

WHEN JUSTICE DOESN'T MEET OUR EXPECTATIONS

PRIDE SERVICE

UNITARIAN FELLOWSHIP OF PETERBOROUGH

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OPENING WORDS *You Are Beloved and You Are Welcome Here* (abridged) ~Joan Javier-Duval¹

You are beloved and you are welcome here
Whether tears have fallen from your eyes this past week or gleeful laughter has spilled
out of your smiling mouth
Whether you are feeling brave or broken-hearted; defiant or defeated; fearsome or fearful
Whether you have untold stories buried deep inside or stories that have been forced
beyond the edges of comfort
Whether you have made promises, broken promises, or are renewing your promises,
Whatever is on your heart, however it is with your soul in this moment
In this space of welcome and acceptance, commitment and re-commitment, of covenant
and connection,
You are beloved and you are welcome here
Let us worship together.

STORY FOR ALL *The Day You Begin* ~ Jacqueline Woodson

(This story is about the experience of entering a space where it feels like no one else is quite like you.)

READING *Mattering* ~ Mark Hicks²

My father asked if I am gay
I asked Does it matter?
He said, No not really
I said, Yes.
He said get out of my life.
I guess it mattered.

My friend asked why I talk about race so much?
I asked, Does it matter?
He said, No not really
I told him, Yes.
He said, You need to get that chip off your shoulder.
I guess it mattered.

My neighbor asked why I put that ramp up to my front door.
I said, Does it matter?
He said, No not really
I told him because it made my life easier.
He said, Is there a way to make it less obvious?
I guess it mattered.

A member of my church asked why I like gospel music.

¹ <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/opening/you-are-beloved-and-your-are-welcome-here>

² <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/mattering>

I asked, Does it matter?

She said, No, not really.

I told her that it connects me to my southern, Christian childhood.

She said, I think you're in denial about your oppression.

I guess it mattered.

My God asked me, Do you love yourself?

I said, Does it matter?

She said, YES!

I said, How can I love myself? I am gay, Latino, disabled, and a Christian in a hostile climate.

She said that is the way I made you. (*slight pause*)

Nothing will ever matter again.

CANDLES for JUSTICE and PRIDE

For centuries, most LGBTQ2S folks have lived in societies in which they were criminalized and demonized. Even though now in this country, we all have rights of gender expression and sexual orientation, the journey to true equal rights and non-discrimination is not over. This morning, inspired by a few names included in a reading that comes later in the service, we are lighting a rainbow of candles to honour individuals who put their lives on the line for change and justice. (*A candle was lit for each of these names.*)

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), was one of the greatest painters and most versatile geniuses in history. Though not much is known of his life, in 1476, just as Leonardo was becoming a master in his own right, he was plagued by scandal. Along with three other young men, he was anonymously accused of sodomy, which in Florence was a criminal offense. The charges were brought against him in April, but were dismissed in June, probably because of the intervention of his patrons, the Medici family.³

Susan B. Anthony, (1820 -1906) the famous leader of the Suffrage movement, had very strong emotional bonds with women, who she wrote to in very flirtatious ways, including invitations to share her bed. She lived at a time when the concept of "lesbian" hadn't really surfaced, and it's hard to determine whether "romantic friendships" and "Boston marriages" of the time would have been considered lesbian relationships today.

Montreal writers Elsa Gidlow and Roswell George Mills launched *Les Mouches Fantastiques* in 1918, a mimeographed underground magazine which is the first known LGBT publication in Canadian and North American history. At least five issues were published before Mills and Gidlow moved to New York City in the early 1920s.⁴

Patrick Kelly and Samuel Moore are recorded as the first two men in Canada of having been criminally convicted of sodomy for what the court records clearly describe as consensual sexual activity. They arrived at Kingston Penitentiary in 1842. Although both men were sentenced to death, their sentences are commuted.⁵

Marguerite Radclyffe Hall (1880 -1943), an English poet and author, is best known for the novel *The Well of Loneliness*, a groundbreaking work in lesbian literature. Being

³ https://www.bnl.gov/bera/activities/globe/leonardo_da_vinci.htm

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_LGBT_history_in_Canada

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_LGBT_history_in_Canada

"undeterred by the Church's admonitions on same-sex relationships," she described herself as a "congenital invert", a term taken from turn-of-the-century sexologists. She had at least three long-term relationships with women during her lifetime.⁶

Emma Goldman (1869 – 1940) played a pivotal role as an activist and a writer in the development of anarchist political philosophy. During her life, Goldman was lionized as a freethinking "rebel woman" by admirers, and denounced by detractors as an advocate of politically motivated murder and violent revolution. In 1906, Goldman began publishing *Mother Earth*, which she called "a place of expression for the young idealists in arts and letters" In it, Goldman wrote frequently about politics, labor issues, atheism, sexuality, and feminism.⁷

W. H. Auden (1907 – 1973), an English-American poet and Pulitzer Prize winner, was noted for his stylistic engagement with politics, morals, love, and religion. When he moved to the United States in 1939, partly to escape his reputation, he fell in love and into a relationship he regarded as a marriage. However, it was short-lived because of Auden's insistence on faithful relations.⁸

A rhythm and blues singer from Toronto, Jackie Shane, had a single *Any Other Way* which hit the charts in 1962. The song's lyrics include an explicit and deliberate play on the dual meaning of the word "gay". Shane, who performed in female clothing despite being male-identified at the time, would later come out as transgender, although this was not confirmed by a media outlet until 2017.⁹

The Reverend Mark DeWolfe was the minister at the Unitarian Church in Mississauga from 1982 until his untimely death of AIDS in 1988. Reverend DeWolfe was the first openly gay minister in Canada, was much loved by his congregation, was known for his devotion to social justice issues, and came to Peterborough as a guest preacher on many occasions.¹⁰

Recognizing that these are just but a few lights among the thousands whose lives have mattered in the struggle for LGBTQ2S justice and liberation over the centuries...additional candles to this fierce bowl of rainbow colours.

Let's now spend a few moments in reflection to celebrate these lives, and the thousands unnamed, as the Occasionals sing.

READING *Fierce Urgency* ~ Ashley Horan

My four-year-old daughter has taught me this lesson:
when a child wants to derail Business As Usual –
to curb the hubris of adults who dare believe
in schedules and plans and productivity –
one fierce little body and one clear, piercing voice,
strategically applied to the right pressure point,
will change the course of the day's events.

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radclyffe_Hall

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emma_Goldman

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W._H._Auden

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_LGBT_history_in_Canada

¹⁰ <https://uucm.ca/social-action-award/>

My comrades in organizing have taught me this lesson:
when a silenced people want to be heard –
to raise from dry bones a living, breathing dream
of new ways of moving, being, incarnating freedom –
one small, tenacious group whose hearts beat in rhythm,
rising shoulder to shoulder against the inevitable,
will bend the arc from impossibility to hope.

Our young climate leaders are teaching us this lesson:
when the grownups and the old movements are too slow –
as the sea levels rise and the hurricanes rage and
the migrants flee and the corporations profit –
one generation, both young and silenced,
refusing to accept an inheritance of doom,
will take toward the streets and move us toward life.

Blessings upon them as they teach us,
organize us,
beckon us in
and call us out.

May their fierce urgency and uncompromising clarity
Show us the path toward healing, and freedom, and hope.
Blessed be, Ashé, and Amen.

MESSAGE *When Justice Doesn't Meet Our Expectations* ~ Rev. Julie and Rev. Kierstin Allen

First, I just have to express how grateful for and awed I am by those who are taking part in the Beloved Conversations program. You are leading us on the way to undoing racism within ourselves and in this congregation, and I am very excited about seeing how this unfolds. And the folks who helped to prepare meals and serve us...I want you to know how valued your presence was. And, I hope that we're able to offer this program over and over again, so that everyone has a chance to participate.

And, I am very grateful to our guests this weekend. To Dr. Mark Hicks and Rev. Kierstin Homblette Allen for coming to facilitate, and to Rev. Linda Thomson and Casey Stainsby for coming from the CUC and Beverly Horton coming from Hamilton First to participate and observe. And extra bonus, Kierstin and Beverly were able to stay for our service this morning.

I had the privilege, earlier this week, of being asked to moderate a listening circle called "Voices from the Margins." It was organized by ISARC, the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition and by Nourish Peterborough. The task was to witness stories of people who are living in poverty, stories that are being collected across Ontario and compiled in a book that will be given to every MPP.

They were asked about their lives and their day to day struggles. They were asked about whether they had enough money for appropriate and healthy food, and for a place to live, and for medications, and for transportation.

It was a privilege. To just listen to a circle of folks risking their vulnerability to share their stories. To just listen. To not be in the position of giving advice or fixing. Which is not to say, if I'm being

completely honest, that I listened judgment-free. Which is not to say that my impulse to fix wasn't present.

It was a privilege to hear those stories. And yet now, I wonder what other questions might have been asked.

You see, I was inspired for today by something said by Rev. Elizabeth Nguyen, who identifies as a queer Vietnamese-American. She wondered if, in the midst of the struggle, we can know if the arc is (actually) bending toward justice. And then she says: "The great test of our Unitarian Universalist faith is not whether we believe we can bend the arc, but how we are when the bending looks oh so differently from what we expected."¹¹

I hear that this way: she's asking if things are heading in a direction different than what I think should happen, how do I respond? She's asking if my expectations of what justice looks like are actually what justice looks like.

Who decides what justice looks like?

I'm reminded of a story told by one of my seminary professors about a time in her youthful activism when she and a group of her well-meaning middle-class friends decided to set up an affordable daycare to serve all the 'poor' women they thought wanted to get out of the house and have 'meaningful' careers. Without asking if that's what those women needed, or wanted. It failed. Miserably.

Who gets to decide what justice looks like?

So the question I wish had been asked in that listening circle was "what does justice look like for you"?

I could extrapolate. What I heard was a request for our own right to respect. Our own right to dignity. Our own right to a safe place to live and to sleep. Our own right to raise our children. Our own right for poverty not to be our whole story. Our own right to be seen as whole people. (Yes, I can extrapolate, but I do wish I'd taken the opportunity to ask this question directly, especially since the whole point is that I don't have a right to make assumptions.)

So, what does a space, a neighbourhood, a community, a world look like when everyone has those things? When no one has the experience of feeling that who they are is not acceptable and that they don't belong? Or that their lives, their food, their culture, their gender, their abilities, don't measure up to what has been normalized?

This is PRIDE Sunday, and although I've begun with stories of poverty, the point, I think, is the same for LGBTQ2S justice. Another great privilege I've had recently was to be the chaplain for Camp fYrefly here in Peterborough, which is an arts-based leadership school for LGBTQ youth. That was another chance for me to listen. To notice. To learn.

But I didn't ask the question there either. What does justice look like for you? How do you imagine it might be achieved? Is there a role for me, as a straight, white, able-bodied cis-gender person, in helping to bend the arc of justice in THAT way...the way YOU see it? In the face of every one of my prejudices and assumptions, or at least those I can see in the moment, what might my role be in bending the arc in favour those who are on the frontlines of injustice?

¹¹ <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/prayer/loving-arc>

This congregation became a Welcoming Congregation in 2008, which is to say that the we committed to, and got done, a long series of workshops and self-education about what at that time was called LGBT justice. A plaque in the foyer proves we did it, as does a resolution passed by the congregation to “be known as a welcoming congregation.” Here’s what that resolution says:

WE DO HEREBY RESOLVE TO:

- Be inclusive and expressive of the concerns of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons, and
 - Nurture ongoing dialogue among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and heterosexual persons and to create deeper trust and sharing, and
 - Celebrate the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and all people and our diverse ways of expressing love for each other, and
 - Advocate for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons and to promote justice, freedom, and equality in the larger society,
- AND THEREFORE DECLARE OUR INTENTION TO BE KNOWN AS A WELCOMING CONGREGATION.

Twelve years ago, maybe this verged on radical. Today, it looks antiquated! I know I read that rather quickly, but did you notice anything that feels a bit off? Anyone have any thoughts?

(Lack of the Q2S, no mention of listening to...trusting experience of...“To Be Known As” as opposed to actually BE?? Assumption of the normative ‘we’ ...)

I think the thing that bothers me most is the position it takes. We might want to let ourselves off the hook by calling it word-smithing, but it feels like there is an assumption of how ‘we’ are so generously being open to ‘them’ ...as if they are not a part of us.

Who decides what justice looks like? I saw an interview with Melinda Gates recently, where she spoke of her determination to ensure that there are more women and people of colour in the tech world. Because technology is leading so much of what happens, and is moving so fast, she said, paraphrased, ‘they need to be at the table, because whoever is at the table are the ones who are designing our future.’ If they’re not at the table, she said, we are ‘baking into the system a bias, without even knowing it.’ That’s institutional discrimination.¹²

And finding ways to see how we are unknowingly ‘baking bias into the system’ is the work of Beloved Conversations. I asked Rev. Kierstin Allen, the Congregational Coordinator for the program, and one of our weekend facilitators, if she might offer a few words about that work.

Happy Pride, y’all. I’m so grateful to be here in Peterborough and worshipping with you, especially on this Pride Weekend. Thank you, Rev. Julie, for the invitation and your powerful ministry here.

I’m also grateful to my friend and colleague, the Rev. Elizabeth Nguyen, for her words that inspired this morning’s service. Elizabeth is a fierce, grounded, and incredibly knowledgeable advocate for justice- she is an important teacher of mine.

¹² Interview with David Letterman on Netflix

She asks, what we do when the bending of the arc towards justice looks so different from what we have imagined? When we find ourselves disappointed, surprised, or confused by the world around us or even by the actions of those we are fighting for and with?

Who gets to decide what justice looks like? In my ministry with queer and trans folks, with immigrants, with Black Lives Matter organizers, I have learned that following the lead of those most impacted by any injustice will help to reveal what justice needs to be done.

Following the lead of undocumented people fleeing violence or trans women of color who are being murdered at an alarming rate, or black folks incarcerated or killed by police while simply going about their lives. Or here in Canada, indigenous women who are sex workers, who are going missing and being murdered.

People who are most directly impacted by an issue of injustice are the ones who know best what is needed to bend the arc towards justice. The challenge for those of us who are not most directly impacted is to listen, to believe their truth, and to take action based on what we are being asked to do.

It's simple in some ways. And it's very hard to do if you've been raised to believe that your opinion, your voice, your ways of doing things are the best, the most reasonable, the most knowledgeable. It is a spiritual practice, and a spiritual challenge, in any situation where we hold privilege, to learn to follow.

In the United States, the fight for marriage equality for same sex couples has come to be seen as THE justice issue of the LGBTQ community. Now that marriage equality has been achieved, LGBTQ people are equal to straight people and the arc has been bent sufficiently. But this priority was created, funded, and pushed for by mostly wealthy, mostly white, mostly gay men. Because not being able to be married was one of the last barriers to them becoming equal to their wealthy, white, straight, male counterparts.

Don't get me wrong- marriage confers lots of needed benefits and rights to lots of queer couples. My wife and I are married, and happily so. BUT. Has justice been achieved for the entire LGBTQ community now that we can get married? No. I do not think it's a coincidence that the biggest battles for LGBTQ justice in the US in recent memory have been those that allow queer people who can assimilate to assimilate into the larger heterosexual cisgender culture: marriage equality and full inclusion in the military.

I have been inspired and taught by a collective of mostly queer and trans people of color in an organization called SONG- Southerners on New Ground. In the midst of the fight for marriage equality, they created a campaign called Marry the Movement. By marrying the movement, they meant, "We are committed forever to the needs and priorities of the movement as a whole and to those voices most marginalized among us." They cite the needs of queer and trans people living in poverty, those who are seeking asylum, children who are bullied in school and in their families, and those facing racism and police brutality as priorities in our movement. A movement for all LGBTQ people, not just those who already have privilege in our society.

Gay marriage is important, they say. AND we still have so much to fight for.

Who are the voices you are following here in Peterborough? Who is on the front lines and feeling the heaviest impacts of injustice in this community? Whose vision of justice can you get behind, with your voices, your resources, your bodies? What spiritual resources do you need to practice deep listening, following, and bending the arc towards someone else's vision of justice?

Rev. Elizabeth Ngyuen reminds us that, "Our faith teaches us two truths: That we are always enough; that the great circle of love casts no one out. And that we are responsible for bending our small piece of the arc, for finding our own... justice front lines. When we find our front lines, we find not only our hope, but we also find our most effective action."

Here's to hope, friends, and effective action. Let's bend our small piece of the arc together.

SO. Who gets to decide what justice looks like? Who is at the table? We might even ask, whose table is it?

Gay people, trans people, gender-fluid people, 2-spirited people, queer people, lesbians... People of Colour... Indigenous... Black people... women... the differently abled... people living in poverty. The ones who suffer injustice are the ones who know what justice looks like. Those with the lived experience are the only ones whose voices can help design the future in such a way that we truly can exist in a Beloved Community where all the tables are open and welcoming.

Those of us who are white, cis-gendered, straight, financially secure, and able bodied would do well to sit at other tables. Otherwise, as Melinda Gates suggests, we continue to bake bias into the system. We make assumptions about what justice and equality look like. We suppose that everyone is asking to have the life that we have.

We've been down this path before, right? In white colonialist history, there's been a supreme assumption that what the white Euro-Centric world deems desirable is what everyone desires. Explorers, conquerors, and settlers came believing in their superiority. Repeated attempts were made to take care of the "Indian Problem" ...if not by genocide, then by assimilation. Make them as white as possible.

And the straight world has done the same thing... made same-gender sexual relationship illegal, institutionalized those who were deemed depraved, and worked to 'pray the gay away'. Around the world, and here in Peterborough, violence is done to LGBTQ2S people daily simply because they are seen to be a threat to 'normalcy' ... whatever that is. And so perhaps it is left up to those of us who have lived at the center to expand our own ideas of 'normalcy' to include all of creation, in all of its beautiful and marvelous diversity. Difference is no threat. Diversity is a gift and a blessing, a reality to be embraced.

Who gets to decide what justice looks like? Not me. Not me all by myself. Not any of us all by ourselves. Not me without a whole lot of listening and consultation. Not me, not without ongoing flexibility and openness to learning and parking my assumptions before sitting down at any table.

I am listening. Here are more of Elizabeth Nguyen's words:¹³

¹³ <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/prayer/loving-arc>
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We do not know if this arc bends toward justice. The great test of our Unitarian Universalist faith is not whether we believe we can bend the arc, but how we are when the bending looks oh so differently from what we expected:

When we're met with swear words when we expected songs...

When our efforts feel frustrating and hopeless, when we expected to see outcomes.

When our people's bodies are dying in the streets and we have no idea how to be alright.

When our people's spirits are dying from the grinding violence of white supremacy...

When we've been in this work for 6 years or 6 decades and we look around at our congregation, our local police, our schools, our prisons and we have no idea what justice could look like.

And I would add...when we believe that Canada is the most progressive country in the world when it comes to LGBTQ2S rights, and then Stats Canada reports that in 2017, violent crimes targeting sexual orientation account for a higher proportion of crimes than other types of hate crimes. And that this increase is largely the result of more incidents in Ontario.¹⁴

Nguyen says, as Rev. Kierstin already reminded us:

Our faith teaches us two truths: That we are always enough; that the great circle of love casts no one out. And that we are responsible for bending our small piece of the arc, for finding our own racial (and gender and sexuality) justice front lines. When we find our front lines, we find not only our hope, but we also find our most effective action.

Who gets to decide what justice looks like? Those whose tables are at the front lines. May we join humbly them there.

So be it.

READING *How to Discuss the Truth*¹⁵ ~ Mark L. Belletini

How to discuss the truth that some men love men,
and some women, women, and some, both...
with the children in the church school and church home?
Nonchalantly.
Without drum-rolls.
Without tip-toe preparations.
Without calculating and predicting to the nth degree.
With candor.
With open ears.
With unfailing tenderness.
With one foot in the Realm of God
and the other foot on that solid earth
made of the ashes of Radclyffe-Hall, Auden, DaVinci,
Emma Goldman, Susan B. Anthony and Mark De Wolfe.
With real hope in our purpose
and thanksgiving in our pulse.

¹⁴ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/181129/dq181129a-eng.htm>

¹⁵ <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/how-to-discuss-the-truth>

With the full iris of our living tradition in the eye.
Without using the inherited Augustinian scalpel
that splits flesh from spirit and pleasure from good.
Without homilies on toleration.
With the words “some of us” and not the words “them” and “they.”
With as much heart as intellect.
Without embarrassment.
With stories and examples as wonderful as a tale by Seuss.
With rhapsodies on the glories of friendship.
With gladness for uncertainties.
With joy.

* **CLOSING WORDS** *Our Common Life Is Enriched*¹⁶ (adapted) ~ Religious Institute

Grateful for the gift of our lives and the gift of other people in our lives, and affirming that each of us is created with dignity and worth, we are called to love one another.

Honouring the many ways that people live and love, we affirm that our common life is enriched by the lives of queer, transgender, bisexual, lesbian, gender-fluid and gay people.

True justice flourishes when all people can live and flourish.

May we work to build a world where all people are celebrated and loved.

Go, celebrating diversity as a blessing that enriches us all.

[Because it is!]

Amen.

EXTINGUISHING THE FLAME

¹⁶ <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/responsive-reading/our-common-life-enriched>
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