

We Have All Been Charged

Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship
November 12, 2017

PRELUDE *Smiling Faces* Sung and played by Erika, Hilde, David, Karen and Chad

WELCOME Cat McIntyre

Good morning. My name is Cat McIntyre. I've been a member of BUF for six years. You may know me as a cook, or recently an RE teacher, but I am also a member of the BUF Black Lives Matter Ministry Action Team. This service is a collaborative effort by several members of that Team. The title of the service, *We Have All Been Charged*, comes from the Unitarian Universalist Association *UUA World* Fall 2017 issue, which presents this year's General Assembly Report from New Orleans.

At the General Assembly, Dr. Robin DiAngelo spoke to three, packed, sessions about how to develop White racial literacy. I quote from her book on the subject: [What It Means to be White](#).

"I now understand that race is a profoundly complex social system that has nothing to do with being progressive or "open-minded." In fact, we whites who see ourselves as open-minded can actually be the most challenging populations of all to talk to about race, because when we believe we are "cool with race," we are not examining our racial filters. Further, because the concept of "open-mindedness" (or "colorblindness," or lack of prejudice) is so important to our identities, we actually resist any suggestion that there might be more going on below the surface, and our resistance functions to protect and maintain our racial blinders and positions."

LIGHTING THE CHALICE

We light this chalice to remind ourselves of the Light of Justice we hold dear in our minds and hearts, and our commitment to work for a just and fair world for everyone.

MESSAGE Judy Pine: "Injustice Isn't New"

Hello, my name is Judy Pine. I'm an anthropologist, and a member of this congregation, and I'm proud to welcome you to this, the first service hosted by the Black Lives Matter Ministry Action Team.

Each time we make this, or any other sort of progress in pursuit of social justice, it is tempting to relax, to congratulate ourselves, to ignore the fact that really, nothing has changed. Not yet. Not anything of true revolutionary significance. The system, from the perspective of White Middle Class folks like myself, swings back and forth between the values of freedom and equality and the comfort of our familiar spaces. And yet that comfort is illusion. As the opening song reminds us, the trappings of comfort, the smiling faces, the handshakes, the camaraderie that I experience in the system as it exists today is NOT the experience of people of color in our community. The message of this year's General Assembly "We Have All Been Charged" tells me that as a UU, if I am to see myself as part of Beloved Community, I MUST learn to be much less comfortable.

After all, we got real comfortable a few years ago, when we elected a Black man as president of the United States. When rage against this event became visible, we dismissed it as insignificant, belonging to those "bad people", the racists, not us. As police violence against Black men was brought, over and

over again, to our attention, we separated ourselves from it. We knew WE were not part of the problem, but rather part of the solution. We voted the right way, we gave money to the right causes, we marched in the right protests. And we kept this up even as our president was replaced by a man who depended, visibly, upon the system of White supremacy for his power base. And while we were being so very proud of ourselves, the leadership of the Unitarian Universalists was undergoing a crisis. In April of this year, the UU President Peter Morales was forced to resign from his position due to his work promoting White supremacy.

It sounds odd, doesn't it. A bit off-key somehow, to say that Morales, by all reports an excellent pastor and moral man, was promoting White supremacy, and yet it is a perfectly accurate statement. By failing to actively, vigorously, work against White supremacy at all times and in all places -- and especially in hiring decisions at the highest levels -- Morales by definition supported and promoted the existing system, which is a system of White supremacy. UUA management had gone from 5% to 9% people of color in nine long years, and a major leadership position was filled by yet another White man. Morales characterized the angry response to this hiring decision as "hysteria". The folks who felt discomfort at a hiring decision that brought yet another straight white man into a position of leadership were told to be "less self-righteous". They were asked to behave as if everything was alright, to ignore their discomfort. After all, the majority of those in charge are easily able to do this. The system is comfortable for us.

When Black Lives Matter came into existence, many in the White middle class felt uncomfortable. It felt as we were being diminished somehow. It was possible to respond "all lives matter!", and imagine this was an assertion of common humanity. But that assumes that we are all comfortable in the system. It ignores the fact that I benefit, every single day, in countless ways, whether I want to or not, whether I agree with it or not, from my White-ness. The system ALWAYS says "White Lives Matter". Every single day. All day long. Without ceasing. And every time I try to pretend that I don't benefit, I support the system. Every time I look away, I support the system. Every time I say "look, you have to be patient, change can happen but don't be so disruptive about it", I support the system. Every time I say "Since I did not intend to offend you, you ought not be offended", I support the system.

The system is complex, pervasive, and intent on its survival. These are structures built up over more than five centuries, always, ALWAYS, benefiting the White folks at the expense of Black folks and Native folks, defined by the system as not only Other but as "less than", denied self-determination, denied control over their lives, denied rights over their bodies. Denied humanity. And we are all charged to do something about it.

It is possible to see that phrase, we have all been charged, as an accusation. Charged with an offense of which I was unaware, my response is defense. No, I say, I am a good person. I cannot be a racist. I work for social justice, I am committed to valuing diversity, I am NOT GUILTY. But the system of institutional racism that is literally killing Black people and Native people does not require my evil intentions. It does not ask me to commit offenses. It only asks me to be comfortable, to relax, to stop looking.

The system is built for my comfort. It soothes me. It gives me opportunities to donate money, to march with a sign or banner, to write letters to the editor, and then go on with my life. It provides me the luxury of not ALWAYS being aware of its inequities, of the damage it is doing, constantly, by its existence, to those who are not White Middle Class people.

I've been thinking a lot about the idea of being charged, as I worked on these remarks, and I've decided that, for me, the proper reading of that phrase is electrical. And not a warm and friendly "oh, look, I am all energized here!" kind of electricity. We have been shocked, jolted, hit by a charge of reality to which we must respond.

We can respond, of course, by avoiding the situations in which we are jolted out of our comfort. That is a White middle class option. It is a privileged option. It is, I am quite confident, a cowardly option. Another option is to welcome that painful jolt, to recognize and acknowledge that the changes we must make, if we are to do more than pay lip service to our ideals, will be uncomfortable for us White middle class folk. I hope that I can welcome all of you to that truly Beloved community, a community committed to discomfort in the name of justice, a community of the intentionally charged.

ERACISM MINUTE

Video "The Talk" introduced by Judy Pine: White Supremacy means white Americans do not have to have this talk with their children

MEDITATION interspersed with silence: Mary Alden -- *I Have Peace like a River*

OFFERTORY for the Lummi Youth Canoe Family
Ella's Song, Womyn's Ensemble

SENDING SONG # 1008 *When our Heart is In A Holy Place*

BENEDICTION

A final quote from Rev. Dr. Mark Morrison-Reed, found in the UUA World Fall issue, is our benediction: *"The time in Unitarian Universalism when black lives didn't matter has passed. Nonetheless, change is generational, incremental, and bruising. It comes, but not necessarily on our time schedule. We have fallen short and will again, and when we do we need to pause and pray and ask, "What does love demand of me?" and then stand up and try again. Impatience is not what sustains us, but rather dreams, hope, work, and companionship—the chance to pour out one's life for the faith, principles, and people whom we value."*

CIRCLE ROUND FOR FREEDOM

For more information, and creating your own path forward:

UU World, Fall 2017 issue

uaa.org -- search *Black Lives Matter* for multiple articles and sections

Detour-Spotting for white anti-racists by Jona Olsson

<http://www.culturalbridgestojustice.org/resources/written/detour>

A detailed description of attitudes or behaviors that indicate a detour or wrong turn into white guilt, denial, or defensiveness.

BUF Black Lives Matter Ministry Action Team blog: bufblacklivesmatter.blogspot.com

BUF Black Lives Matter Ministry Action Team meetings: 2nd and 4th Mondays of each month at 6 pm at BUF

Black Lives Matter official website:

www.blacklivesmatter.com, and especially
<https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/what-we-believe/>

Visit this site, and spend some time thinking about the Guiding Principles of this organization. Be prepared to respond to inaccurate, misguided, uninformed assertions about the organization and its goals.

Some recommended books:

Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome – Joy DeGruy

Waking up White: And Finding Myself in the Story of Race – Debby Irving

What It Means to Be White: Developing White Racial Literacy - Robin DiAngelo

Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption – Bryan Stevenson

Between the World and Me – Ta-Nehisi Coates

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness – Michelle Alexander

Black Wealth/White Wealth: a new perspective on racial inequality - by Melvin Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro (Editors)

Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria: And Other Conversations About Race – Beverly Daniel Tatum

Home Going (a novel) – Yaa Gyasi

How NOT to Learn More:

- Don't ask or expect black folks to educate you. Many African Americans are exhausted, and feel unsafe, by expectations from those who haven't taken responsibility for their own education
- Don't look to mainstream media. Televised discussions often give racist answers to racist questions that uphold white supremacy.
- Don't expect black stories of lived experience to conform to your narrative. Listen with an open heart and mind.
- Don't fear black truth or black anger.
- Don't let guilt or defensiveness stall your journey. Unlearning racism is uncomfortable, hard, and sacred work.