

Order of Worship, April 14, 2019
Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church

Thought for Contemplation: *"All journeys have secret destinations of which the traveler is unaware."* Martin Buber

INGATHERING CHIMES

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHALICE LIGHTING reader: Schuyler Stevenson, Lighter : Ethan Scott

This chalice honors the dreams of our ancestors.

Who had visions of peace with justice.

This chalice honors the courage of our ancestors,

Who journeyed through ways unknown on our behalf.

This chalice calls us to faithfulness,

that we too might dream of peace and justice

and have the courage to make them come true.

Anita Farber-Robertson

CALL TO WORSHIP

We have been called here together,

Out of love or need, longing, or abundance,

Called here by that which we name in different ways,

Yet know intimately in our hearts.

The spirit of life and love and community,

Sacred and central

It is here. In joy and delight it calls

Let us waken to the call

Anita Farber-Robertson

HYMN Wake Now My Senses #298

CHILDREN'S TIME *Bob Moseley*

Song (seated) Go Now in Peace #413

(Children are invited to go now to their program)

MUSIC FOR REFLECTION

JOYS AND SORROWS

MEDITATION AND PRAYER

PERSONAL TESTIMONY Brian Emery 9 a.m.;
Pauli Juneau 11 a.m.

READING by Carol Graywing reader: Carol Hayward 11:00 am

If Christianity is about worshipping Jesus as the only Christ, we have little common ground. If it is about awakening the Christ within each and every person, then it is the same as awakening the Wise One Within which lies at the heart of Wicca...If Judaism is about fealty to the tribal deity of Yahweh, we have little to say to one another. If Judaism is about bending the world toward Justice and Righteousness, we have a great deal to discuss and work to do together. If Humanism is about the Primacy of Reason, and all that is not rational is necessarily irrational and therefore suspect, then we cannot quench our thirst from that dry well. If Humanism is about exploring the farther reaches of human nature, let us not delay the adventure!

Carol Graywing.

ANTHEM

SERMON

An Unsettling Journey

The Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson

It is an old story, and it has been told in many ways, with scholars and seekers plumbing the tale for authentic understanding and meaning. I offer it to you the way Marcus Borg and Dominic Crossan, two brilliant and engaging scholars have told it and opened it up for me. You too may hear something new, something helpful. Come, for the moment, enter the story, enter it as though you have never heard it before. And take up the journey on which it invites us to embark.

Two processions entered Jerusalem on a spring day in the year 30. It was the beginning of the week of Passover, the most sacred week of the Jewish year. ...

One was a peasant procession, the other an imperial procession. From the east Jesus rode a donkey down the Mount of Olives, cheered by his followers. Jesus was from the peasant village of Nazareth, his message was about the kingdom of God, and his followers came from the peasant class. They had journeyed to Jerusalem from Galilee, about a hundred miles to the north (a raggle-taggle bunch, I imagine) ...

On the opposite side of the city, from the west, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Idumea, Judea and Samaria, entered

Jerusalem at the head of a column of imperial cavalry and soldiers.

Jesus' procession proclaimed the kingdom of God; Pilate's proclaimed the power of empire. The two processions embody the central conflict of the week that led to Jesus' crucifixion....¹

Imagine the imperial procession's arrival in the city. A visual panoply of imperial power: cavalry on horses, foot soldiers, leather armor, helmets, weapons, banners, golden eagles mounted on poles, sun glinting on metal and gold...

Pilate's procession displayed not only imperial power; but also, Roman imperial theology...the emperor was not simply the ruler of Rome, but the Son of God....²

Borg and Crossan warn us:

We must guard against some possible misunderstandings of the conflict that led to Jesus' crucifixion. It was not Jesus against Judaism.... Jesus was a part of Judaism...The conflict was also not about priests and sacrifice...Rather, his protest was against a

¹ Marcus J Borg & Dominic Crossan, *The Last Week, What the Gospels really teach about Jesus's final days in Jerusalem*. Harper One, 2007, p.2.

² Op cit p. 3

domination system legitimated in the name of God, a domination system radically different from what the already present and coming kingdom of God, the dream of God would be like.³

Today, the Sunday before Easter, marks the anniversary of those two processions, 2000 years ago. And yet, it seems we are still living in that story, still experiencing those struggles between the rule of values and the rule of empire, in our public life, for sure, and most likely in other dimensions of our lives as well, the conflict between values and accumulated power, between oppression and the rights of the oppressed. It can play out in any place where people come together with an inequitable distribution of resources or power. In your town, your neighborhood, your family, your church.

Sometimes we live with it, an uneasy truce with the disparity. Sometimes we are the beneficiaries. We may be the ones with more access to influence, or more access to resources. We may be the deciders in some situations, feeling deserving and entitled to that role. Or we may be on the margins, feeling discounted, without influence, subject to the wisdom or whim of the deciders.

³ Op cit p. 30

On that fateful day, when Jesus set out, and when Pontius Pilate set out, they were each convinced of the rightness of their position. And they took up the journey through the city and the unfolding week, aware there was a lot at stake, and neither fully knowing how it would eventually come out. I imagine it was a little scary on both sides. I can understand why Jesus' friends tried to talk him out of going. The conflict between truth and power has never been pretty. Any conflict that pits deeply held values against the common culture or the status quo is dangerous and gut wrenching, because it is a fight for meaning, and for integrity. To turn away and submit feels like more than a loss of power. It can feel like the selling out of one's soul.

That was how it was on a grand scale, that story. But it repeats itself in our little stories, our personal stories, and our shared stories as a community. How do we embark on a journey that is about integrity, truth and meaning, when we don't know how it will turn out? When we think we see a better way, while there are forces that call to us, entreating that it would be easier to stay the same, to keep things how they are; the voices in our frightened head, telling us we can manage the way things are. They are reasonable questions to pose. Why risk the conflict? Who will be hurt? Who will gain? Is it worth it? We face

them here and wherever we turn, for always there is the call to speak truth to power, always the opportunity to redistribute access and influence and always a temptation to resist and protect the status quo.

In roughly the same week as our first story, only about 1500 years earlier, three thousand, five hundred years ago, Moses and his people fled slavery, crossed the Red Sea, and wandered in freedom, in the desert. We now call the telling of the story, Passover, but when they were tying up their personal things into small bundles for the escape, they probably called it scary. They were embarking on a journey with an outcome unknown. It did get them to where they were going, that circuitous journey, eventually, after 40 years of traveling, but it was rough going, this freedom. So much unknown and needing to be figured out. How to share responsibilities and delegate decision making? How to be accountable? All in an environment that was changing. Many of them complained, getting nostalgic for the good old days – the good old days when they were enslaved, and knew where their next meal was coming from; nostalgic for the days when they were enslaved and had a roof over their heads, and expectations they understood. Oh yes, they embraced the value of freedom, but were not sure they were ready to embrace its required sibling- responsibility.

Oh, right. We know that dilemma. We probably have struggled with it mightily in our personal lives, and we struggle with it here, in our Unitarian Universalist free church tradition. Each individual covets their freedom, but also longs for a community that shares and cooperates around a cohesive core. Freedom and responsibility. Each congregation wants to choose its own priorities and set its own goals; but struggles with how to come together to generate the resources necessary to follow through. Freedom and responsibility. We tenaciously hold these two values that are often in tension together, in one sentence in our UU Principles: that we affirm and promote the free and responsible search for truth and meaning. Free and responsible.

Sometimes even we might yearn for those proverbial good old days, when there was one right way to do things, and one authorized decider, and we didn't have to work so hard to figure these things out for ourselves. That is always the lure in democracy. The price of relinquishing responsibility is the loss of freedom to choose and to be as one feels called to be.

Two holidays that conjoin, each, it turns out, enacting the same essential human story, the challenging journey from oppression to freedom, from authoritarian power, to shared responsibility. And as

history has told and retold the story, the emphasis shifts, depending upon who is the teller, the one with the power or the one on the margins. Often, we find we are both- Moses and Pharaoh, Jesus and Pilate.

And that can make it difficult to make what we know is the right choice- the choice to walk with Jesus and Moses into the unknown land of freedom with justice, because that land is an unsettling place for all of us, all of us, who have never been there. But we are going.

Amen and Blessed be.

OFFERING

CLOSING HYMN *Building a New Way* #1017

BENEDICTION

CLOSING MUSIC (please remain seated for the closing music)