

Sunday, July 1 2018 – UUCM
America Was Never Discovered, Merely Detected

Responsive Reading

Give us a peace equal to the war

*'Or else our souls will be unsatisfied,
And we will wonder what we have fought for
And why the many died.'*

Give us a peace accepting every challenge --

*'The challenge of the poor, the black, of all denied,
The challenge of the vast colonial world
That long has had so little justice by its side.'*

Give us a peace that dares us to be wise.

'Give us a peace that dares us to be strong.'

Give us a peace that dares us still uphold

'Throughout the peace our battle against wrong'

Give us a peace that is not cheaply used,

'A peace that is no clever scheme,'

A people's peace for which all can enthuse,

'A peace that brings reality to our dream.'

2 Corinthians 3:1-6 (NRSV)

"Ministers of the New Covenant"

Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Surely we do not need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you, do we? You yourselves are our letter, written on our [a] hearts, to be known and read by all; ... written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

Such is the confidence that we have.... Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Other readings:

“You have to have a habitual vision of greatness ... you have to believe in the fact that you will refuse to settle for mediocrity. You won't confuse your financial security with your personal integrity, you won't confuse your success with your greatness or your prosperity with your magnanimity ... believe in fact that living is connected to giving.” — Cornel West

Give us a peace that will produce great schools --
As the war produced great armament,
A peace that will wipe out our slums --
As war wiped out our foes on evil bent.

Give us a peace that will enlist
A mighty army serving human kind,
Not just an army geared to kill,
But trained to help the living mind.
An army trained to shape our common good
And bring about a world of brotherhood.

"Discover America" by Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael

America, America, God shed his grace on thee.

In the middle of the country -
I saw lighting strike -
So close I could hear the electric cry -
In Kansas -
Flat as beaten steel -
Flat as pulp -
Electric tears -
The anguish of empty space -
And that electric strike -
Was it God's demolition -
Raging penance from on high.
Tearing Kansas sky -

...I swear I will not dishonor
My soul with hatred.

...Raging penance from on high.
A Mount Olympus Outcry -

Spilling holy retribution -
America is so, so far from beautiful -
I'd flatten her in my eye -
I swear - so, so far from beautiful -
Her trajectory is demolition -
Exceptional expansion -
Exceptionally white - on black bodies -
On red soil. On Chinese ties -
In Japanese detention -
In the fear of miscegenation -
In Mexican prevention -
In war unending.

...I swear.
I will not dishonor my soul with hatred.

But -
Her history was detention -
Restriction - Jewish boat rejection -
Company store manipulation -
Her system was repression -
Heteronormative expectation -
Women's votes, black segregation -
Hijab hatred -
Her infatuation was oppression -
Klu Klux, Nationalistic Expansion -
Environmental desecration -

I swear. So, so, so far from beautiful.

And bolts of demolition -
On the flat pulp of a native land -
Where buffalo roamed -
And the skies were not cloudy all day -
Electric strike -
Tears - Tears through the blind -
And I want Zeus to pummel her -
Electric retribution for my national expansion -
I swear, I will not dishonor my soul with hatred.

America, america...

You have not yet, not yet been discovered -
Desecrated, dishonored, disinherited -
You have not yet, not yet been discovered.

I will not dishonor my soul, your soul with hatred.
For the soil of your soil is sacred -
Freed from our complicity it's fated -
That America lives in lives she created -
Still - In lives she in her unknowing, unyielding, unrelenting -
Denial - Still
Still she, still she created -

My father fore is not Jefferson -
America doesn't live in his duplicity -
She shone in the shadow that Lincoln threw -

In the paths Tubman crawled -
In the ache Baker sang -
And she echoed off the Mountain Martin climbed -
These are the fore - fathers, mothers, kin,
These are the fore - fathers, mothers, kin,
Of a yet undiscovered land -
A land Ali rolled punches for -
And Robinson ran bases toward -
Stowe wrote for, Parker prayed for -
Owens ran for, Goldman spoke for -
Parents of an undiscovered land I slam for -
That you ache for - That Truth fought for,
An America behind bars that Cash sang for,
That Ruby Bridges walked for,
That Rustin loved for,
And Riviera marched for,
That Anzaldua broke for,
and Velazquez sat for,
That Trasca wrote for,
That Homeboy stood for,
That Schwerner died for,
That Liuzzo died for,
That Milk died for,
That Evers died for.

A yet undiscovered land -
That these bled for -

I will not.

I will not dishonor their souls with my hatred -

Their souls, are this soil,
Their soil... with my hatred -
America yet undiscovered -
Undiscovered country -
That Undiscovered County -
Birthing souls of unimaginable magnanimity -
That makes us bear our ills -
Illuminate them bleak and beautiful -
Conscience like a lighting strike -
Illuminated bleak and beautiful -
And... And God...
God shed her grace on thee.

Sermon Start

The Letter is death dealing, but the spirit gives life

Shall we gather at the river?

I swear I will not dishonor my soul with hatred

*We gather in this sanctuary, daring to invoke the name of
the holy to assuage our fears and show us a way –*

a way where there seems to be no way?

In the name of love, what is going on in our nation and in
our culture?

~ This first service in July always comes right after the Unitarian Universalist Association has held its annual *General Assembly*, where we exercise our fifth principle, honoring the democratic process; *our way of doing church* – *democratic polity* – *was the seed that blossomed into American democracy.*

How a people is governed is a vital avenue for theological investigation

Today's sermon title comes from Oscar Wilde, who in his cheeky way, wrote, "Perhaps America was never discovered, merely "detected"?" –

America is indeed not discovered but it is made – co-created by every one of us every day.

Sometimes what we are co-creating is something new.

Sometimes we *think* it is new, but what we are doing is merely putting in place a new boss - same as the old boss.

Sometimes what we co-create seems like it is heading towards a promised land of inclusion and diversity;

sometimes we witness a turning back to what most here would regard as darker times.

And so we gather today, looking towards Independence Day, many of us feeling the America we helped to co-create is being threatened, altered in ways we find unacceptable.

Let us admit our concern – even our sorrow and despair. Feel that sorrow completely; one cannot reach the mountaintop without a long trudge through the rough valley.

We are sensing that things we value deeply are endangered. That is worthy of our time and emotional engagement.

Don't rush past the lament. "I can't, keep from crying"

It is the lament that will assure that we remember, re-focus, so when we can look up with hope to restore and amplify the values upon which human thriving is contingent, the memory of the pain we feel today will fuel our return, restoring the kingdom of truth as we understand it.

We wonder, what America are we co-creating right now?

One might say our nation is allowing itself to forget hard-won lessons of the past – lessons on international cooperation, against greed, and the danger of fascism, lessons paid for with millions of lives.

Some say the burden of being the world's #1 superpower has worn away America's resolve to remain central to world peace and order.

Have we become greedy? Some foolishly believe we could have done better all along without some of the international institutions that tried to prevent the world from falling into World War – NATO, The United Nations, even the G-7.

Far from perfect, these institutions kept armed conflict from consuming the globe during the Nuclear Age.

Many seem willing to trade that old dance of compromise for a different kind of attitude towards the world.

We are encouraged to be motivated by greed instead of compassion, to embrace nationalism instead of the wider notion that we are all part of the same human race.

And our own institutions, like the Senate and the Supreme Court, seem to be licensing division, ignoring the higher

truth that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few or the one.

I criticize this new so-called ethic not because I say so, but because the world's great religious teachers say so.

Consider what is happening in the last few weeks that directly opposes major ethical teachings;

Family separations at our borders; our immigration policy contradicts what the Judeo-Christian Bible says more than one hundred times in various ways – *“be kind to the stranger for you were once a stranger in the land of Egypt.”*

We have watched children used as tools in a cynical ploy for political gain; how do we see that as anything but an act of evil?

“Be kind to the widow, the poor, the sick, the orphan,” intones the world's religious scriptures.

Even the Southern Baptist Convention, not known for its progressivism, passed a resolution this Spring, “calling for immigration reform that maintains “the priority of family unity.”

Their measure calls for providing a pathway to legal status for undocumented immigrants now living in the country.

It passed on a near unanimous vote of the thousands of delegates in the room.

“We declare that any form of nativism, mistreatment, or exploitation is inconsistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ,” the resolution said.

This is coming from the very people who put the current regime in power.

We saw this week another Supreme Court decision that attacked and diminished workers rights.

And we also saw perhaps the most confounding decision in decades in the decision to affirm an indefinite travel ban on some majority Muslim countries.

For this decision I turn us towards the Bible as well as American Jurisprudence.

First – American Supreme Court Precedent

In our legal system one has to have compelling evidence, the effects of new legislation, a big change in culture or a constitutional amendment to overturn earlier rulings.

This is why a really bad court decision is dangerous – it can take a century to undo.

In her bold dissent to this decision, Sonia Sotomayor decided Tuesday to read her dissent aloud during the session – this rarely happens.

Sotomayor did this to send a message to the other justices and to the nation that the decision made was out of bounds with current legal theory, and even endangered setting a course for legal segregation.

Sotomayor cited the case known as *Korematsu*.

She drew parallels between this decision and [Korematsu v. United States](#), the 1944 ruling that upheld the detention of Japanese-Americans during World War II.

“As here, the government invoked an ill-defined national security threat to justify an exclusionary policy of sweeping proportion,” she said. “As here, the exclusion was rooted in dangerous stereotypes about ... a particular group’s

supposed inability to assimilate and desire to harm the United States.”

Justice Sotomayor concludes, “the court redeploys the same dangerous logic underlying *Korematsu* and merely replaces one ‘gravely wrong’ decision with another.”

Justice Sotomayor “remained resolute . . ., condemning the ban as “harrowing” and “motivated by hostility and animus toward the Muslim faith.”¹

She proceeded to read into the record dozens of public statements by the President that made it clear why he wanted this ban – religious bigotry.

Indeed, every other court that heard heard this same evidence found it was clear from the president’s statements that this ban had little to do with national security and everything to do with fulfilling a campaign promise to ban people of a certain faith from entry into our nation.

¹ From <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/26/us/sonia-sotomayor-dissent-travel-ban.html>

The majority's clinical defense of the Muslim Travel Ban cited the president's executive authority, something Kennedy and the other conservatives had frequently sought to check.

In so doing they made the mistake the Apostle Paul warns about in our reading from 2 Corinthians 3.

You've all heard of the famous reading from First Corinthians 13 "Love is patient, love is kind, ..." The one usually read at weddings?

Paul did not write this for a wedding – he wrote it for a congregation that was fighting one another; let's say they did not heed his call for love and peace, so he wrote a Second letter:

"The letter of the law is death dealing –the spirit gives life."

Paul wrote this because the church in Corinth was in deep conflict, and they were using the law as a cudgel against one another instead of acting out of something greater, the spirit of love.

Paul's injunction is meant to remind us that those in power should look beyond technical justifications and instead consider the broader impact and social consequences.

With this awful ruling the SCOTUS has effectively affirmed the first racial/religious ban on entry to the United States since the lifting of such quotas in the 1960's under President Johnson.

We were handed a focus on the fine print, letters that are death-dealing, and we are right to mourn.

You see, we thought we understood the progress and advance of American Liberty.

Many of us grew up honoring as scripture proclamations in our nation's founding documents; what Rev Forrest Church called "America's civic religion."

These words mean a lot to us.

Our Civic Religion is best encapsulated in the Declaration of Independence – "*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all ~~men~~ are created equal, that they are endowed by*

their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

These recent court rulings against workers, immigrants and Islam fail to live up to those ideals.

Religious liberty was the very reason this nation was founded – freedom of and freedom from religion.

This is why it was the subject of the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights.

Mormons and Catholics, Lutherans and Jews, Unitarians and Muslims – all are endowed by our creator with rights inalienable, meaning no governmental power is ever justified in taking those rights away.

These rights come from the almighty – no person can rightly take away what God graciously gives.

Here is what we can do now in light of our mourning.

Seek out our Muslim neighbors, family and co-workers.

Let them know they can count on us to stand up for them;

Show up and defend them if they need us

Any undocumented people you know, the same – let them know we are people they can count on.

Reach out to any black folks you know, work with, have in your family; white nationalism is afoot and emboldened.

Ask them how best to be of support – how best to serve the good with your witness, power and privilege – and follow that advice.

Tell them this is not acceptable – share that there are entire communities like this one dedicated to their liberty.

And ~ if you can bear with me – I invite you to share time with those in your circles who may actually think the last few months have been good for America.

Unless it is unsafe to be around them, do not cut them off.

Don't further shred our social covenant by denying them table service, or peace of mind at a movie or gas station.

Stay in relationship, be kind, and witness to the truth – calmly, simply proclaim our values:

Be kind to the stranger; protect the poor, the widow, the orphan, the sick, the elderly; migration from misery and violence is not a crime; women are in charge of their bodies
Remind them of their best selves, of America's best self.

To help you start that conversation, I challenge you to wear an American Flag pin. [refer to baskets]

We all cannot do this – but try, sharing your dreams of a nation that honors all manifestations of humanity – regardless of passport, religion, whom one loves, what one calls holy ...

The way we establish justice is inseparable from the justice we establish; it is not alright to use the same destructive, death-dealing methods and tactics used by those who wish to shrink the promise and protection of America.

This week, claim the America you know is and should be.

Act the way we wish those who oppose us would act:

With love, grace, decency and invitation.

To sustain you, find and revel in your joy; play; sleep; eat with friends; and spend time feeling what moves through

you.

Yet, know a new paradigm begs our invention

Yes, it seems our institutions have failed us, like we could be legitimating the worst inhumanity ~ racism.

We are not there yet, still we prepare with prayer and song, deed and sweat, care and wisdom, embodied community

I leave you with this question –

By definition, Are *we* now the conservatives?

Is it not we who stand up and say “Do Not Change This!”?

Singing of the expansive inclusion of multi-ethnic

humanity, we mean a given upon which the entire system is built – human dignity is inalienable.

It is unholy to stray from a wide embrace of the entire human family, regardless of border, love, prayer, Party, posture or pain.

Our liberty begins at birth – nay at the dawn of time itself; our liberty ends where we impose on another’s liberty ...

We have shown, with a majority of our neighbors and fellow citizens in most states, certainly here in New Jersey, that we will honor these rights, these rock-ribbed truths. How must we defend these inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness?

One answer is - Do nothing alone, especially here at the U. Our theme for next year is Connections – within, without, among, between.

Everything we put our energy behind should be co-sponsored; no group committee, team, board, group should act alone.

Model the collaboration that is the remedy to tyranny and division in all we do, say, plan and champion

We are one another's accomplices for the journey; find your grateful heart and devote yourself to our mission

Are we now the conservatives?

The guardians of truth, demanding loving minds and wise hearts rule our days, ancient ideals upheld?

We are the ones proclaiming the most precious innovations
of our republic – freedom of religion, speech, press,
We are Champions of the advance of restorative justice.
We are those who Care for one another without wondering
who deserves our care ...

I challenge you to wear your flag pin, and inspire folks with
your telling of the America that is and should be

May we protect defend and preserve the values that form
the best of our national promise, may the better angels of
our nature sing songs of beauty and nourishment through
our words and deeds, and may we know that this America,
that we co-create together – this is your land, my land; as
we show our love for one another in new ways every day.

HYMN – This Land is Your Land

Let us sing this great old tune from Woody Guthrie ...

In his day Woody Guthrie taught that music can conquer
fascism.

Here's praying that power has grown over the years ...

Benediction

The Letter is death dealing, but the spirit gives life

I swear I will not dishonor my soul with hatred

*Shall we gather at the river? America, God Shed thy grace
upon thee, so Always remember We are united by a love
that won't let us go, let us down or let us off the hook*

This Land Is Your Land

Woody Guthrie

A D

G D
This land is your land, and this land is my land

A D D7
From California, to the New York Island

G D
From the Redwood Forest, to the Gulf stream waters,
A D
this land was made for you and me

G D
As I was walking a ribbon of highway

A D D7
I saw above me an endless skyway

G D
I saw below me a golden valley

A D
This land was made for you and me

G D
This land is your land, and this land is my land

A D D7
From California, to the New York Island

G D
From the Redwood Forest, to the Gulf stream waters,
A D
this land was made for you and me

G D
I've roamed and rambled and I've followed my footsteps

A D D7
To the sparkling sands of her diamond deserts

G D
And all around me a voice was sounding

A D
This land was made for you and me

G **D**
This land is your land, and this land is my land
A **D** **D7**
From California, to the New York Island
G **D**
From the Redwood Forest, to the Gulf stream waters,
A **D**
this land was made for you and me

G **D**
The sun comes shining as I was strolling
A **D** **D7**
The wheat fields waving and the dust clouds rolling
G **D**
The fog was lifting a voice come chanting
A **D**
This land was made for you and me

G **D**
This land is your land, and this land is my land
A **D** **D7**
From California, to the New York Island
G **D**
From the Redwood Forest, to the Gulf stream waters,
A **D**
this land was made for you and me

G **D**
As I was walkin' - I saw a sign there
A **D** **D7**
And that sign said - no tress passin'
G **D**
But on the other side it didn't say nothin!
A **D**
Now that side was made for you and me!

G **D**
This land is your land, and this land is my land

A **D** **D7**
From California, to the New York Island

G **D**
From the Redwood Forest, to the Gulf stream waters,

A **D**
this land was made for you and me

G **D**
In the squares of the city - In the shadow of the steeple

A **D** **D7**
Near the relief office - I see my people

G **D**
And some are grumblin' and some are wonderin'

A **D**
If this land's still made for you and me.

G **D**
This land is your land, and this land is my land

A **D** **D7**
From California, to the New York Island

G **D**
From the Redwood Forest, to the Gulf stream waters,

A **D**
this land was made for you and me

A **D**
this land was made for you and me