

**Allen Ave. Unitarian Universalist Church  
August 11, 2019**

**Thought for Contemplation:** *Tell me with whom you walk, and I'll tell you who you are.*

Richard Blanco

INGATHERING CHIMES

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS Troy Moon

CHALICE LIGHTING #454

In our time of grief, we light a flame of sharing, the flame of ongoing life. In this time when we search for understanding and serenity in the face of loss, we light this sign of our quest for truth, meaning, and community. Rev. Christine Robinson

CALL TO WORSHIP In the Midst of a World by Rev. Rebecca Parker

In the midst of a world  
marked by tragedy and beauty  
there must be those  
who bear witness  
against unnecessary destruction  
and who, with faith,  
rise and lead  
in freedom,  
with grace and power.  
There must be those who  
speak honestly  
and do not avoid seeing  
what must be seen  
of sorrow and outrage,  
or tenderness,  
and wonder.  
There must be those whose  
grief troubles the water  
while their voices sing

and speak

refreshed worlds.

There must be those

whose exuberance

rises with lovely energy

that articulates

earth's joys.

There must be those who

are restless for

respectful and loving

companionship among human beings,

whose presence invites people

to be themselves without fear.

There must be those

who gather with the congregation

of remembrance and compassion

draw water from

old wells,

and walk the simple path

of love for neighbor.

And,

There must be communities of people

who seek to do justice

love kindness and walk humbly with God,

who call on the strength of

soul-force

to heal,

transform,

and bless life.

There must be  
religious witness.

HYMN *For the Beauty of the Earth* #21

JOYS AND SORROWS

MEDITATION AND PRAYER

READING *Blessing for the Brokenhearted* by Jan Richardson

Let us agree  
for now  
that we will not say  
the breaking  
makes us stronger  
or that it is better  
to have this pain  
than to have done  
without this love.  
Let us promise  
we will not  
tell ourselves  
time will heal  
the wound,  
when everyday  
our waking  
opens it anew.

Perhaps for now  
it can be enough  
to simply marvel  
at the mystery  
of how a heart

so broken  
can go on beating,

as if it were made  
for precisely this-

as if it knows  
the only cure for love  
is more of it.

as if it sees  
the heart's sole remedy  
for breaking  
is to love still,

as if it trusts  
that its own  
persistent pulse  
is the rhythm  
of a blessing  
we cannot  
begin to fathom  
but will save us  
nonetheless.

HYMN *We Are a Gentle Angry People* #170

READING *Remembering Boston Strong* by Richard Banco

Years from now, you'll wish all you remember was  
how spring arrived just as you expected, the icicles  
gone as magically as they had appeared, the snow  
seeped back into the earth, just as you had trusted

it would. The thawed Charles and a river of runners  
ribboning that morning through the city that was  
a city long before our nation was a nation, while  
the ivy scribbled, climbed, turning green the red  
bricks your great-great-great grandfathers laid-  
memories mortar in every city wall and chimney.

But, years from now, you'll still remember this:  
the unexpected smoke that wasn't a spring fog,  
pink-purple blossoms mingled with the sparkle  
of shattered glass strewn over Boylston Street  
bursting red, red maples' tiny leaves opening  
like newborn hands to cup April's rain, the lives  
of two girls with names as pretty as May flowers,  
who would never bloom, the irony of the race  
ending with the mangled feet and legs of those  
wheeled away by those who did not run away,  
and the boy, the son-everyone's son-his life  
outlived by the budding tulips of window boxes  
dressing-up the city suddenly frozen in spring.

Daylight each day a few minutes longer, but  
baseball diamonds dulled and muted, the sky  
each day a tint bluer, but stadiums abandoned,  
every seat an empty nest. The wind each day  
a hint warmer, but park benches cold and quiet,  
swings like pendulums-stopped. Each night  
crickets louder in your ears, but winter set still  
in your eyes caught in the glow of television sets  
casting shadows of the news across living rooms

and hollow city streets locked-down in silence.

And years from now, what you'll mostly want to remember is not the shoot-out that ended the silent waiting, nor the bombers names nor the blasts, but the tender roses you laid across the finish line, the thankful praise you gave for the lives that saved lives in their arms, the brave promises of those who vowed to walk, dance and run again, the stadiums and ball parks again filled with anthems sung by you, like a thousand songbirds at once, a chorus into a second spring you had not expected: dandelions still pushing through pavement cracks, spiders still spinning, forsythia still bursting yellow, elms still growing taller, and ivy still climbing the enduring walls of the city, still a city. But a whole lot stronger.

OFFERING

REFLECTION *On Religious Witness*

The Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson

Richard Blanco tells the truth when he says what it is we wish were our memories of times of tragedy, and what our memories really are, and might be. Our memories might be of the horror, or of the recovery. They might be of the grief for what was lost, or the acknowledgement that out of the loss, we retrieved something of value.

Probably our memories are all those things, our memories of grief and horror, and our knowing that we picked up and life went on. Unsettling, but true. One tragedy stirs up memories of so many others. If you are older like me, you remember the assassination of our President, John F. Kennedy and of Martin Luther King, Jr. If you are younger, sad to say, there is no shortage of horrific events in your lifetime that the most recent ones of this past week can stir up for you and call to mind. It's why Richard Blanco's poem about *Boston Strong* is not old news, but current, sadly current.

And we never make sense of it, do we? I don't. It never makes sense. It is never something to which I want to be reconciled. I am horrified to recognize in myself a growing numbness- tragedy fatigue? - what an awful thought! That one could grow immune to such events. And yet it seems we do. The current phrase "the new normal" speaks to exactly that-the suggestion that indeed we could get used to anything, and in time, believe it normal. Holding children in cages apart from their families. Flagrantly violating international law regarding the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers. The mass incarceration of black and brown men. Our President calling elected members of congress un-American. The valuing of the

right to own an assault rifle or stockpile guns, over the right to live. It is NOT normal.

There must be religious witness. While there are times when faith communities are looked at by some, as relics of a bygone day, it is at times like these we are reminded that it is the faith communities, grounded in centuries, millennia of history and ethics, who are not so quick to embrace the “new normal;” whose sacred scriptures and traditions remember for us the needle of the moral compass that is not so easily swayed by convenience or economics.

Love your neighbor as yourself (Talmud), Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you, love your enemies, do good and lend, expecting nothing in return (Luke 6:27, 35)

These are not silly or whimsical suggestions, but practices that constitute the foundation of a full and meaningful life, and a sound and thriving community. That moral compass has come down to us through a tradition that has had to fight generation after generation, century after century, tyrants who would have us embrace their “new normal.”

The undermining of our social fabric is real. I was listening to NPR and they were sharing the recorded voices of folks who had called in to talk about how this violence has impacted them. One woman's tale struck me, got through the haze of overstimulation. She talked about Woodstock, about living near Woodstock, and about planning to go to the marking of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that extraordinary spontaneous celebration of life by hundreds of thousands of people that erupted there in 1969. Her voice got shaky. "I was planning to go. I was so excited. And now I am too afraid. Too afraid to go to such a large festival gathering. I'm going to stay home, and listen to good music, by myself."

This is a serious tear in our social fabric. I went to that original Woodstock event in 1969. Had no idea that hundreds of thousands of others would show up. And when they did, there was a certain amount of chaos. There were food shortages and shelter shortages, water shortages, port-a-potty shortages. And while I may have worried a bit about some of those things, I never worried about being safe. In the moment of listening to that woman, the stark truth of what has happened to us in the past fifty years hit home. We have lost our way.

In 1859 the Rev. Henry Bellows, Minister of All Souls Church in New York City spoke to the alumni of the Harvard Divinity School. It was in the days when the transcendentalists were dismissive of the role of the church in developing one's faith. He said:

“Would that I could develop here...the doctrine of institutions, the only instruments, except literature and blood, by which the riches of the ages, the experience and wisdom of humanity, are handed down.”<sup>1</sup>

I am as taken now by that wisdom, as I was when I first read it more than 40 years ago.

Institutions, the church, are the only instruments, except literature and blood, by which the riches of the ages, the experience and wisdom of humanity, are handed down.

If we have ever doubted the need for the church, the liberal church, THIS church, to exist, to hold this space and do that work, of handing down our values, the wisdom of our hard-won experience, it is obvious now. The church is the minder of the moral compass. The speaker of truth. The source of wisdom and courage. We are its hands, its feet, and its voice. This is no time

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Whitney Bellows, *Suspense of Faith*, 37

for hesitancy or timidity. Too many have died. Our social fabric is torn and bleeding out.

There must be religious witness.

May we answer its call with faith and fresh courage.

Amen and blessed be.

#### INVITATION TO A RITUAL OF LAMENT AND RECOMMITMENT

Please turn to the insert in your order of service.

You will notice, scattered around the sanctuary are stones, each with a number on it.

If you are sitting with or near a stone with the number of the litany we are saying, please rise if you are able, and while we are reading that number, place the stone on our worship center memorial cairn. Raise your hand if you need assistance.

#### Grieving Gun Violence Prayer By Keith Kron

adapted by Anita Farber-Robertson

#1 Rev. Anita: Today, and forever, we grieve the loss of life. We grieve for the 34 people who died in Gilroy, California, El Paso, Texas and Dayton, Ohio in the week passed.

#2 We grieve for their families, friends, and co-workers.

#3 We grieve for those who were there and feel both lucky and guilty that they survived while others died. We have witnessed another national tragedy.

#4 We grieve for all those directly and indirectly affected by today.

#5 We grieve for those who are reminded of their own losses. The parents and family in Newton, Connecticut, and Columbine, Colorado. The church members of the congregations in Charleston, South Carolina, and Knoxville, Tennessee.

#6 We grieve for all those who know someone who has been lost in mass shooting and feel the rise of emotion that a day like today produces for them.

#7 We grieve for those who have died and those who loved them, (and those) who died when we did not pay attention....

#8 We grieve for police officers and safety officials who are trained in how to respond to mass shootings.

#9 We grieve for workers who must look at and remove the bodies, who try and keep the wounded alive, who must tell family members that someone they loved has died or been hurt.

#10 We grieve for the first responders who will never forget this day.

#11 We grieve for the reporters trying to tell a story while witnessing and listening to horrific details.

#12 We grieve for the parents who must explain today to their children.

#13 We grieve for parents who have wondered if they should have done more when they've seen hatred and anger come from their children.

#14 We grieve for the parents who simply turned away or encouraged the hatred and anger. We grieve for the parents who say they didn't see this coming from their children.

#15 We grieve for schools that do not have the resources to educate and manage children, where they know some children will slip through the cracks.

#16 We grieve for those who believe there are sides and lines to be drawn.

Rev. Anita: There are no sides. We all lost this past week. We move forward only by laying down our own sword of words and being with one another, of seeing each other's humanity, and reminding ourselves that the responsibility to be a human being means remembering we are one human among billions of people on this planet.

#17 We grieve for a planet that forgets that a leading tenet of every major religion in the world is treat others as you would like to be treated.

#18 We grieve for those who will be assumed to be bad people because they are perceived to be like a shooter—whether they be Muslim, live with mental health issues, a responsible gun owner, or similar in some other way.

#19 We grieve for our country where we could rush to believe that only others have responsibility for today. We must come together for the sake of each other.

#20 We grieve for those who will die and those will lose loved ones in the next shooting.

#21 And the next.

#22 And the next.

#23 And the next.

#24 And the next.

#25 Until we decide they must stop.

#26 Until we act.

#27 We grieve for a country and for a planet where this violence is all too common, all too familiar, all too tragic.

#28 We pray that each of us commits to be a little more humane, a little more compassionate, a little more willing to come together to be a part of solution.

#29 We pray that we work together to end hatred and superiority.

#30 We pray that we decide to become better people today.

#31 We pray we never forget.

#32 We pledge to remember.

#33 We pledge to become a better person.

#34 We pledge to be a part of the solution, however many solutions it takes.

Amen, amen, and blessed be.

MOMENT of SILENT REFLECTION

CLOSING HYMN *Spirit of Life* #123

BENEDICTION

CLOSING MUSIC (please remain seated for the closing music)