**All Souls Sunday**

**November 4, 2018**

*If you wish to share a personal joy or sorrow with the congregation, please write it at the joys and sorrows table and place it in the basket there. These will be posted on the joys and sorrows bulletin board in the foyer, so that people at both services may be aware of important events in our lives. You can also privately send a joy or concern to the Pastoral Care Team by emailing* [*care@a2u2.org*](mailto:care@a2u2.org)*.*

**Thought for Contemplation**: “We honor our dishonorable ancestors by acting honorably for them.” Kenneth Collier

INGATHERING CHIMES

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHALICE LIGHTING

Chalice of light

Brighten our days

Chalice of warmth

Open our hearts

Chalice of memory

Renew our hope

And guide us in love this day. -Anita Farber-Robertson

CALL TO WORSHIP Responsively *The Larger Circle* #646

HYMN  *Bright Morning Stars are Rising* #357

***Honoring and Remembering Our Beloved Departed***

This is All Souls Sunday, a day when we remember and honor those we have lost. It is particularly meaningful to me because of my deep Universalist faith. While there are those who believe that there are people who are lost beyond redemption, whether it is a belief of going to hell, or being eternally damned and cut off from healing wholeness. as a Universalist, I chose to believe and affirm that no one is irrevocably lost. Reconciliation and return are always an option.

And so it is that I invite us to open our hearts and minds to the embrace of all souls, holding them with care in this place of love.

Some of us have lost loved ones within the past year. If you have lost someone this past year, I invite you to come forward, light a candle and tell us their name and if you wish, name your relationship to them.

We have created an altar of remembrance here. If you have brought tokens of remembrance of those you have lost, you are invited to bring them up and place them on the altar. If you did not bring one, but have someone whose memory you would like lift up, please take a paper from a basket in the back, write the name of the person on it, and leave it on our common altar.

READING Introducing SILENT MEDITATION and PRAYER -Mohsin Hamid

Now though...Saeed prayed even more, several times a day, and he prayed fundamentally as a gesture of love for what had gone and would go and could be loved in no other way. When he prayed he touched his parents, who could not otherwise be touched, and he touched a feeling that we are all children who lose parents, all of us, every man and woman and boy and girl, and we too will all be lost by those who come after us and love us, and this loss united humanity, unites every human being, the temporary nature of our being-ness, and our shared sorrow, and the heartache we carry and yet too often refuse to acknowledge in one another, and out of this Saeed felt it might be possible, in the face of death, to believe in humanity’s potential for building a better world, and so he prayed as a lament, as a consolation, and as a hope…[[1]](#footnote-1)

SILENT MEDITATION and PRAYER

**Hymn** (seated) For All the Saints # 103

(Children are invited to go to their program.)

MUSIC FOR REFLECTION

JOYS AND SORROWS

MEDITATION AND PRAYER

READING: *from Resources for Living* by Lynn Unger reader 11:00 am Jennifer Caven

Our ancestors are the people gone before us-blood relations or family of mind and spirit- who guide and instruct and inspire us. They are however, also the people who limit us with memories of their fears and their expectations, whose well-worn paths we may feel we need to follow, whether or not that’s a journey we want to take.

We are surrounded by a “great cloud of witnesses” who can call us on and give us strength- or sit in unending judgment, speaking through voices inside our head…

Relationships also don’t go away after people die. My paternal grandfather came to this country in the early part of the 20th century, looking for a place where it was safe to be Jewish. He longed to be a scholar, but took the realistic option of being a tailor….My three siblings and I have all learned some form of doctorate. My grandfather died before I was born, but I have no doubt that his life speaks in me, nudging my direction.

Lynn Unger, “RESources for Living,” *Quest* Vol. LXXIII, No. 10, November, 2018

OFFERING

READING: *I was born…* by lucille Clifton, African American poet

I was born with twelve fingers

like my mother and my daughter

each of us

born wearing strange black gloves

extra baby fingers hanging over the sides of our cribs and

dipping into the milk.

somebody was afraid we would learn to cast spells

and our wonders were cut off

but they didn’t understand

the powerful memory of ghosts. Now

we take what we want

with invisible fingers

and we connect

my dead mother my live daughter and me

through our terrible shadowy hands.

lucille Clifton In her collection, two headed-woman

MUSICAL INTERLUDE (9am)

ANTHEM

SERMON *And If They Weren’t Who We Wanted them to Be*

The Rev Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson

Meg Riley, Senior Minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Larger Fellowship, our church without walls, tells the story of her search for her family history. She wanted to know more about her mid-western roots. She’d heard stories and seen pictures of the bucolic farm and farmhouse her great great grandparents had built, and so she made plans to go out and visit the small town in Missouri where they had settled. Then, one day, she discovered amongst some things from her now deceased father, a book that her great aunt had written about the family’s history. How exciting it was to have found it- a treasure. Eagerly, she cleared a space for her to focus, opened the book and read the opening line.

*The Allen, Rives and Watkins families left a Virginia country environment where they were relieved of the drudgeries of workaday life by the labor of slaves.[[2]](#footnote-2)*

Meg had some processing to do. She further learned that the family had intentionally waited until it was decided that Missouri would be a slave state until they made their commitment to move there, so that they could be assured of having their slaves with them so that they continued to be *relieved of the drudgeries of workaday life.*

This is the Rev. Meg Riley, who before she was Senior Minister of CLF, was the head of the UUA’s Washington Office which was responsible for tracking and advocating for issues of social justice that were at play in the congress and the country, and helping Unitarian Universalists have the information and tools they needed to respond effectively. Her family, she’d discovered, had historically been the people against whom she was regularly advocating. That was hard to face. But she didn’t run. She faced it. She traveled to the community of her ancestors. She met the people who now live in the house her great great grandparents had built, who it turned out, share more with her ancestors’ attitudes, than they do with her own. She did the hard work of taking it in and trying to incorporate it into a more realistic and honest story of her people.

She reflects on the challenge:

I am honoring my ancestors’ lives in a very different way. I am listening to their stories, coming to care about and even love them, and attempting also to be accountable for at least some of the pain and damage they inflicted…. I am taking them with me as I try to inhabit spaces of consciousness, accountability and justice. I hope my own descendants will do the same for me.[[3]](#footnote-3)

What a gift of ministry Meg has done for me, and maybe for you. Surely, we all have ancestors somewhere in our background, whose lives and stories are not sources of pride, and may even be sources of profound embarrassment. It might be something of public disgrace in the ethic of our day, like stories of our history with slavery. Or it might be the kind of family secret that gets leaked in other ways- incest, shot gun weddings, abuse, criminal behavior, suicide or even jail time. One way that these family embarrassments have been commonly handled is to hush them up. To pretend that all of our story is a source of pride. To deny that Dad was a drinker or Grandma abused her children. But when we do that, we lose access to some of the more important parts of who and why we are the way we are.

It is to that insistent reality that Lucille Clifton refers in her poem:

I was born with twelve fingers

like my mother and my daughter

each of us

born wearing strange black gloves

extra baby fingers hanging over the sides of our cribs and

dipping into the milk.

somebody was afraid we would learn to cast spells

and our wonders were cut off

but they didn’t understand

the powerful memory of ghosts.

And so, we take this time each year to embrace those who have gone before, the ancestors on whose shoulders we stand, for good or ill, the ghosts of our long gone, and not so long gone past, because we are inextricably connected.

…Now (Clifton continues)

we take what we want

with invisible fingers

and we connect

my dead mother my live daughter and me

through our terrible shadowy hands.

Truly they are not terrible. They were only unacceptable to the new parents of each generation, who not only removed them, but tried to erase them from memory and reality. But there they are, reappearing every generation or so, silently connecting what belonged together.

This work of learning how to honestly embrace, honor and love our story with the complicated people who lived it, is not just challenge on a family level. It is true of our nation. How insistently we have tried to put behind us the attempt to exterminate the native people whose land we stole.? How doggedly we ignore the ways in which our nation’s enslavement of African people built our economy and created a cognitive dissonance with the American values we proclaim. The inequitable relationship between people of color in the United States and white people is a long-standing foundation on which we stand, and with which we still wrestle. We have resisted the truth of how connected today’s inequities are to what had come before.

We struggle with these inconvenient truths in our own Unitarian Universalist history. Thomas Jefferson, a founder of our nation, and proclaimer of our faith, owned slaves and used that power to create a family of children which he both owned and denied.

That doesn’t make the high ideals he proclaimed any less magnificent or aspirational. It does mean that he, like so many, created a world and a life of cognitive dissonance which he hid from himself, and which we allowed to be hidden from us for longer than was conscionable. We do not need to throw Jefferson away, or forswear him as an ancestor. What we need to do is take responsibility for looking at what he did and what he said and ask ourselves, what of that thought was in such error, that it allowed the unconscionable to continue to be practiced? What in that do we need to correct in ourselves?

It isn’t easy to know how to put those things together. The ancestors who did us harm as well as good. The ancestors who bequeathed us pain as well as life and love of liberty.

I found Ken Collier’s wisdom helpful…

“We honor our dishonorable ancestors by acting honorably for them.”

I think he is right. It is what we can do. We can be the change we wish had been theirs. We can act honorably, as best we know how, and as best we understand it.

We can continue to defend the vulnerable, love mercy, standup for what is right. And when we get it wrong, and we pass the torch for justice to those who come after, we can hope that they will honor us by acting with greater honor themselves, keeping the flame of justice burning.

And so, it goes, each generation handing off to the next what we hope will be a little better world. May it be so. Amen, and blessed be.

CLOSING HYMN *Light One Candle*  #221

BENEDICTION (Congregation holds hands

EXTINGUISH CHALICE

CLOSING MUSIC (please remain seated for the closing music)

1. Mohsin Hamid, *Exit West*, New York: Riverhead Books, 2017, p. 202-203 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Marie Watkins, *Tearin’ through the Wilderness*, 1956 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Meg Riley, Quest, Vol. LXXIII, NO. 10, November, 2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)