

## **Legacies of Love**

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First Parish in Hingham (Old Ship Church)

Unitarian Universalist

May 10, 2020

*(text from live-streamed worship)*

### **Opening Song – There’s a River Flowin’ in My Soul (Rose Sanders)**

There’s a river flowin’ in my soul/heart/mind (2X)

And it’s telling me that I’m somebody.

There’s a river flowin’ in my soul/heart/mind.

### **Call to Worship**

Grateful for legacies of love passed through the generations we gather on this Mother’s Day... May our time together offer comfort, peace, inspiration, love... in whatever measure each of us needs... May we all feel during this time embraced by the love which embraces all, God of many names and beyond all names.

### **Reading - “The Womb of Stars” by Joy Atkinson**

The womb of stars embraces us;

remnants of their fiery furnaces pulse through our veins.

We are of the stars, the dust of the explosions cast across space.

We are of the earth:

we breathe and live in the breath of ancient plants and beasts.

Their cells nourish the soil;

we build our communities on their harvest of gifts.

Our fingers trace the curves carved in clay and stone

by forebears unknown to us.

We are a part of the great circle of humanity

gathered around the fire, the hearth, the altar.

We gather anew this day to celebrate our common heritage.

May we recall with gratitude all that has given us birth.

### **Lighting of the Flaming Chalice**

In that spirit may the flame of our chalice - symbol of our Unitarian Universalist faith, remind us of all that we have been given by our faith and all that we share during these days and always.

## **Story – “The Goose and Her Son”**

A Jataka tale from the Buddhist tradition, condensed and adapted from *When the Buddha Was an Elephant* by Mark W. McGinnis

Long ago in India there was a beautiful lake, a favorite stopping place for all sorts of birds, including a flock of geese led by a kind and wise elder goose.

She tried her best to protect her flock from various predators, including the most dangerous of all, hunters who would snag birds with underwater snares and then take the birds to the city to be sold for meat.

The elder goose heard that more and more hunters were coming to this lake. She thought the flock should pass it by, but the other birds loved that lake and asked if they could stop briefly anyway. So she chose what she thought would be the safest place in the lake, a secluded cove.

But one of the hunters had the same idea and had placed snares exactly there. So as the elder goose landed, an underwater snare caught her foot tight as could be. She didn't want the others to know and panic, so she let them feed for awhile, then sent them on their way, saying she would stay just a little while longer before joining them.

But after awhile, when the elder goose did not rejoin the flock, her son became worried and flew back to find her – and discovered she had been snared. She wanted her son to escape being caught himself, but he said “I cannot abandon you mother; I would rather die with you.”

Well the hunter returned and saw that he had, so he thought, caught not one but two geese. Soon, though, he could tell that only one was snared and the other was staying of its own choice. He heard the conversation between the two, the mother imploring her son to escape and the son saying “I cannot, I will stay with you to the end.”

The hunter heard all this, his heart aching with sympathy. Never had he realized that birds could have such feelings. He let the mother goose go, saying, “You and your son must catch up with your flock. May you lead long and happy lives.”

As the hunter walked home, he wondered if he could continue his hunting, taking the lives of such noble creatures.

## **Meditation and Prayer**

May we now pause, slow down, breathe into this moment, become more fully awake to this moment we share in spirit... And from deeper presence in the moment, presence for one another, our hearts' yearnings arise, prayers to the God of our hearts, God of all blessings...

...as every week during these days... for all in need of help and healing for whatever reason, for the ill, for the hungry, for those facing financial hardship... and prayers of gratitude for all the helpers and leaders guiding us through these times...

And on this Mother's Day we extend prayers especially to the mother of Ahmaud Arbery, the man shot and killed in Georgia, “running while black”; may justice be served, even as we mourn with all the mothers who have lost children to gun violence, in solidarity with today's virtual “Mother's Day Walk for Peace” in Boston.

May we pause in silent communion... wherever we are... whoever we are... whatever our circumstances...

**Reading** – “Connections are Made Slowly” (from “The Seven of Pentacles”)  
by Marge Piercy

Connections are made slowly, sometimes they grow underground.  
You cannot tell always by looking what is happening.  
More than half the tree is spread out in the soil under your feet.  
Penetrate quietly as the earthworm that blows no trumpet.  
Fight persistently as the creeper that brings down the tree.  
Spread like the squash plant that overruns the garden.  
Gnaw in the dark and use the sun to make sugar.  
Weave real connections, create real nodes, build real houses.  
Live a life you can endure: Make love that is loving.  
Keep tangling and interweaving and taking more in, a thicket and bramble wilderness to  
the outside but to us interconnected with rabbit runs and burrows and lairs.  
Live as if you liked yourself, and it may happen:  
reach out, keep reaching out, keep bringing in.  
This is how we are going to live for a long time:  
not always, for every gardener knows that after the digging, after the planting,  
after the long season of tending and growth, the harvest comes.

**Message** – “Legacies of Love”

The century or so long tradition of apple blossoms in the silver loving cup you see behind me you is one of the legacies of love in our congregation. The tradition began quite some time ago: Katharine and Wilmon Brewer honoring their mothers (who gave birth to them at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century)... each Mother’s Day with apple blossoms from their trees gracing this loving cup... which they eventually gave to the church. Katharine and Wilmon are themselves now long gone from among us, but this tradition and the love it manifest continue.

A beautiful generational legacy indeed.

Well, in our era of nuclear families and much moving from place to place, generation to generation... many if not most of us may not know much about our own family lineage beyond our parents and grandparents.

As for me, I do have this photograph which shows a large gathering of Yergins in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (Yergin was my mother’s maiden name...) – it includes my grandfather when he was a boy, but I never met him; and it includes my great aunt Helen as a young girl – who I knew only a bit during the last years of her almost century of life.

But I know even less, almost nothing, of all these other great grandparents, great aunts, uncles, cousins many times removed.

Knowing so little – yet this doesn’t mean not influenced: Genetic inheritance, along with family habits and customs passed along... shaping me.

And of course the influences go back not only that far, a mere century and a half or so. As the opening reading reminds us:

We are of the stars, the dust of the explosions cast across space.  
We are of the earth:  
we breathe and live in the breath of ancient plants and beasts.

No mere abstract thoughts are these. We, each of us, have been shaped not only by generations of mother and father, grandmother and grandfather, and on and on... but also by eons of biological and cosmic evolution – squeezed so to speak... out of it all, like plants squeezing themselves out of the soil.

All leading to *this* body/mind/spirit... mine, yours, each of us – each, yes with so much in common as human beings, yet also utterly unique: *this* body, *this* mind, *this* spirit... with these habits, abilities, possibilities... with these gifts... whatever these gifts uniquely are for each of us.

Particular gifts grown in the soil of generations and of eons... gifts to be put to use... now.

For as my colleague in ministry Rev. Rebecca Parker, asks in words familiar to many of you: “What will you do with your gifts?”

Well, here’s a piece of good news, with which I will draw towards a conclusion this morning:

There are about seven billion of us human beings on the planet, each one of these seven billion with her or his unique constellation of gifts – so no one of us has to do everything, only what we are suited to do. For most of us this will be in seemingly small, quite local ways, yet influential (not only now, but rippling through generations to come) in ways beyond what we can ever know – gifts to one another of kindness and care, gifts on behalf of health and well-being, gifts on behalf of justice and peace, gifts on behalf of the trees and flowers, birds and beasts...

As George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) wrote in *Middlemarch*, in lines I’ve frequently shared with you:

...the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life and rest in unvisited tombs.

So... in these times and always, may we live lives as faithfully, if always and of course imperfectly, as we can – faithful to our unique gifts, the inheritance and legacy of generations... faithful to one another, faithful to humanity, faithful to the family of life... God beyond names, mother of us all.

That’s all we can do.  
And it is everything.

So may it always be.

**Song – We Are...** (Ysaye M. Barnwell)

**Closing Words and Benediction**

From my colleague and old friend, Rev. Barbara Pescan:

Because of those who came before, we are;  
in spite of their failings, we believe;  
because of, and in spite of the horizons of their vision,  
we, too, dream.

Let us go remembering to praise,  
to live in the moment,  
to love mightily,  
to bow to the mystery.

Be well. Be safe.

Take care of one another.

May it always be so. Blessed be. Amen.