Purge the past; forgive the future -
for each come too soon.
Surrender only to this life,
this day, this hour,
not because it does not constantly break your heart

but because it also beckons with beauty
startles with delight
if only we keep waking up.
This is the gift
we have been given...
these "body-clothes,"
this heartbreak, this pulse
this breath,
this light,
these friends,
this hope.
Here we re-member ourselves
All a part of it all - Giving thanks, and centering joy...

Spirit Hymn

Our closing song is *No Longer Forward nor Behind*, #9 in our hymnal.
The lyrics, in our Order of Service, note that we can take the good we find
among the hopes and fears of looking back and looking forward, and open
all the "windows of our hearts" to the day.

Feel free to sing to yourself or hum along as Sunny plays for us.

Closing Words

Our closing words are by Rev. Peter Raible:

We build on foundations we did not lay.
We warm ourselves by fires we did not light.
We sit in the shade of trees we did not plant.
We drink from wells we did not dig.
We profit from persons we did not know.
We are ever bound in community.
May it always be so.

This is as it should be.
Together we are more than any one person could be.

Together we can build across the generations.
Together we can renew our hope and faith in the life that is yet to unfold.
Together can heed the call to a ministry of care and justice.

We are ever bound in community.
May it always be so.

Extinguishing the Flame

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.