

## **“Pandemic as Portal”**

Sunday, May 31, 2020

**Welcome** Rev. Betsy Tabor

Welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Eastern Slopes. On this sobering morning, after a night of violent protests across the country, we welcome the perspective of the Davis-Walsh family – UUFES members, World Fellowship Center leaders, storytellers – who have created this service, entitled “Pandemic as Portal.” Timely...just as the people of this country are pivoting from one crisis to another, just as we pray for meaningful change rather than a return to normality. Thank you, Andy, Andrea and Fiona.

Thanks also to Marion Posner, to Shana Aisenberg and our growing troupe of musicians who recorded all of today’s music, and to Sandy Trask who presents our online services with vigilance and skill.

Welcome. Here we seek justice and truth and understanding.  
Here we celebrate life and contemplate mystery.  
Here we seek healing and wholeness. Welcome, all.

Bring your whole self to this time,  
Feel a kinship that holds us and welcomes,  
that greets each new newest person in the circle.  
We’re so glad you’re here.

Bring your heavy heart, your anguish, your uncertainty.  
Bring your questions and your love and your delight.  
Know that you belong here.

Whatever is in your knapsack,  
whatever you carry,  
whatever you’re ready to put down, and whatever you long for, welcome.

Unitarian Universalists are brought together not by religious belief but by seven beautiful principles that reflect our values. Today, we light our chalices in the spirit of our 1<sup>st</sup> principle, that we promote the worth and dignity of every person. May peace be with us ☺

### **Shared Affirmation**

Love is the spirit of this Fellowship,  
The quest for truth is its sacrament,  
And service is its prayer.  
This is our great covenant:  
To dwell together in peace, to seek truth in love,  
And to help one another.

**Centering Music** “Eretz Zavav Chalav”

Today the Jewish holiday of Shavuot celebrates God’s promise of abundance. The words tell of “the milk and honey” of the land of Israel. Performed here by Shana and Mary Edes.

**Opening Words** Andrea Walsh

Our opening words are from Indian author and activist Arundhati Roy:

“Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.”

**Hymn** “Step by Step”**Reading** Marion Posner

From “Cave of Montesinos” in *Don Quixote* by Miguel De Cervantes Saavedra

...when they finished tying don Quixote, not over the armor, but rather over the doublet, he said: “We should have also gotten a little cowbell that could be tied next to me on this very rope, by the ringing of which you could tell if I still was being lowered and was still alive. But this isn’t possible now, so it’s in God’s hands, and may He guide me.”

And then he got onto his knees and offered a prayer quietly to heaven, asking God to help him and give him a happy outcome of this seemingly dangerous and novel adventure, and in a low voice he said: “Oh, señora of my actions and movements, bright and peerless Dulcinea del Toboso! If the prayers and entreaties of this, your fortunate lover, reach your ears, by your unparalleled beauty I beg you to hear them. They are only to beg you not to deny me your favor and protection now when I need them the most. I’m going to plunge, engulf, and sink myself into the abyss I have in front of me, only so that the world might know that if you favor me, there’s no impossible feat that I cannot take on and accomplish.”

Once he’d said this, he approached the pit, and saw that it wasn’t possible to let himself down nor find a way to enter, except by hacking a passage away by force of arms, so he took his sword and began to chop away and cut the brambles at the mouth of the cave, the noise and commotion from which caused a multitude of crows to fly out; so thick and so fast did they do it that they knocked don Quixote to the ground. And if he’d been as superstitious as he was a Catholic Christian, he would have taken it to be a bad omen and wouldn’t have entered such a place.

Finally, he got up, and seeing that there were no further crows or other night birds such as bats (which also flew out with the crows), he gave the rope to the cousin and Sancho, and let himself be lowered into the depths of the fearful cavern. As he went down, Sancho offered a blessing accompanied by a thousand signs of the cross, and said: “May God, and the Peña de Francia, together with the Trinity of Gaeta guide you, flower and cream of knights errant! There you go, the bravest man in the world, heart of steel, arms of bronze! God guide you, once again, and may

He bring you back safe, sound, and unscathed, to the light of this life that you're leaving in order to bury yourself in the darkness you seek!"

...Don Quixote shouted to them to give him more and more rope and they gave it to him a bit at a time, and when the shouts coming up the cave, as if through a pipe were no longer audible and they had let down the six-hundred feet of rope, they felt they should bring don Quixote back up since they couldn't give him more rope. Even so, they waited about half an hour, at the end of which they pulled the rope up and it was very light and there was no tension, seemingly indicating that don Quixote was left inside, and when Sancho realized that, he began to cry bitterly and pulled even faster to find out the truth. But when they had pulled up, in their opinion, a bit less than five-hundred feet, they felt some weight and they rejoiced heartily. At sixty feet they saw don Quixote distinctly, and Sancho shouted to him, saying: "Welcome back, your grace, señor mío. We thought you were going to stay there and start a family."

But don Quixote said nothing in response, and when they had taken him completely out, they saw that his eyes were closed, revealing that he was asleep. They stretched him out on the ground and untied him, yet with all this he didn't wake up. But they turned him from side to side and shook him for a good while until he came to, stretching as if he'd been woken out of a very deep and heavy slumber. Looking all around as if he were distressed, he said: "May God forgive you, my friends, for you've plucked me from the most delicious and agreeable life and spectacle that any human being has ever seen or lived. Now I finally understand that all of the joys of this life are just shadows and dreams, or wither like a wildflower. Oh, unfortunate Montesinos! Oh, badly wounded Durandarte! Oh, unfortunate Belerma! Oh, tearful Guadiana and you unfortunate daughters of Ruidera, whose waters are the tears that your beautiful eyes cried!"

The cousin and Sancho listened to don Quixote's words, which he imparted as if he'd pulled them from his entrails with enormous pain. They begged him to help them understand what he was saying, and tell him what he'd seen in that hell.

"'Hell' you call it?" said don Quixote. "Don't call it that because it doesn't deserve it, as you'll see soon enough."

He asked them to give him something to eat, for he was ravenous. They spread the cousin's pack-cloth on the green grass and went to the saddlebags for provisions, and once the three of them were seated in good fellowship and company, they ate lunch and dinner all at the same time. Once the cloth was removed, don Quixote de La Mancha said: "Nobody rise, and listen carefully, my sons."

**Hymn** "Fire of Commitment" (youtube)

**Reading** Fiona Davis-Walsh

This reading consists of excerpts from a March 14 blog entry of adrienne mare brown, Detroit based author and activist:

"...when i turned to face it, COVID-19, i felt ashamed because i'd delayed so long, and because my speculative mind activated instantly, my emergent mind, my apocalypse dreamer self, feeling

the familiarity of a moment i'd never lived, but prepared for. ashamed because during any thought of possibility, just north of me, grandparents were dying in hospital hallways. i don't believe in justified collateral damage, and while i love the vulcan quote "the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few, or the one," i actually don't believe it, because i can't say that many and one are different things...i highly and publicly suspect we are part of one creature, one system. we just don't know the scale: are we a cell in the earth body? is earth the cell in a universe body? are we all the light beams of a god body?

i've been saying 'things are not getting worse, they are getting uncovered'. it's the age of COVID-19, already bigger than the intimate reach of 9/11, the Titanic, and many man made and natural disasters we've defined eras by. we are in history, in an apocalypse moment in history. i know there is tragedy here, unfolding, the scale of which we cannot, will never, measure in terms of heartache. but i'm also aware of us moving towards things we have needed to move towards. how do we widen the space within us for the grief *and* wonder? fear *and* vision? the surrender, *and* the creativity, the relief, the humor, the possibility?"

### **"Another Man Done Gone"**

**A Time for All Ages** Andy Davis

**Joys and Concerns** "This is My Song"

**Meditation** Rev. Betsy Tabor

We give thanks  
 Even on this day of anguish and tumult  
 We are grateful for skies bluer than ocean,  
 for fields of clover and hills of pine  
 that lift the spirit and comfort the weary.  
 We are grateful for this circle of aching and loving hearts.

The world is chastened and wary.  
 We don't know what will happen next.  
 Our hearts long for justice at last.

We are given a past - and a planet.  
 We are given a conscience - and each other.  
 May we understand that prayers are not enough,  
 that we can only be saved by and for each other.

We are also given this moment.  
 If the old foundations cannot sustain us,  
 may we find the courage to overcome our fears,  
 to act on our convictions and make meaningful change.

May today's pain not weigh us down but spur us on  
 To clarify our convictions

To light up our hope  
 To propel us forward toward that new day  
 when justice shall roll down like waters  
 and peace like an ever-flowing stream.  
 This we pray in the name of all that is good and true and holy.  
 Amen.

[Respond to Joys and Concerns.]

**Reflection**     Andy Davis

I'd like to begin by saying that I'm grateful that the pandemic Zoom format has made me shorten and rein in, and sharpen my thoughts, because my biggest goal for our time together is to stimulate our communal creative thinking, and sometimes nothing gets in the way of that so much as too many words from a single source. After I say a few words, and after we pass the plate, we'll open the floor to your reflections.

Ever since the middle of March, I've been thinking of caves. Our earliest prehistoric ancestors took refuge in them from the dangers of sleeping in the open. I imagine them hiding in these dark enclosed spaces from other groups of hominids whose motives they distrusted. Think of it as the original social distancing.

When I read Arundhati Roy's essay about the pandemic as portal, I began to mentally image her "portal" as the entry of a cave or tunnel. In folklore, such a stone mouth is often a transitional space between one reality and another. The protagonist of the tale enters it on her or his way into the land of faery and eventually returns either with new powers and blessings, or diminished. Always *changed*.

As I lived with this image, I remembered the Cave of Montesinos episode of *Don Quixote*, possibly the crucial transitional moment of that proto-novel. By the open-ended, ambivalent literary masterpiece of Cervantes, the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance is *transformed* but whether it is for good or ill is left to the eye of the beholder.

As I considered how to talk about this transitional moment we're in, I began marshalling facts and figures. But I think we know the terrible milestone we passed this week, and the terrible inequities in suffering that have laid bare the fault lines of race and class in this country. And this week, those fault lines are beginning to shake. As we heard from the Adrienne mare brown reading "things are not getting worse, they are getting uncovered." People die because of their position in society all the time, but it's usually not national news.

Here's another quote from Arundhati Roy: "The coronavirus has made the mighty kneel and brought the world to a halt like nothing else could. Our minds are still racing back and forth, longing for a return to 'normality,' trying to stitch our future to our past and refusing to acknowledge the rupture. But the rupture exists. And in the midst of this terrible despair, it offers us a chance to rethink the doomsday machine we have built for ourselves. Nothing could be worse than a return to normality."

So, as we speak, in a world of terrible suffering, untold numbers of people are seeing blue sky where there has usually been blankets of woolly smog. It's exciting to think that people could hear the earth breathe and be able to imagine making changes to embrace the possibilities uncovered, rather than struggling to hold onto outmoded ways of organizing society and the relationship with the earth. The much-celebrated "end of history" is not yet here.

In Martino Testadura's green tunnel, I thought of that poem about the roads diverging in a yellow wood. I saw a recent interview with climate activist hero-of-the-age Bill McKibben in which he also used Frost's imagery to crystallize the choice before us.

Another image I'll leave you with comes from Thoreau, from a quote I keep coming back to these days. To paraphrase, the current moment is the intersection between two eternities, that of the past that of the future, and the meaning of our lives is all about how well we toe that line. I look forward to hearing your thoughts about that, and other reflections from your time in the COVID cave.

## **The Morning Offering**

### **Community Reflections**

Kim: During Andy's talk I found myself going to that place of being a little cynical in that, yes, this covid-19 pandemic has certainly made us realize how connected we are, worldwide, to everyone else, but as I see communities opening up and people getting back to what they do, traffic building up even here in the Lakes Region, those blue skies, those smog-free skies, those clear waters in the canals of Italy...clearly we could see that in even just a little time we could clear things up. I'm not sure that we *aren't* going to go back to the way things were. I'm not sure how it will not be back to business as usual. I hate feeling that way, and I certainly want to feel hopeful. But then this week, seeing our country torn apart by something that has been ongoing – it certainly shouldn't be a surprise to any of us that it happened – it's hard not to feel cynical. I wish I could feel differently.

Margaret R: I find myself turning more to quiet as a path to action, kind of an ironic move, but that through meditating, through being still and focusing on the present, I find that I feel more able to take action by stepping back, more able to feel hope by experiencing the present moment. And I feel like it makes space within me, to use the words that Andy used, that, by being still, I feel space within me to then act in ways that make more connection.

Eleanor J: The word apocalypse means uncovering. I made an association and you can take it for what it's worth. "I can't breathe" is a signature of police brutality against the black brothers, but the Covid also has "I can't breathe," and the people who are affected are people of color, so that that term "I can't breathe" has really uncovered and is like the final straw. Not only are we seeing pictures of police brutality against them, which is an inherited bias of the whole white community, but we're seeing the disease attack their lungs, and they can't breathe, and they're dying in increased numbers, more than anyone else.

Fiona: I wanted to respond to what Kim was sharing about what she's feeling because I often also feel very cynical, but I've been pretty energized the past few days, seeing how many of my

white friends and family that have never shown any investment or interest in any of this before are suddenly mobilized. And I'm hoping that that's not just the moment and that folks are finally waking up to the fact that especially in areas like this where we are almost entirely a white community, it's imperative that we do this work internally, that we learn our history that we were not taught in school, that we own the fact that we benefit from these systems everyday, and that we carry a lot of racism within us.

One of my favorite points that a lot of people have made (I'll paraphrase) is that to be anti-racist you're not non-racist. It is owning the fact that you carry racism within you, that you carry racist beliefs that have been programmed into you, and the fact that you're working on that in yourself and the world is what allows you to do this anti-racist work. And so I'm energized by seeing folks that haven't shown any interest in doing this work coming out, coming to the demonstration today at 1:00 at the four corners in Conway, and sending money to folks that have been prevented from having resources since the 1600s.

I'm also cynical and scared at what coming out of this will look like, but I'm also hopeful, seeing a new level of engagement from white people, and I'm hoping that people in this congregation will take that to heart in themselves and also that they really put pressure on and encourage folks in their circles to engage in this and engage in *action*, because as we know, believing that people should have equal rights to life and to resources is not enough, at all.

Kim, I'm with you but I hope we're in a unique moment, and I really am seeing that from folks in my high school, in this area, and all around the country...so send your money to Minneapolis, talk to your friends and family, and I would love to engage in individual conversations with people who want to.

David W: We're going to be there. We're not going to be in the crowd, but we're going to drive by and honk and hold up our sign. What I'd like to say is that when humans face a challenge, it demands our creativity, and it seems to me that with these challenges that are so great, that the easiest way is to go to the negative, and the hardest way is to go to the positive. As we face all these challenges, let's put our creativity to work and figure out ways to positively respond to the things that the virus and democratic system are asking of us.

Sam P: I just nominate Fiona for the Greta Thunberg for us in this movement. Please keep it up!

Barbara B: I also go into that place of feeling like there's no way out of this. I've thought about the similarities of having lived through the 60s and this violence just brought all that up, and I thought, oh gosh here we go again, and it just never resolves. But then I thought about the connection that we're being hit with Covid and now we're being hit with the past re-surfacing. I really have learned that when I ignore something in my body that's trying to get a message to me, it hits me harder with a bigger sledgehammer. And I can't help but look at this – that we're being hit and we're being hit again – and the sledgehammer is going to get bigger. That may sound depressing, but I don't think so, because in the end I really really, really believe that love will win. I'm not going to be here to see it and probably most of you won't either, but I truly believe the universe is moving in a positive direction and that these sledgehammers are just trying to get our attention. It may take a hundred of them, a million of them, but it's moving.

Rev. Betsy: Thank you all. Thank you for your sharing. I suppose every once in a while we crawl back into our caves and get quiet so that we can come out and do the creative thing, do the positive thing, do the brave thing – engage. May it be so.

**Closing Hymn** “Love Will Guide Us”

**Extinguishing the Chalice**

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth  
The warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.  
These we carry in our hearts

**Reminders**

- Flower photos
- Coffee hour – continue the conversation
- Andy – announce protest

**Benediction**

Things are getting uncovered, and this time everyone is seeing them. May we explore the dissonance between our grief and our love. This is our sacred Work.

**Postlude** “The Mist Covered Mountains of Home”

This service can be viewed until August 30 at:

[https://uuma.zoom.us/rec/share/7tUoHp2vrXJJaYHK-Qbce5Y5LKrsX6a82iMc\\_cEyjKnEBKfSnFAnFy62xCEgIM](https://uuma.zoom.us/rec/share/7tUoHp2vrXJJaYHK-Qbce5Y5LKrsX6a82iMc_cEyjKnEBKfSnFAnFy62xCEgIM)

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