

Transcript of Sunday, March 15, 2020 Worship: Love in the Time of Pandemic

Welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Greater Lansing.

My name is Reverend Neal Anderson, and it is a blessing to serve you as your senior minister.

I stand here praying, looking out at an empty sanctuary and I must say that I miss you. I miss you so much. We, as you know have made the decision to postpone and end all of our in-person activities during this time of pandemic. And we are all learning how to adjust to a new reality for the time being that we might slow the spread of COVID-19 as they say “lower the curve,” “flatten the curve” so that our health care system and workers can look after those people who are most vulnerable and in need of our services.

This morning we acknowledge that we gather as a Unitarian Universalist Church of Greater Lansing on the traditional land of the Anishinabe people past and present . We honor with gratitude the land itself and the people who have protected it through the generations. This calls us to commit to direct and tangible support for local and national indigenous movements which seek to protect the environment and restore indigenous ways of life.

We also strive to be an anti-oppressive anti-racist and exuberantly multicultural community. Often that means congregants on Sunday morning on Pennsylvania witnessing Black Lives Matter.

And in the absence of being together, I invite all of us to make Black Lives Matter have meaning in all that we do. To make that a reality. I want to especially welcome this morning first time visitors to the church of Greater Lansing, we are so glad you joined us this morning via this video. I invite you to let us know--let me know that you joined us by emailing revneal@uulansing.org. I would love to hear from you and know that you have joined us.

I'd like to invite you after worship this morning to grab a cup of coffee and reach out to someone you haven't talked to in a while. Pick up the phone, use Facebook messenger, Skype, Zoom, whatever technological methods you have available for reaching out. I would invite you to do that. We need to work on how to be proximate to each other, to retain proximity while we are unable to be together in person, so for coffee hour this morning you're going to create coffee hour by having a beverage by reaching out to friends and family, congregants and loved ones that really need to hear from you.

As you know, we have postponed and suspended all in-person activities for the time being, so there will be no activities here or off-site. I, like you, am heartbroken by this new reality, but the staff and volunteers and congregants are working on ways that we will be able to get together in the days to come using technology like Zoom. Always check your email, look on FB and we will be communicating in those ways with you as the days and weeks go by.

Our chalice lighting words this morning are those of reverend Lynn Unger who wrote these words and shared them on Facebook.

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.

May this chalice--symbol from our religious community symbol of our faith in Unitarian
Universalism, may this chalice remind us of the promise we make to the world with our love.

And now it is time we greet one another. As you may know I love this part of worship and it feels
like a loss not to see you and witness you greeting one another this morning but I'm going to
invite us in this moment to reach out in loving kindness, I'm again reaching out to those who
would be nearest you if we were here together so that we may do so soon. I invite you in the

weeks to come to be reminded that every hand that we don't shake, everybody that we don't hug; may that become a phone call, a Skype call, a Zoom call, a phone call, a reaching out of love and kindness. May we share our warmth, our comfort, kindness and love through reaching out in the ways that we can. And now I invite you to greet one another.

Whomever you are, wherever you are on your spiritual journey, whomever you love, we welcome you.

Now let us join together in the spirit of medication and prayer. Spirit of life, spirit of love; let us first start with where we start each worship service: and that is in gratitude. May we be grateful in this time that we have to share together. Grateful for a moment, a moment outside of regular time, a moment shared in sacred time, this morning may we lift up all of those in the world who are working overtime to ensure that this public health crisis is abated. Thinking and sending love to all of those public health workers, nurses, doctors, and all those who clean our medical facilities who are working overtime at this time to ensure the health and safety in all our communities. Let us lift up all of us who are impacted by the closure of schools, closure of workplaces. May we send love and kindness to parents who will be home for the coming days with children. Those wondering where and how to do childcare. Attempting to adjust to this new reality which we live in. may we be gentle, may we be reminded to be gentle with one another and know that we are not alone. Let us understand that we can reach out, let us not hesitate, let us be reminded that we can reach out to one another that we can ask for help. We can seek out those needs and we can reach out to others. May we continue, may we be reminded to continue in the weeks and months to come to find those connections in ways that we may not have had an opportunity to do before. Though we cannot be proximate physically, we can be proximate in so many ways. And may we make it so. Blessed be and amen.

Singing: Mystery, mystery life is a riddle and a mystery.

Oh, there could be no truer words as we face this new reality of novel coronavirus, otherwise known as covid19. It's been quite a week we've had, witness to the spread of a virus and state of emergency in the state of Michigan and the closing of MSU and schools and witnessing the sports leagues and all kinds of public gatherings being cancelled. We are working with public health officials and leaders within our own religious community to be part of the work to "flatten the curve," trying to spread out the contraction of the virus so that our health care systems are not overwhelmed by the needs that we have seen in other places. These unprecedented events also give us the opportunity to think about new ways of being together. To think about new ways of fulfilling the values, incarnating the values we have as a religious community.

We had just embarked upon this process of mapping our future together with our consultant from unity and asking that important question what does it mean to be a community with courageous vulnerable and loving relationships, and where can that take us in the future? Groups have been gathering to being the answer that question three and I'm saddened as I know you will be that we're going to have to figure out ways to continue what work so you can

stay in touch about that, but some of the groups that have met together already talking about the core values that we have. As this sense of interconnectedness, a sense of that which is of the heart, this idea that we are part of faith in transformation. All of those values apply to this moment in time, and so I invite us to think of the ways in which we can maintain this sense of interconnectedness.

We'll be sending out messages about how you can post your joys and sorrows on line and check that so we can be in touch with each other, I invited you to contact the pastoral care hotline by calling the church, it's the second extension--extension 102--to meet any needs that you have. The pastoral assistants and I are meeting together--meeting together virtually--to ensure that those of us who have need for care are reached out to. I invite all of us in the days to come to continue to reach out to find those connections with our beloved community. We'll also be rolling out some opportunities to meet in small group ministries kinda virtual community circles and working to invite us to gather around Zoom calls and the like. So, I'm sending you love, I'm sending you virtual hugs, and let us care for one another now so that we can care for one another in the future.

May it be so. Blessed be and amen.

I again invite you to reach out to one another for our benediction this morning. In the weeks to come may be gentle and loving with one another, may we ensure that nobody is alone, may we reach out to one another.

Our worship is over may our service begin.