

**Journey Not of Our Choosing**  
Rev. Ken Read-Brown  
First Parish in Hingham (Old Ship Church)  
Unitarian Universalist  
April 5, 2020  
*(text of live-streamed worship)*

**Opening music** – “Ode to Joy”  
*words by Pete Seeger and Don West*

Build the road of peace before us  
Build it wide and deep and long  
Speed the slow, remind the eager  
Help the weak and guide the strong

None shall push aside another  
None shall let another fall  
Work beside me sisters and brothers  
All for one and one for all

Joy, joy, sister and brothers  
All for one and one for all

**Call to worship and lighting of the flaming chalice**

We have gathered for worship in spirit and with love.  
May we feel during this shared time the spirit of the God beyond all names and of many names, whose highest name is love.

Love – connecting us one to another.  
Love – connecting us to all who suffer and grieve.  
Love – connecting us to all who need a helping hand and open heart.

And may the flame of our chalice - flame of truth, of freedom, of community, of love – symbol of our Unitarian Universalist faith, remind us of all that we share, wherever we may be.

## Poem for all ages

“Where the Sidewalk Ends” by Shel Silverstein

There is a place where the sidewalk ends  
And before the street begins,  
And there the grass grows soft and white,  
And there the sun burns crimson bright,  
And there the moon-bird rests from his flight  
To cool in the peppermint wind.

Let us leave this place where the smoke blows black  
And the dark street winds and bends.  
Past the pits where the asphalt flowers grow  
We shall walk with a walk that is measured and slow,  
And watch where the chalk-white arrows go  
To the place where the sidewalk ends.

Yes we'll walk with a walk that is measured and slow,  
And we'll go where the chalk-white arrows go,  
For the children, they mark, and the children, they know  
The place where the sidewalk ends.

## Meditation and Prayer

May we now pause, slow down, breathe into this moment, breathe into full presence,  
body, mind, spirit...

Allowing whatever feelings or emotions we are experiencing now and in the midst of  
these days... whether exhaustion... loneliness... sadness... worry... anxiety... grief...  
confusion...

May we know that whatever we are feeling is human and understandable.

And in the midst of whatever blend of concerns we have... may we feel held by the love  
we have for one another... and by the love at the heart of the universe...

And from this love at the heart of our lives, our prayers to the God of blessings rise:  
Prayers... for healing for those suffering hardship or illness in the midst of these days,  
Prayers... of abiding gratitude for those on the frontlines of Covid-19: health care  
workers, first responders, pharmacists, grocery workers, journalists keeping us informed... and  
for political leaders who speak the truth and seek to help.

May we pause in silence... knowing we share this time wherever we each are, knowing  
we hold one another in our hearts, wherever we are.

**Readings** – for this time of Palm Sunday and approaching Passover:

**from a Passover Seder Haggadah**

There arose in Egypt a Pharaoh who knew not of the good deeds that Joseph had done for that country. Thus he enslaved the Jews and made their lives harsh through servitude and humiliation.

While the Jews endured harsh slavery in Egypt, God chose Moses to lead them out to freedom. Moses encountered God at the burning bush and then returned to Egypt to lead the people out of Egypt.

**from chapter 11 of the Gospel of Mark:**

When the disciples brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. <sup>8</sup> Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. <sup>9</sup> Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, “Hosanna!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” <sup>10</sup> “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” “Hosanna in the highest heaven!” <sup>11</sup> Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

**Message** – “Journey Not of Our Choosing”

The way I understand the story of Palm Sunday leading into Holy Week is that Jesus (in his aspect of fully human after all, as Christian theology has it) did not know, and his followers certainly did not know how the week was going to go. Even at the Last Supper (quite likely a Passover meal) the disciples themselves were mystified by just about everything – as they so often were...

And after all, it wouldn't make a very good story, not to mention wouldn't be true to life as we know it, if all was actually known ahead of time. That's not how life is.

The Passover story of the Exodus of the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt is best understood in the same way: No one knew how it was going to turn out. Remember – after the Hebrew people did make it out of Egypt... they spent forty years wandering in the wilderness... often complaining! A generation passed away before the entry into the promised land – and there were still struggles to come.

After all, think of your own life. Think back to a time many years ago.

Think of choices you made then.

Think of hopes or dreams or plans you had then...

And now recall how your life actually unfolded in the years since.

Maybe somewhat close to what you imagined. Maybe quite other than you imagined. In any case, probably not exactly as you had imagined however many years ago.

Certainly true for me... knowing, as Robert Frost put it, “how way leads unto way...”

For as the Franciscan priest, contemplative, and activist Richard Rohr wrote this past week, the truth of the matter is that we don't live our lives, life lives us.

Writing of this moment in time he went on:

For many of us, this may be the first time in our lives that we have felt so little control over our own destiny and the destiny of those we love. This lack of control initially feels like a loss, a humiliation, a stepping backward, an undesired vulnerability. However, recognizing our lack of control is a universal starting point for a serious spiritual walk towards wisdom and truth.

What do we think of that?: "...recognizing our lack of control is a universal starting point for a serious spiritual walk towards wisdom and truth." Learning to live life as it actually is.

It's not that we don't control anything at all. Decades ago I did decide to go to seminary. Days ago I planned this service. And a few hours ago I did actually decide what to have for breakfast.

And so forth.

But these are small things relative to the larger stream of life in which I and all of us live.

As I wrote to you earlier this week, we have all been thrown into a journey very much *not* of our choosing, and with no other destination than the hope that the journey will unfold with as little pain and suffering as possible. To put it another way, we are living in a time of uncertainty heightened to an almost unprecedented degree in living memory, having forgotten that uncertainty is actually a quality of life not just in a time such as this, but all the time.

This means that the question of how to live this journey of our lives filled with uncertainty is actually the question of how to live. And we do know how to live: Pay attention as best we can to each moment; be kind; help our neighbor when we can; speak our love... today; and sure, we can plan our days and our lives, but to coin a phrase, we would do well not to fall in love with that plan.

All this said – I do get hope from looking back to other difficult, even dark times in history. Seeing, now in retrospect, that then things got better... we emerged... sometimes having learned something... grown in some way...

This is, after all, the message of Holy Week – from death to resurrection, however we might understand that. It is the lesson of Passover – from slavery and wilderness wanderings to the promise land. It is the lesson of the seasons – from winter to spring.

All of which may suggest that it is true what Wendell Berry once wrote, that...

... when we no longer know what to do, we have come to our real work, and when we no longer know which way to go, we have begun our real journey.

What *is* our real journey now, in this trackless wilderness into which we've been thrust, our journey when the sidewalk ends? My hope: *Not* returning to our culture's striving for ever more consumption, ever more exotic experiences, always having to be the best... rather a

journey towards more equality, more kindness, more love... toward really understanding that we're all in it together.

Seem unlikely? Maybe. But who knows? Who really knows?

Wendell Berry continues:

“The mind that is not baffled is not employed. The impeded stream is the one that sings.”

Boy, how about that last line: “The impeded stream is the one that sings.”

Our stream of business as usual is certainly impeded now... on the whole planet. Yet there *is* singing, lots of actual singing as musicians share their healing creativity for the whole planet to hear and enjoy, to be inspired, lifted, healed.

And there is also the “singing” of innumerable numbers of people helping one another... including simply through the courageous and challenging act of staying home to slow the spread of the virus, to save lives.

Do we know where or how this journey will end? Where life is taking all of us?

Of course not. So natural to wonder these days where we are going and when will we get there... but the question we can answer is in what spirit will we live, these days and always? And millions upon millions of us are answering this question with kindness and love. Guideposts for this mysterious journey we have always been on.

As the wise 7-year-old granddaughter of one of our members said this week, “Don’t worry about the future or you’ll miss the present.”

### **Song – “Woyaya: We are Going”**

(Teddy Ose, Sol ASmarfia, Loughy Laisisi Amao, Mac Tontoh, W. Richardson, R.M. Bailey, R. Badau)

We are going, heaven knows where we are going, we’ll know we’re there.  
We will get there, heaven knows how we will get there, we know we will.  
It will be hard we know, and the road will be muddy and rough  
But we’ll get there, heaven knows how we will get there, we know we will.

### **Closing words and benediction**

Why it was wonderful; Why, all at once there were leaves,  
Leaves at the end of a dry stick, small, alive  
Leaves out of wood. It was wonderful,  
You can’t imagine. They came by the wood path  
And the earth loosened, the earth relaxed, there were flowers  
Out of the earth! Think of it! And oak trees  
Oozing new green at the tips of them and flowers  
Squeezed out of clay, soft flowers, limp  
Stalks flowering. Well, it was like a dream,  
It happened so quickly, all of a sudden  
It happened.

-Archibald MacLeish

Be well. Be safe. Take care of one another.

May it always be so. Blessed be. Amen.