

Speaking of Faith
May 2017

Memorial Day. A long weekend. Barbeques. Burgers. Dogs. Potato salad. Rhubarb pie. Bathing suit (and a parka just in case). The gist of it? Summer is here. Fun is the name of the game as we “roll out those lazy-crazy-hazy days....”

Red, white and blue bunting also reminds us of the values of this country—values for which more than 658,000 Americans have died over the years. Pete Seeger, a great Unitarian, sang those values: “It’s the hammer of JUSTICE, it’s the bell of FREEDOM, it’s the song about the LOVE between our brothers and our sisters all over this land.” How wholesome his words sound today.

But Memorial Day’s *origin* lies in tenderness. After the horrors of the Civil War, thousands of unmarked mounds—graves of soldiers buried where they fell—moved people to see beyond their own hatreds and heartache to the loss and grief of families far away. In town after town, while tending the graves of husbands, brothers and sons, they also placed flowers on the graves of the unnamed dead.

What does it take to put down our opinion—our daily armor!—and respond from the heart? How to resist the impulse to take our usual side? We live across divides. Our favorite websites and bumper stickers reflect which end of the political spectrum we occupy. We can *see* our economic and class divides when we drive through different parts of town or stand in line at the grocery store. And in this neck of the woods, the racial divide hurts, with so very few people of color on New Hampshire’s white landscape.

Religious differences divide us, too. We feel the divide in travel ban protests and at rallies when people not identifying as Christian are labeled “the other.” Our beliefs place us on a long, wide spectrum—the great New England “un-churched” at one end (larger than anywhere else in the country) and at the other end, those who attend services or meetings at churches, synagogues, fellowships, mosques, sanghas and gurdwaras. In the congregation I serve—a theologically rich mix of theists and deists, humanists and atheists, and everything in between—we articulate our welcome of people of all beliefs every week and, at the same time, live with the challenging reality of how differently each one of us makes sense of things.

History would suggest that it takes tragedy on a grand scale to cross our divides and connect at the heart level. Think of the love that swept the globe in the weeks after 9/11. Or the extraordinary spirit in England’s Manchester this week, as crowds form each day in song and prayer and hope.

We live across everyday divides, *and* we have within us the wherewithal to come closer. It doesn’t take a tragedy. Rather, it takes willingness to connect at the heart level. To see each other’s humanity. May we be inspired by the tenderness at the heart of Memorial Day.

Rev. Betsy Mead Tabor serves the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Eastern Slopes (UUFES) in Tamworth, a congregation known for its warm welcome and plurality of theological understandings.