



“Building Beloved Community”

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Much like what we heard from Kerridwen, my own experience as part of religious community has evolved over time. As a young person, especially in my middle and high school years, church was the place where I knew I belonged—those were “my people” ... the peers of my own age who shared a common language and stories to talk about our faith and our worldviews and our values, even outside of the church proper; the children in my care during kinderchurch each week; the adults who served as our youth advisors and choir directors and Sunday School teachers, and who welcomed me to the decision-making table at church council. Those people—my people—cultivated a foundation in which I could be firmly grounded, roots nourished and strengthened so that I could blossom and grow.

And that growth—that blossoming—was important, too. Roots do not exist for themselves alone, but as part of a whole. Properly nourished, that whole grows and thrives and serves more than its own self—in the case of a plant, it serves by improving air quality; by offering beauty and sometimes food; sometimes by producing new plants.

In the decades since my young years in the Wilmington Island United Methodist Church, as I have continued to seek robust nourishment, my person and my faith have grown ... grown healthier, more mature, more complex. I credit Unitarian Universalism—and this congregation in particular—for much of that growth. But the truth is that I don't know what would have happened if I'd remained in the United Methodist church. I certainly *could* have remained there—I even had a trusted Unitarian Universalist mentor urge me to consider it when I was heading off to seminary (“the Methodists could use leadership like yours”, she said). I have no way of knowing for certain how I—my life, my faith—



would have grown in a different context. Perhaps it would have been equally as rich, even as it wouldn't have been the *same*.

I offer these musings about the figurative geography of my own faith journey because the communities in which we choose to position ourselves make a difference. Regardless of its location or its denomination, the nature and mission of a particular community *matters* in how it affects the growth of its individual members and its impact on others more broadly.

Committing to build and nurture Beloved Community—capital B, capital C—is a statement about mission and values. A Beloved Community is a designation profoundly greater than “a group of people who matter to me and for whom I show affection”. It is a commitment to doing hard work to confront injustice—overcoming militarism, poverty, racism, and other oppressions.

In one of the pieces I read recently (which I inadequately noted and now can't find!), the writer explained that for Dr. King it was important to note that an individual person is derivative of community, and not the other way around—that is, a community (a *beloved* community) is not merely a collective of individuals whose separate personalities define the community. Rather, the community is something greater than the sum of its parts—and the characters and personhood of individual members of that community are affected by, derived from that community.

“We shall be known by the company we keep,” the MaMuse song says. We shall be *made* by the company we keep.

At UUCC's annual meeting last June (2020), the membership voted overwhelmingly to adopt a resolution that was inspired by the grassroots movement of Unitarian Universalists who are organizing to add an 8th principle to our UUA covenant. Our congregational resolution states,

We, the members of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Columbia, Maryland, covenant to affirm and promote the building of a diverse, multicultural Beloved Community where [Black, Indigenous, People of Color],



[lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning persons], and other marginalized communities find respite from racism and other oppressions. We commit to educating ourselves and to taking actions that dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves, our institutions, and the broader community working in accordance with each person's unique abilities and approaches.

In the fall, your Board of Trustees charged a committee to examine ways that we are already serving this commitment, and to recommend ways that we might deepen our understandings and advance our anti-racism/anti-oppression efforts. (Again, I thank Kelly, Mo, Elly, Amber, Kerridwen, and Margaret for their leadership in this endeavor!)

Over and over again—for at least the past two decades—the membership of UUCC has reaffirmed its commitment to be a community that provides a foundation that grounds and nourishes individuals AND that serves a larger purpose to make the community as a whole better, stronger, more just.

With this resolution last year, the congregation reaffirmed this commitment and updated it to articulate more clearly an understanding of the real world in which we currently live—a world in which persons who are Black, Indigenous, or other People of Color, and who are queer, are especially vulnerable to mistreatment and harm, and where we strive still to fulfill the vision of Beloved Community that was articulated decades ago by Dr. King.

As The King Center reminds us in its materials about The King Philosophy, “Dr. King affirmed...: ‘I do not think of political power as an end. Neither do I think of economic power as an end. They are ingredients in the objective that we seek in life. And [the] end of that objective is ... the creation of the beloved community.’”

They further explain that, “The Triple Evils of POVERTY, RACISM and MILITARISM are forms of violence that exist in a vicious cycle. They are interrelated, all-inclusive, and stand as barriers to our living in the Beloved Community.”



Dr. King himself said, “There is nothing new about poverty. What is new, however, is that we now have the resources to get rid of it. ... The well off and the secure have too often become indifferent and oblivious to the poverty and deprivation in their midst. Ultimately a great nation is a compassionate nation. No individual or nation can be great if it does not have a concern for ‘the least of these.’” And yet, still we know that poverty abounds among us – in unemployment, homelessness, hunger, malnutrition, illiteracy, infant mortality.

Evil #2, racism, said Dr. King, “is the arrogant assertion that one race is the center of value and object of devotion, before which other races must kneel in submission. It is the absurd dogma that one race is responsible for all the progress of history and alone can assure the progress of the future. Racism is total estrangement. It separates not only bodies, but minds and spirits. Inevitably it descends to inflicting spiritual and physical homicide upon the out-group.” And still we know that racism also abounds among us. In the King Center’s work, they recognize racism as prejudice, apartheid, ethnic conflict, anti-Semitism, sexism, colonialism, homophobia, ageism, discrimination against disabled groups, and other stereotypes.

And finally, the third of the triple evils, militarism. Dr. King said, “A true revolution of values will lay hands on the world order and say of war – ‘This way of settling differences is not just.’ ... A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.” This is not to say that the military is at fault, but rather that we must resist the impulse to default to overuse of violent, fear-based, militaristic action. And still we see militarism abound: Not only in literal war, but also as imperialism, domestic violence, rape, terrorism, human trafficking, media violence, drugs, and child abuse.

Only when we overcome these triple evils of poverty, racism, and militarism will we realize true Beloved Community.

Lace on Race is a San Diego-based online learning community whose mission is to “[lessen] and [mitigate] the harm endured by Black and brown people, perpetuated by white people and white supremacy.” I love that they express a



commitment to serve “kind candor with love and with care”. Last month, Executive Director and Founder Lace Watkins wrote about Dr. King’s vision of Beloved Community and how we might respond to and serve that vision today. She said, “...in this Beloved Community, we ... can and do go beyond the minimum standard of human *decency*, and dare to risk a common *humanity*.” [emphasis Paige’s]

And she reminds us that in achieving this common humanity, we must remember that, “while the individual effort is necessary ... it is wholly insufficient if not cleaved to the collective.” And in this effort, we must be honest with ourselves about our collective history. She wrote,

... we will absolutely need to take a hard look at anything that would hearken back to a supposedly better and more unified and reconciled time. [W]e need to unpack this carefully and fully and unflinchingly. As we look at 600 years of colonization, we need to ask ourselves is reconciliation possible—when there was never any sort of ‘conciliation’ worthy of the name? At what point in our shared global history was there a time of true peace, power sharing and non color based oppression? For most of the globe, wistfully gazing at a time which might have been seen to have a quieter timbre and time, however brutally enforced, is a luxury afforded only to the people and the culture and written history (also brutally distorted) of Europeans and their progeny around the world. At what point can white people, as a group, ever reach back to a time when they were trustworthy to those they systematically oppressed?

When have we, *white people as a group*, ever been trustworthy to those we’ve systematically oppressed?

[pause]

“The objective that we seek in life,” Dr. King said, “is the creation of the beloved community.” Surely all of us know that one of his abiding values was a foundational belief in non-violence—a tenet that the King Center still upholds prominently. “To work against the Triple Evils,” they say, “you must develop a



non-violent frame of mind." Dr. King was committed to a vision that was creative and life-giving—he discouraged gratuitously harmful and destructive behavior and promote nonviolence instead. But he also criticized “the white moderate, who is more devoted to ‘order’ than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice.” Too often, his commitment to non-violence is misrepresented, diluted, and used (ironically) as a weapon to criticize direct, disruptive action; to subdue passion; and to silence justifiably angry voices.

Dr. King emphasized that agape love is central to the Beloved Community: “Agape,” he said, “is not a weak, passive love. It is love in action. Agape is love seeking to preserve and create community. It is insistence on community even when one seeks to break it.” (Herstein)

Earlier we heard the words of Dr. Takiyah Amin: “Unitarian Universalism as a faith and philosophy calls us to work toward building a sustainable, equitable context for all of us to live and thrive, and there is no getting around that. ... How does anyone propose we get [to the “goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all”] if we don’t take action to make it happen?”

Agape is *love in action*. We have chosen to be in this religious community—a congregation that has again articulated its commitment to *acting* in service of a more just community and world. Ours is not a passive, idle faith—it calls us to step into our discomfort, to pay attention to pain as a reminder that healing is required, to work together to creating something new and vibrant and beautiful.

Let each of us do our part in building that Beloved Community, answering the call of love... Amen.