

For Meredith News "Speaking of Faith" for July 2, 2020
Rev. Betsy Tabor - UU Fellowship of the Eastern Slopes

"All Lives Can't Matter Until Black Lives Matter"

Sooner or later it would happen, and it did last week when someone vandalized the Concord UU church's Black Lives Matter sign, spray-painting in big blue letters "B-L-U-E."

"But Mom," asked our 27-y.o. son, "Don't ALL lives matter?" We had just arrived in South Carolina for a wedding. I'd decided that morning to walk my talk and wear my new BLM pin. Since checking in at Logan, it had already become a talking point when the TSA guy called out, "Lady, take off the pin!" Through the concourse, at the gate, and then on the plane it continued to generate a mix of curiosity and studied avoidance. "Are you really going to wear it all weekend?" asked my worried husband. I assured him I wouldn't wear it at the wedding.

What is it about "Black Lives Matter" that puts some people off? Does it feel uncomfortably bold? Militant? I want to make a new BLM button in soft colors and use the actual words, mild and wondering, that began it all. Seven years ago this month – July 2013 – Howard Zimmerman was acquitted of murdering 17-y.o. Trayvon Martin in cold blood. That day, Oakland organizer Alicia Garza posted: "I continue to be surprised at how little Black lives matter."

"I continue to be surprised..." Does that sound threatening? And while 400 years of brutality and calculated racism merit untold rage and must end, once and for all, who couldn't be surprised – for all our talk of freedom, liberty, and equality – at how LITTLE some lives continue to matter? These gentle words don't threaten. They break the heart.

We fret for the Earth. Do all glaciers matter? All oceans? All fish? Do all marshes matter? All fields and forests? What about trees? My esteemed colleague, the Rev. Nancy McDonald Ladd, answers with eloquence:

When we say, "Save the Rainforest," we don't mean that we cease to honor the mighty cedars or the reaching pines. We mean that *one particular piece of a deeply sacred whole is more at risk than others*, and...this risk, this threat, is worthy of our very bravest actions. So it is with Black lives in this country....

"Don't all lives matter?" said my white boy of privilege, unaware of the steady wind at his back that makes his way so darned easy compared to his Black, Indigenous and other peers of color. My vehemence surprised me, who always prefers a pen and hours to think to finding the right words in the moment.

"Does that mean it's OK to pull over someone with a broken taillight and beat them? Or kill them, if you feel like it? Does that mean it's OK to put a Black teenager in jail for years on a minor drug charge when another teen's parents hire a lawyer to expunge it from their kid's record? Does that mean it's OK for a person of color to feel fearful every time they leave their neighborhood?"

This does fire us up. And that's a good thing.

Rev. Betsy Tabor serves the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Eastern Slopes (UUFES) in Tamworth, a congregation that works toward diversity, equity, and inclusion. Curious about the Unitarians? All are welcome, all Sundays, at 10 a.m. Zoom details at www.uufes.com.