

## PRELUDE

### ANNOUNCEMENTS – member of PC

## INTROIT (HUSH)

### WELCOME AND CALL TO WORSHIP (Elizabeth and Tommie)

E: Welcome! My name is Elizabeth Robinson and I will be leading the worship today. Joining me as Worship Associate this morning is Tommie Magazu who attended the UUA General Assembly with me this past June, in which we witnessed this work in the larger UU community and attended a Dismantling White Supremacy workshop.

Our worship service this morning is uniquely prophetic: it calls to us who identify as white to listen, humbly and perhaps with some discomfort, to the lived reality of black Unitarian Universalists in our midst and in the UU world at large. This discomfort is both a gesture of hospitality to voices that have not been heard enough, and a sign that we're growing in the right direction.

T: If you're joining us today as a guest, know that you are witnessing this Unitarian Universalist congregation doing sacred work: collectively, we will wrestle with what it means to be a majority-white faith whose anti-racist intentions have not always been borne out. We invite you to witness this moment of transparency and vision, and to join us on future Sundays for a more traditional worship service.

E: We who are Unitarian Universalists often choose to make ourselves uncomfortable in the service of our meaning-making. We recognize our discomfort as evidence that we're growing. Today, if you feel discomfort arise within you – especially if you're white – we invite you to practice being curious, and to allow your discomfort to lead you to new learning. When you came in, you should have been given two piece of paper. One is for your HOPES and the other is for your FEARS. We invite you to reflect on both during the course of the service, and continue to reflect on them after you leave this space.

*Our call to worship this morning is written by **Viola Abbitt** who is a candidate for UU ministry and currently the ministerial intern at the UU Society of Greater Springfield, MA.*

We are Unitarian Universalists.

When we lift up our Seven Principles, some of us think of them as a form of theology — but they are more important to our collective than that: they do not tell us what we should believe; they tell us how we should be.

They tell us how we should act in the larger world and with each other. We are brought here today by the fact that Unitarian Universalism has fallen short of the image that was presented to the world, and to many of those who embraced this religion.

But we are also brought here today by the truth that Unitarian Universalism has shifted course to move toward a place of wholeness: a place that perhaps never existed for us as a denomination.

It has been a long and sometimes unforgiving road to today. But we are here today because we are mindful of that past, and because we have hope for the future. We want the practice of this faith to be a fulfilling manifestation of its promise.

Open your hearts. Seek new ways of understanding.

Come, let us worship together.

**OPENING HYMN #153 – OH, I WOKE UP THIS MORNING** (Elizabeth)

**CHALICE LIGHTING** (Tommie)

*Our Chalice Lighting is by First Unitarian Church of Baltimore lay leader Adrian L. H. Graham*

We kindle a flame of power, illuminating the Holy in each of our faces.

We recognize in the flame a passionate commitment to our shared faith.

We are held and carried from day to day, week to week, in the shining of the light.

This flame is mine, as well as yours.

We are brought together on this day, called to growth, to expansion, within its glow.

What does your heart know while beholding this holy fire?

**SHARING OF JOYS & CONCERNS** (Tommie)

**RESPONSIVE HYMN #95 – THERE IS MORE LOVE SOMEWHERE** (Tommie)

**TIME FOR ALL AGES** (Gabe)

**CHILDREN'S RECESSONAL**

## **READING** (Tommie)

There Is More Love Somewhere *By Glen Thomas Rideout*

Last summer at General Assembly, I walked out of the sanctuary we had made from the convention center space. As tired as I was, I returned more and more to my deeply introverted default of self, and I passed a woman who had to stop to talk with me.

Many religious professionals who have led a morning worship service know this is where the work begins.

She walked up to me and said, “Doctor Rideout!” Because she had enough grace to remind me of my title, she gave me the opportunity to resume my church face and posture. She held my hands as if we had known each other for the longest time. She looked into eyes and she said, “You know what? I always sing that song: There is more love right here.... There is more love right here.... I’m gonna keep on ‘cause I found it... There is more love right here.... I don’t understand why it is that we don’t sing that here at GA. We’ve already found a community of love.”

And because she had enough compassion and grace to call me Dr. Rideout, she had given me enough time and opportunity to summon up a bit of stillness from the weary remnants of my churchman’s posture.

She looked into my eyes and spoke and sang to me with her own truth. She asked with genuine curiosity why it is that we don’t all sing the words that she had come to know.

I was compelled to respond to the woman I had just met with, “Thank you for trusting me with that question.” And then I explained to her why I thought it was necessary — particularly with the music of people of color — that we enter and examine these songs with more curiosity than colonization.

I thanked her, and I explained that for those of us who live with the privilege of knowing love, it can be difficult to understand the perspective of one who lives without such a privilege.

I explained that it can be difficult to understand the lived experience of those who have trouble finding the evidence of love in their immediate vicinity; in their church; in their neighborhood; in their city; in their nation; even in their planet.

I thanked her, and I explained that for some who don’t share the privilege of perceiving love “right here,” moving toward that idea of privilege had become a vital practice of Black faith.

I offered that if we, as a spiritual community of Unitarian Universalists, populated by well-meaning people, are to mean anything to the lives and the deaths of people of color, we must begin by learning — not squelching — the forms of expression that arise from these living perspectives.

And she said, “Thank you. I’ve never heard it expressed that way. I’ve never understood it that way. And I will never sing it that same way again.”

When we inhabit the music, the forms of expression of people who lived their lives along the margins of notice, we must notice that we have entered holy ground, a sacred space of learning; a sacred space of relationship.

### **READING** (Elizabeth)

*"Missing Voices" By Connie Simon who is Intern Minister at the Unitarian Society of Germantown and Contract Chaplain at Einstein Medical Center in Philadelphia*

When I started attending a UU church, I was excited by the promise of worship that would draw from the arts, science, nature, literature and a multitude of voices. Indeed, some of the voices that Unitarian Universalists hear in worship each week belong to Thoreau, Emerson, Ballou, and others. Their words are beautiful, but they come from a culture and experience that’s foreign to me. When do I get to hear voices from my culture? I quickly learned that, other than the same few quotes from Martin Luther King, Jr. and Howard Thurman’s “The Work of Christmas,” it wasn’t gonna happen. I sit attentively and listen with my head to “their” voices while my heart longs to hear more of “our” voices.

I am a Black Woman. When I look around on Sunday morning, I don’t see many people who look like me. In most of the congregations I visit, I don’t see anybody who looks like me. So I guess I shouldn’t be surprised that I don’t hear voices of people who share my experience. But it still hurts. I want to hear voices that tell the struggle of living under the weight of oppression in this culture of White Supremacy. I want to hear stories of trying to stay afloat in the water we swim in. I want to hear voices of Living While Black in America.

I don’t hear those voices in UU churches so I have to supplement my worship by reading black theologians like Anthony Pinn and Monica Coleman. I read Maya Angelou, James Baldwin and my favorite poet Paul Laurence Dunbar. Though not a Unitarian or a Universalist, Dunbar chronicled the African American experience in the years following the Civil War and the emancipation of enslaved Africans — a time of opportunities for blacks as we migrated north

in droves seeking employment and education but also a time of continuing segregation, racism and oppression.

Dunbar acknowledged this tension in his writing. We hear him long for joy and prosperity while at the same time knowing that the system would conspire to keep true happiness just beyond his grasp. “A pint of joy to a peck of trouble and never a laugh but the moans come double; and that is life!” Still, he was a champion of social justice, believing that God has sympathy for the plight of the oppressed and that his grace will be bestowed not on those “who soar, but they who plod their rugged way, unhelped to God.”

For Dunbar, the struggle was real. One hundred years later, hearing Dunbar express his frustration and give voice to the contradictions of our existence as African Americans encourages me and nourishes my soul. His voice speaks to my heart. He knows my pain and understands my sadness, my fear and my rage. He understands the tears I cry as I pray for strength to get through another day in this world. He gives voice to my deep faith that real change is coming someday. He didn’t see it in his lifetime and I might not see it in mine, but I have to keep believing it’s possible.

That’s the message many African Americans long to hear in church. I know that’s what I need to hear every now and then. Will it ever happen? Or will we always have to go “outside” to hear our voices? If that’s the case, maybe there’s no place for us in Unitarian Universalism. The thought of leaving is painful — but so is being in a faith that ignores our voices.

## **PRAYER AND MEDITATION**

*By Viola Abbitt*

Let us open our hearts, still our minds and enter a time of prayer.

Let us call forth and hold in our hearts the stories of all who have come before us, the memories of those who are with us today, and the hope for tomorrow and for all of those who will come after us.

Let us be thankful for this opportunity for healing, forgiveness and reconciliation, while knowing that we can never, should never, forget what has brought us here today.

*[Let us be glad that voice has not only been given to those whose sorrow and pain were their companions in this faith, but that the stories told by those voices have been received with a goal of redemption and understanding.]*

Let us call upon that light which shines in each of us to give us the strength to walk together into the future and do the work that is necessary, and which does not end here today.

Let us have the wisdom to lovingly have the conversations we need to have with each other, that we must have with each other, in order to grow this faith in radical love and inclusion.

Amen.

## **ANTHEM – I DREAM A WORLD**

### **REFLECTION** (Elizabeth)

*TIRED OF BEING SILENT by Rayla D. Mattson who serves as the Director of Religious Education for the Unitarian Society of Hartford, CT*

The summer of 2016 began as an exciting one for me: I was finally going to a beloved Unitarian Universalist conference and retreat center. I'd heard many wonderful stories about it, and I couldn't wait to bring my three children with me. On the drive there, I felt excited about spending a full week in an entirely UU space. After all, it was my UU community that so lovingly embraced me after a very painful divorce and several painful years of church shopping. I needed this week. I needed this healing.

As UUs descended on the camp and found their rooms, I began to introduce myself to others, and thought I noticed them offering me a cursory hello before making a quick getaway. Maybe, I thought, it was hard for people to speak to me because I had my one-year old in tow. Maybe they were eager to reconnect to old friends.

There was one other black woman at the camp who I had noticed; I was thankful we both signed up for the same program. I asked her: Was it just me or did she, too, feel a distinct coldness from the others? I wanted to make sure that I was not being paranoid.

But unsettling things continued to happen. There was an issue with my daughter in childcare: they felt she was a problem and difficult in comparison with the other children—although a very kind person noted that she couldn't understand how my child was deemed "a problem" when she was doing the same things all the other children were doing. Then a black child the same age as my son—12 years old—came crying to me one night. He was being bullied—but he wasn't being heard, because the adults around him insisted that they "knew that girl and she would never say those things." The child trusted that as a black mother, I was the only

person at the camp who would listen and believe him. I brought the matter out in the open. The typical excuses followed, like the boy misunderstood what she meant and he was just being too sensitive, and it was just in fun, and nothing was really meant by her comments.

I tuned those excuses out. And I spent a lot of time alone that week. When my daughter and I walked around the conference center, I saw reminders of racism everywhere, from the statues and memorials to the paintings on the walls. It was everywhere; it was clear as day: “Your kind are not welcome here.”

I would end my strolls by going to the dining hall, only to find there was no table for me—not because there weren’t empty chairs, but because I was told that there was no room at the table for me and my toddler. The empty seats were for other people, I was told, and they couldn’t make room for me. The pattern became so distressing that on most days I considered not eating—but I couldn’t let my child starve. If my new friend was there, she always made room for me. And there were the kids.

After the incident with the young black boy, the kids came to me quite a bit to mediate things going on between them. They even took turns giving me a break from my little one. Eventually one of them would see me trying to find a table and no matter how many people were at their table, they would find a way to squeeze me and my little one in. As kind as they were, they ate quickly and were off. And again, I was left alone in the silence. As all the tables around me buzzed with talk and laughter and I sat there alone staring at my one year old.

Then one evening my youngest finally settled down enough for me to attend evening worship. I was so excited; I grabbed my lantern and journeyed to the chapel. The guest speaker spoke so eloquently talking about what he called “the elephant” in the space—how the camp was rooted in racism. His words brought me to the edge of my seat. I was thrilled and excited: I hadn’t been paranoid! This white man saw what I saw. He was naming my hurt, my truth and I was elated.

As we left worship, my heart felt light. In the darkness that surrounded us, the voices started. I heard campers—who couldn’t see me, a black woman, listening—agree that it was one of the worst services they had been to at the camp. And how they couldn’t believe he dared to say those things. And how they, who come to the chapel to be uplifted, did not want to have that kind of mess thrown in their face.

I melted into the darkness that surrounded us. That night I cried myself to sleep.

When I left the camp at the end of the week, the knot that had formed in my stomach started to ease.

Once home, I shared my story—my truth—with multiple people who were connected to the camp and its programs; people who I believed might use my experience to make future conferences and retreats more welcoming. I even offered to teach, to add some diversity to future retreats. I was told by each person that they would pass on my information and have someone contact me so they could get a better idea of what happened and how I felt so it wouldn't happen to others. That never happened. I sent several emails and responded to all the surveys and asked to be heard. But as usual when I bring up concerns about race, there is only silence in response.

Fast forward nearly a year, and the approach of another summer. My oldest two children chatted excitedly about going back to the camp. Although I had explained that it took two years of funds and planning to go, they were still hopeful that we could make it work for this summer. I felt anxious; I felt guilty; and I could feel the knot creeping back into my stomach. I wanted them to see their friends and go back to a place that they come to love—and yet, I could not see myself stepping foot in that retreat center.

I broke down one day: I shared with my oldest two children my experiences the previous summer. Their father is white and at times I choose not to tell them things that I feel would cast a negative light on white people as to not give them negative feelings towards their family or be torn about their own genetic make-up. But I could be silent no more. And as I shared with them my experiences and my time at the camp, they sat there not saying a word but staring at me with silent tears rolling down their cheeks. They asked me why I didn't say anything during our week at the camp. Why hadn't I shared with them sooner? Like a lot of parents, I answered that I wanted to protect them and not give a negative light to such an enriching experience they had had.

My oldest child then asked me if I often sit in silence and hold in the pain. I answered him truthfully. I answered with a “YES.”

Many times as a black woman, I hold in my pain and my experiences to protect others. To keep and hold up the white fragility that I have been taught, or rather trained, to value more than my own feelings and my own experiences—more, even, than my own needs and self-worth. I have been trained to minimize myself, my light, my voice. To just grin and bear it. To put up with it because I should know that they mean well. Or I didn't want to seem too sensitive or be the “angry” black person in the room.

But I'm tired of being silent. It's a heavy load to carry day in and day out. Sometimes, I'd like to take off my blackness and pick it up another day; sometimes it's just too heavy a load. But I

can't, so I press on. So, I ask this question whenever someone will listen, "Who is standing in your dining hall looking for a seat at the table? And can you make room for them too?"

## **OFFERING (Tommie)**

*By Susan Frederick-Gray, UUA President and Lena K. Gardner*

Every day in our world, people are feeling vulnerable, frightened, and heartbroken. For those [of us] who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color, the effects of racism and oppression are an everyday lived reality — and these feelings are not new.

For others, this can be a time of hard awakening to the realities that have existed for a long time, and to new and heightened racial violence and policies targeting the most vulnerable. For all of us, the call of this moment is real. And as Unitarian Universalists we are invited and challenged everyday to live more deeply into our faith.

And every day, our people, our congregations — you — are responding to that invitation. We are learning to live with a vision of the Beloved Community in the face of white supremacy and fear. We are learning to confront these things in our own hearts, lives and congregations.

If we as UUs are going to be ready to meet the challenge, and accept our invitation to build a new way, we must do it together. We know that, as June Jordan said, "we are the ones we've been waiting for."

Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism is one of the most exciting ways our faith is answering this call. As a national ministry for and by black-identified Unitarian Universalists, BLUU embodies a liberating community of all ages. A community that lifts up the lives, and stories and the leadership of those who have been marginalized and silenced. A community that brings hope, when hope is hard to find. And a community that calls us to wrestle with the gap between our theology and our practice in the world.

Today, we are asking you to join us in fulfilling this promise. We need your help.

The Unitarian Universalist Association has set aside one million dollars from its endowment. Two very generous Unitarian Universalists, Julie and Brad Bradburd, have offered an additional one million dollars to match congregational giving. All of your gifts are needed and appreciated. And, if this congregations reaches the threshold of \$10 per member our gift will doubled!

If you believe that our faith must become radically inclusive, justice centered, multiracial and multigenerational, then there is no better way to advance that vision than through your support for BLUU.

The power and promise of Unitarian Universalism is waking up to meet fear and hate with radical imagination, transformative partnership, resilience, and joy.

We make it possible through our commitment and our generosity. Thank you for your support.

**CLOSING HYMN - #1008, "When Our Heart Is in a Holy Place"**

**BENEDICTION** (Elizabeth)

*Crafted by Kimberly Quinn Johnson, minister of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the South Fork in NY state and a program leader with the UU College of Social Justice.*

We are the ones we have been waiting for.

We are not perfect, but we are perfectly fitted for this day.

We are not without fault,

but we can be honest to face our past as we chart a new future.

We are the ones we have been waiting for.

May we be bold and courageous to chart that new future

May we have faith in a future that is not known

We are the ones we have been waiting for.