

Unitarian Church of Montpelier

March 15, 2020

“Wisdom and Uncertainty”

Gathering Song Dona Nobis Pacem (sung by choir)

Welcome Rev. Joan Javier-Duval

Good morning and welcome, all, to this time of worship with the Unitarian Church of Montpelier! We are a Unitarian Universalist congregation, and like many of our UU congregations we have put our “in person” worship gathering on pause out of love and care as we all work to slow down the coronavirus pandemic that is now affecting many corners of the globe.

Whether you are sitting at your kitchen table, lounging on a sofa, or reclining comfortably in your favorite chair, however, and wherever you are joining in for this shared time of worship, you are welcome here.

I’d like to extend a special hello and welcome to anyone who might be joining this community for worship for the first time. Hello, and welcome to you!

And, welcome to all of you members and friends of UCM who are regulars here at 130 Main Street in Montpelier and are joining remotely today.

Feel free to say hello by typing a comment below the video stream if you are viewing directly on Facebook.

After today’s service, members and friends of UCM are welcome to join in a conversation with me and one another using Zoom video and phone conference to talk more about how our church community is responding to this time of pandemic and caring for one another.

The Zoom information will be shared at the end of the worship service, and you can also find it in the online order of service.

There is a link to the order of service in the Facebook event for this morning's service and also in the service description on our church website.

Needless to say, we are joining together in a very different form of worship this morning. What remains the same is that we set aside this sacred time in our day, in our week, to give space for what is worthy of our reverence, of our gratitude, and of our praise.

So, I invite you to settle in now as we begin our worship with the Prelude.

Prelude Eliza Thomas

Opening Words "We Hold Hope Close" Rev. Theresa I. Soto

Opening Hymn We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder
(sung by choir)

Unison Affirmation and Chalice Lighting Adapted from L. Griswold Williams

Let us now light together the chalice, symbol of our Unitarian Universalist faith. As we light the chalice here in our sanctuary, you can be lighting your chalice wherever you are.

As we kindle this flame, let us say together our Unison Affirmation:

Love is the doctrine of this church,
the quest for truth is its sacrament,
and service is its prayer.

To dwell together in peace,
to seek knowledge in freedom,

to serve human need,
To the end that all souls shall grow into harmony with the divine.
Thus do we covenant.

Planting Hope Testimonial

Throughout the month of March, we have been sharing our Offering with Planting Hope. Here to tell us more about this organization are Anja Rand, Jane Miller-Arsenault, and Ruby Bryant.

Sharing Gratitude

Our generosity is a form of Love and Gratitude. Our gifts freely given help us to practice Unitarian Universalism within and beyond our congregation. Thank you to each of you who has shared freely and lovingly of whatever means you have to support the mission and ministry of this congregation and organizations aligned with our values.

We hope to have online giving set up through our website very soon. In the meantime, if you are moved to make a financial gift, you can use regular snail mail and send a check to the Unitarian Church of Montpelier at 130 Main Street, Montpelier, VT 05602.

If you wish to designate your entire offering to our Community Pouch recipient, please write that in the memo.

We are so grateful for your generosity in its many forms.

Choral Offering

Rising

Donia Prince

Richard Riley and UCM Choir

Time of Meditation and Prayer

Rev. Joan Javier-Duval

Sharing of Joys and Concerns

We enter now a time of meditation and prayer.

A time in our worship service to give attention to what is most present on our hearts.

We share now joys and concerns from our church community...

Cassandra Madison is sharing gratitude and sending love to her sister who is on the frontlines of the coronavirus epidemic, working 15 hours a day as a nurse at Penn Medicine.

Pat Carstensen and Mitzi Unger share their concern for Mitzi's daughter Betsy, who is experiencing almost constant pain.

Marissa shares the joy of how light it is staying after dinner these days.

Kris Pavek shares her gratitude to Rhoda Chickering, Linda Normandeau, and Janet Poeton for helping her sell the contents of her home this weekend.

And, finally, Catherine and Steve Coteus share the joy of the birth of their baby, Mesa Peter Coteus, on March 5th. Mesa was born at home with the support of a brilliant team of midwives and all are doing well.

Let us pause now for each of you to name aloud or just hold in the silence of your own heart a joy, gratitude, sorrow, or concern that is present for you this morning.

And, in our thoughts and prayers, we also hold all of us who are feeling the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on our lives and the lives of loved ones. Let us lift up in our awareness and with our compassion those who **are** feeling and **will** feel most acutely the effects of this global emergency –

those who already suffer from illness,
those who are already isolated and feel alone,
those who depend upon hourly wages and who cannot afford to stay home
from work,
those without homes to shelter them.

Let us hold with gratitude all those who are working against the odds to keep
people safe and healthy,
who provide the necessary health care to treat those who are ill,
who form the mutual aid networks to meet one another's most basic needs,
who are the first responders as we all navigate this new terrain.

Let us take a breath now reaching out with compassion to those in our midst
and to those far away.

Prayer and Words for Meditation

These words of prayer and meditation come from Brother Richard Hendrick of
the Capuchin Franciscan order in Ireland.

A poem called, "Lockdown."

Yes there is fear.
Yes there is isolation.
Yes there is panic buying.
Yes there is sickness.
Yes there is even death.
But,---
They say that in Wuhan after so many years of noise
You can hear the birds again.
They say that after just a few weeks of quiet
The sky is no longer thick with fumes
But blue and grey and clear.

They say that in the streets of Assisi
People are singing to each other
across the empty squares,
keeping their windows open
so that those who are alone
may hear the sounds of family around them.
They say that a hotel in the West of Ireland
Is offering free meals and delivery to the housebound.
Today a young woman I know
is busy spreading fliers with her number
through the neighbourhood
So that the elders may have someone to call on.
Today Churches, Synagogues, Mosques and Temples
are preparing to welcome
and shelter the homeless, the sick, the weary
All over the world people are slowing down and reflecting
All over the world people are looking at their neighbours in a new way
All over the world people are waking up to a new reality
To how big we really are.
To how little control we really have.
To what really matters.
To Love.
So we pray and we remember that
Yes there is fear.
But there does not have to be hate.
Yes there is isolation.
But there does not have to be loneliness.
Yes there is panic buying.
But there does not have to be meanness.
Yes there is sickness.
But there does not have to be disease of the soul
Yes there is even death.
But there can always be a rebirth of love.
Wake to the choices you make as to how to live now.
Today, breathe.
Listen, behind the factory noises of your panic

The birds are singing again
The sky is clearing,
Spring is coming,
And we are always encompassed by Love.
Open the windows of your soul
And though you may not be able
to touch across the empty square,
Sing.

Silence

Let us share now in a time of silent meditation.

Sung Response Spirit of Life (McDade)

Message Wisdom and Uncertainty Rev. Joan Javier–Duval

I will admit to you now that I have never enjoyed roller coasters.
Really, any kind of amusement park ride that involves lots of twists and turns
and ups and downs has never been for me.
This past week has felt a lot like being on a ride that I just want to get off of.
I just keep thinking, “When will it be over?”

Maybe some of you share this feeling.

The hardest part of adapting to this unprecedented public health emergency
has been the not knowing.

There is still so much we don’t know and the not knowing creates so much
uncertainty about how to make even the most basic decisions.

We have all had to rethink what we’re doing and how we’re doing it, and we
will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

Our worship theme here at the Unitarian Church of Montpelier for the month of March is Wisdom.

What does it mean to be a people of Wisdom?

The author Toni Morrison reflected on her writing process in a lecture she gave in 1992, and she said, “In all of our education, whether it’s in institutions or not, in homes or streets or wherever, whether it’s scholarly or whether it’s experiential, there is a kind of a progression. We move from data to information to knowledge to wisdom.”

One of the challenging aspects of the last several days, and probably more broadly the era we are living in, is that there is SO much information. Some of it is based on data. And, lots of people claim to have knowledge.

Morrison continues, “it’s easy, and it’s seductive, to assume that data is really knowledge. Or that information is, indeed, wisdom. Or that knowledge can exist without data. And how easy, and how effortlessly, one can parade and disguise itself as another.”

With such uncertainty, I have been craving knowledge and looking for information and data almost constantly, though I do try to take breaks from all the news and articles and social media posts now and then.

I have been seeking out this information and data trying to determine what is the best thing to do now and now and now.

So many of us are just trying to make sense of this moment and to make the wisest decisions we can with the information we have. And, it turns out this is not easy at all.

So, in times like this especially, when so much is uncertain, how do we live wisely?

I believe that wisdom is not just a matter of the mind; it is also a matter of the heart.

Wisdom cannot be reached through rationality alone, though that is an important aspect of wisdom.

Wisdom is also guided by our intuition. This intuition is developed by the knowledge and information and data we gather from our own life experiences and the experiences of others.

As we live, we learn, they say. These learnings become embedded not just in our brains but also in our bodies.

There is also a deeper knowing, an inner wisdom within each of us.

An inner wisdom that is grounded in the recognition of our shared humanity and our interconnection with all living beings.

An inner wisdom that is the fount of our compassion.

Wisdom, I believe, emerges when we are able to bring into union the mind's most critical thinking with the heart's most tenacious loving.

Wisdom comes when knowledge and compassion meet.

One of the most challenging parts of this whole coronavirus ordeal is that wisdom tells us that when we are in need and facing hard times we ought to come together.

It is wise to be in community, to seek closeness with one another.

Public health experts tell us, however, that the most effective way to slow down this pandemic right now is "social distancing." To create physical

distance between our human bodies and the germs and viruses we might carry. With this distancing, we give public health experts and scientists and health care providers a chance to learn more and meet critical needs without overwhelming the system.

“Social distancing,” though, feels counter-intuitive and just plain hard when we crave connection.

So, here we are trying to find other ways to stay connected with one another, and not just connected, but connected intimately enough that we can care for one another’s emotional, mental, physical and spiritual health.

Some of us may be having conversations with our neighbors we never thought we’d have, like, can I give you a call if I run out of toilet paper? Or, letting friends know about medical conditions you’ve never spoken of so they know why you can’t make it over for dinner.

What this particular global crisis makes clear is that we must draw upon the wisdom of our humanity to get us through. Much of this wisdom is based on the knowledge we have acquired through science. And, thank goodness for those who are using those scientific methods to understand better what this virus is and how we can protect ourselves from its most devastating impacts.

The wisdom of our humanity also knows how to make art, how to care for the vulnerable, how to seek beauty.

It is the wisdom of our humanity that compels Italians to open up their patio doors and windows and sing with one another across empty streets and plazas.

It is the wisdom of our humanity that moved shop owners in Scotland to bundle up packages of hand sanitizer and face masks and deliver them to the elderly in their community.

Albert Einstein said, “Compassionate people are geniuses in the art of living, more necessary to the dignity, security, and joy of humanity than the discoverers of knowledge.”

Geniuses in the art of living.

This unprecedented time we are living through right now is giving us the chance to be geniuses in the art of living, to tap into a Wisdom we may not fully grasp.

A wisdom drawn from the best of both our minds and our hearts.

To do anything with wisdom right now and in any period of uncertainty, requires slowing down. We must slow down enough to allow ourselves the space and the time to discover this genius.

Just like social distancing, this slowing down, can also feel counter-intuitive.

When the world is rushing forward, sometimes that is when it is wisest and most crucial to pause.

Many of you by now have read this poem written by Unitarian Universalist minister Lynn Ungar just a few days ago. It is called “Pandemic.”

What if you thought of it
as the Jews consider the Sabbath—
the most sacred of times?
Cease from travel.
Cease from buying and selling.
Give up, just for now,
on trying to make the world
different than it is.

Sing. Pray. Touch only those
to whom you commit your life.
Center down.

And when your body has become still,
reach out with your heart.
Know that we are connected
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.
(You could hardly deny it now.)
Know that our lives
are in one another's hands.
(Surely, that has come clear.)
Do not reach out your hands.
Reach out your heart.
Reach out your words.
Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.

Promise this world your love--
for better or for worse,
in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live.

So may it be.

Let us join now in our Closing Hymn, Just as Long as I Have Breath.

***Closing Hymn** Just as Long as I Have Breath (Carpenter/Ebeling)
(sung by choir)

***Unison Mission and Chalice Extinguishing**

As we draw our service to a close, we extinguish the chalice carrying with the spark of hope ignited within each of us. As we do so, let us say together our Mission Statement.

We welcome all
as we build a loving community,
to nurture each person's spiritual journey,
serve human need,
and protect the Earth, our home.

***Benediction** Rev. Joan Javier-Duval

As we end our time of worship, may we “know that our lives are in one another's hands.”

And, may you be held by the spirit of Love and tendrils of compassion
Until we come together again.

We conclude our service with the Postlude.

Postlude Eliza Thomas