



Most people wish to be consoled, confirmed. They want their prejudices reinforced and their structured belief systems validated. After all, it hurts to think, and it's absolute agony to think twice. —*Jennifer Stone*

Words can destroy. What we call each other ultimately becomes what we think of each other, and it matters. —*Jeane J. Kirkpatrick*

## **WELCOME**

All who come in the spirit of goodwill are welcome here. All who come in the spirit of goodwill can be allies, and it is our great privilege, our great duty, to find the way to make this happen: to find our voice as allies in the cause of freedom, equality, and dignity for all people.

## **GATHERING SONG**

*Bring Many Names*

#23

## **RE MINUTE / CHILDREN'S FOCUS**

“Boy meets Girl,” from *Free to Be You and Me*

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS & GREETINGS**

Leadership Council meets today after the service. The Leadership Council is a gathering of the chairs of all BUF committee so if that's you please be in the library from 12:15-1 pm. Or if you group does not have a chair, because that doesn't seem egalitarian, then please send your convener, contact person, or other life-form given temporary and partial permission to tactfully invite people to meetings, I mean get-togethers, I mean love circles.

## **PHOENIX ENSEMBLE**

*Bourree*, by J.S. Bach

## **REFLECTIONS, part 1**

People who come in the spirit of goodwill come in every shape and size and color. Rich and poor, immigrants and natives. We come with differing abilities, on a spectrum of gender and sexual orientation. We have diverse learning styles, and express a variety of theological perspectives. At BUF we're comfortable with this.

But today I'd like to consider “discomfort.” A particular kind of discomfort: the kind that kills conversation. Destroys opportunities that we might have had to connect across our differences. I'm not going to go all Pollyanna on you and say that Bernie supporters should find a way to caringly engage with Trump supporters. Maybe another time. My focus today is much narrower. And perhaps riskier to address. But let's talk about this: We're very diverse here in our interests around matters of social justice: some are focused on the environment, others on racial justice, others on homelessness, good government, religious freedom, education, or LGBTQIAPK rights ... so how can those of us who are very diverse in our passions, but rather homogenous in our liberal-ish outlook... how can we best ally ourselves with one another when we disagree on tactics, or emphasis, or choice of language ... when we simply choose to put our energies in one of these areas instead of another ... or in some cases we don't give any outward indication that we are

engaged in these struggles, but we are doing our best behind the scenes, in our own way, or in the context of personal complications that no one else can see?

This is a sensitive topic. It's risky. Not risky because I might be misunderstood, but because there will be references to anxiety. And being present to anxiety can hurt. Hey, I don't even want to listen to the radio any more. It hurts. And BUF should not be a place where you get hurt. Worse yet, there is a risk today that addressing these concerns, clumsily, could *create* or expand divisions among us. So I'll just say this up front: I'm going to get it wrong. That's what happens when we're learning. We get it wrong at least as often as we get it right. We stumble, maybe we feel foolish, we feel terrible if, stumbling, we hurt an innocent bystander. But it's gonna happen. So we're going to need one another. We're going to need the grace and the shelter of each other.

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Google has a really cool tool called ngram. Spelled n-g-r-a-m. It lets you chart the frequency of usage of any word in printed history. When I n-grammed political correctness this week, I found that it had hardly been used until the 1980s, when it rose sharply, topping out in about 1996, and after that its use subsided. But the chart only goes to 2008, so I'm terribly curious about what has happened since then. It seems to me that there has been a recent spike in conversation around the topic, especially through, and since, the election period.

The term PC is still being used as it was years ago, as a devious way to shut people down when they argue for inclusion, equality, and multiculturalism. It's used as a bogus defense of the disrespectful bombast that is again being held up as normal and ok.

But there has also been a slew of *new* articles on Political Correctness. In addition to the hyperbolic rhetoric you'd expect from Breitbart news, we have serious people on the left saying that political correctness is running amok, progressive allies frustrated by well-meaning advocates for equality who *equate justice and compassion as always standing on the side of perceived victims*, such that anyone objecting, in any way, instantly becomes a perpetrator.

And then there's Lawrence (Larry) Summers. You may remember Summers as Bill Clinton's Secretary of the Treasury, and Obama's Economic Advisor who, in between these gigs became President of Harvard, and then quickly worked himself out of that job with his blunt talk. He was known to have no time for Political Correctness. But Summers had something new to say after the recent election. He wrote: I have made no secret over the years of my conviction that the sensitivities of individuals or members of various groups should not be permitted to chill free speech on college campuses. I have the scars to show for speaking out against overdoing the idea of microaggression ... regulation of Halloween costumes and ... prosecution of students for taking part in sombrero parties...."

Summers did not hesitate, on *The Campus of the Liberal Elite*, to call out what he thought of as irrational, inane, counterproductive, and curiosity-killing oversensitivity. But since the recent election, he says, things have changed. He can no longer say that the fears felt by marginalized

groups are exaggerated. He says, now, and this is a quote: I will never again use the term “political correctness.”

What we’re talking about today is serious. This isn’t Coke vs Pepsi. When we talk about climate change, immigration reform, and access to health care, we are talking about life and death.

Early last summer, within the Unitarian Universalist movement, we had an internal firestorm that would probably still be smoldering if we hadn’t pulled ourselves together in response to the spate of police killings of black men.

In all likelihood the controversy that began at the 2016 UUA General Assembly will be back. It’s about the metaphors used in the hymns sung at our annual national conference. Charges of ableism were brought to the attention of worship leaders by those who objected to the use of words like walk, run, and stand, which exclude from our consciousness those among us who cannot walk, run, or stand. So national leadership came together to consider the significance of this concern, and came back with an apology and a vow to audit our collective behavior in this area.

And the UU online commentaries erupted. Some worried that we’d soon be eliminating all body-based metaphors. No more seeing, no more hearing, no more “running this race.” And certainly no more standing on the side of love.

Those of you who are newer to our movement may not have noticed the “Standing on the Side of Love” banner above our front door. The logo on this banner also adorns thousands of bright yellow t-shirts worn at social justice rallies all around the country for the last several years. The phrase started as a rallying cry at marriage equality demonstrations ... and was quickly picked up by our immigrants’ rights activists. And now most people probably don’t know where it came from, and that doesn’t matter because it resonates with us, it’s who we want to be.

And those of you who *have been* around longer may not even know about the yellow t-shirts, but *you know the song* that launched a thousand t-shirts. “Standing on the Side of Love...” All kinds of you-tube videos of congregations belting out that sweet uplifting light rock rhythm — you can’t sing it without swaying and smiling. Or so I thought. Because I can stand, and I can sway.

Rev. Jason Shelton, who wrote the song, says that he took a hard look inside himself when he was confronted with this concern. He wrote afterward that it’s often best for those with power to set aside their power voluntarily. And as the composer, with an influential voice in our denominational conversation around music, he found himself called to change the words to the song. Just like we changed the words in the 1970s to eliminate sexist language, both in reference to God and in reference to ourselves. We did it even tho it was controversial. We did it even tho it was hard. It was hard not because anyone was defending their right to sexist language, but because these songs were familiar, their rhythms were a part of us. Also, changing kind-of implies that we’d been doing it wrong all along. So it’s not surprising that there was some defensiveness

around this. It took a couple of decades, but now it's something we take for granted (except on the Christmas carols).

Jason rewrote the words as: "Answering the Call of Love." And he says he actually likes this better. I believe him. I do not think he was coerced or felt coerced to do this.

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The Phoenix Ensemble, preparing for today's service, had a couple of good conversations about Political Correctness. But then had a hard time deciding what to sing. We took seriously the matter of cultural appropriation, not wanting to co-opt music from traditions that we could not represent with integrity. We didn't want to sing anything that would minimize the seriousness of this topic, but we also didn't want to be so serious that we'd undermine the beauty of the music with anxiety about its appropriateness. Theological language was definitely out. So you probably noticed: they performed a song without words.

Sometimes we can get away with this — finding an easy compromise. Sensitive to who is not represented, and careful about how we express ourselves, we gracefully convey the best of our principles. But it's a delicate balance; we also risk narrowing the scope of our discourse and limiting the impact of our art when our field of vision can only include that which is so non-offensive that what is left is bland and irrelevant.

And what about humor, which, I think, has to involve some tension. I do not believe that it's necessary for humor to involve pain. But I do believe there has to be tension and release. Without that there is no humor, no stories, no sex, no breakthrough, no epiphany. There has to be tension and release, an element of surprise. That's what I appreciate about Jesus' parables: you learn something via an unexpected twist.

## **PARABLE**

by Paul

ONE: [holding a picket sign, shouting] Potty Parity! Potty Parity! Potty Parity! Potty Parity!

TWO: [approaching] Potty parity, what's that?

ONE: Parity is fairness, equity. In public facilities, there are usually about the same number of restrooms for women as for men. But this isn't true parity. Women still end up waiting in long lines while men zip in and out. True parity will require proportionately more facilities for women. [They both shout... and hold up "potty parity" or "PP" signs]

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THREE: Look at those fools.

FOUR: Potty parity? What the heck is that?

FIVE: Who cares, it's probably just some politically correct nonsense.

THREE: Yes, a little PC party.

FOUR: A PC potty parity party.

FIVE: Yeah and they're so zealous about it, so earnest, so pious.

THREE: Pious, what's that?

FIVE: You know, piety, like when someone is so devoted... to the point of being religious about something.

FOUR: So it's a PC potty parity piety party?

THREE: Yeah, yeah.

[They all get on their knees and start praying, mocking, FIVE & FOUR hold up signs “PC potty parity piety party.”]

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SIX: [looking at THREE, FOUR, FIVE] What’s that about?

SEVEN: It looks like a parody.

SIX: A parody, what’s that?

SEVEN: You know, a satire, an essay or theatrical production that pokes fun at excess, perhaps serving as a parable. A parody seeks to influence by pointing out irony... it’s been used skillfully, for example, by Mark Twain and Jonathan Swift

SIX: Oh poking fun, I know what you mean, like Howard Stern!

SEVEN: No, that’s just stupidity. I think “parody” has to have at least an element of art to it.

THREE: Oh Oh wait, I have an idea [she runs around a bit...then comes forth with a huge picket sign showing Whistler’s Mother sitting on a toilet.] Pretty artistic, right?

SIX: Well... I guess now it’s a PC potty parity piety party parody.

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[others join THREE, FIVE, FOUR]

SEVEN: Look, there are more people coming to poke fun, there are bunches of ‘em...hundreds of ‘em.

SIX: And they’re all parroting.

SEVEN: Parroting? What’s that?

SIX: You know, like a parrot, mindlessly repeating what they hear from others.

SEVEN: You’re right, they’re parroting the PC potty parity piety party parody.

SIX: Precisely.

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TWO: Look at all of those people over there, do you think they’re with us or against us?

ONE: I’m afraid they don’t even know what we’re trying to say. I’m afraid they’re protesting simply to shut us up. Instead of dialogue, they’re creating an artificial polarity.

TWO: Polarity? What’s that?

ONE: You know, when there are two sides at opposite extremes of an issue. Or more often, it’s a passive perception that we’re at polar extremes when in reality we simply haven’t stopped to listen and learn about each other’s’ perspectives. And all too often this passive perception persists and a passing predicament becomes a prevalent problem.

TWO: That’s pitiful.

ONE: Yes, but now it’s still only a potential polarity.

TWO: You’re right, proactive persuasion is probably possible, practical, and prudent. Let’s put our principles into practice!

[they go over to THREE, FIVE, FOUR and start to chat]

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SIX: Well that was pivotal a parable.

SEVEN: Yes a parable of potential polarity...but then practical prudent persuasion overpowering the parroting of a PC potty parity piety party parody....

SIX: Ok ok, you proved your point.

## REFLECTIONS, Part 2

Some say you can't win. You're going to be criticized no matter what you say. But do we really need to win? Not always. I don't expect to win the war on Christmas, for example, because I can never remember which side I'm on.

But other battles really matter. We found out this week that christians will receive priority when applying to enter the United States as refugees. Not only is this an attack on religious freedom, one of our nation's most dearly held values, but it's going to be an administrative nightmare. I mean, will I qualify if I believe in an old aching god? What if I believe in both a warm father god AND a strong mother god? The composer [of our gathering song, with six verses all using different god images] Brian Wren, is a christian minister — or so *he says* he is — in Britain's United Reform Church. What would happen if *he* were a refugee? (That's easy, he'd go to Canada.)

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We are christians here at BUF, and atheists and buddhists and pagans and people who abhor labels. And so we create and maintain here a space for dialogue. A space for dialogue rather than conclusions. There is an appropriate tension, of course, between on the one hand a desire for open-ended exploration of ideas...and on the other hand, a closing of our ranks, when needed, in order to unite our voices against the forces of exclusion and oppression.

A lot of folks here today are activists. And most, perhaps all of us to some degree, are allies. This sermon is not aimed at activists who need to tone it down. Just like haters gotta hate, activists gotta activate. So I'd like to speak now to the allies — who in many cases could tone it up.

We can't dive deep into every cause that matters. We can't even dive into every cause that matters to us personally. But we have a lot of opportunities, and I think we miss a lot of opportunities, to make sure that others know that we're allies. We don't need to agree with every tactic taken by the most energetic out-front leaders of BUF's many causes. But we can — especially if we do this before things get hot and complicated — if we can take a brief moment to look an activist in the eye and say, something like: This is an important cause you're involved in...

... don't screw it up

No, really that's probably *not* what you should say ...

I don't know what you should say. Go figure it out! You'll be glad you did. It will pay huge benefits a few months from now when you find yourselves arguing over tactics, but you'll remember: you're allies!

Go figure it out. Go do it! You may get it wrong but remember, problems are going to arise less from *what* you say than *how* you say it. And also, *when* you say it, and *to whom*. That is, usually, it's better not to criticize one another in public, and not behind each other's backs.

And to our most trailblazing activists: know that you are among allies. I don't mean a lot of us, I don't mean the majority, I mean that the very identity of this congregation resides in our support

for the inherent worth and dignity of all people. But it also resides in support for a free and responsible search for truth and meaning. We're all on a learning curve.

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To work through these challenges we need both knowledge and practice. Both knowledge and practice. And as a congregation, to be an effective leader in this community, BUF needs to provide opportunities both to increase our knowledge and to improve our practices. We need to provide opportunities that extend WAY beyond a few minutes in a sermon. To make this happen BUF leaders need to initiate programs and workshops, and BUF members and friends need to participate, learn, practice, fail, and continue. And collectively, we need to provide an environment in which we can fail without being ostracized. Where we address our disagreements with I-statements rather than you-ought-to-statements.

And finally, to succeed at this, to bolster our strength and leadership in advancing equality and inclusivity, we need financial resources to further this work. We at BUF are extraordinarily well-positioned to do this work. We cherish, and have supported for decades, key pieces to the puzzle: free speech, personal responsibility for what we say and do, caring community, service to our wider community ... and equality for all, both in our congregation and in law.

So to succeed at this, to bolster our strength and leadership in advancing equality and inclusivity, we need financial resources to further this work. We are extraordinarily well-positioned to do this work at BUF, and as allies, taking the work beyond these walls. We have supported for decades, key pieces to the puzzle: free speech, personal responsibility for what we say and do, caring community, service to our wider community ... and equality for all. Let's not screw it up.

## **SHARING OUR GIFTS**

### **SENDING SONG**

*O What a Piece of Work are We* #313

What a piece of work are we. I was attracted to this title because it sounded like a nice blend between disgust with humanity and a good-natured throwing up of hands. But it turns out to be neither. The songwriter is Malvina Reynolds, American folk/blues singer-songwriter and political activist, best known for writing Pete Seeger's Little Boxes ... and by the way she wrote "Turn Around" which we sang earlier too. Anyway, it turns out that the words to this song are neither cynical nor resigned. As you'll see the lyric speaks of all that we have to work with, and all that we can accomplish...together.

May our spirits rise as we sing...

### **BENEDICTION**

"We Need One Another" #468