

**Order of Service  
May 6, 2018**

**Announcements before the service - Worship Associate. (Lois Remeikis)**

**Ringing of the Rin Gong - Worship Associate**

**Prelude: Getting to Know You From “The King and I” music by Richard Rodgers**

**Lighting of the Chalice** **by Samuel A Trumbore**

O light of life,  
Be kindled again in our hearts  
As we meet together this morning  
To celebrate the joy of human community  
Seeking a wholeness that extends beyond ourselves.

\* **Hymn** #360 Here We Have Gathered

**Opening Words and Greeting** **by Krista Taves**

Whether you have come here with heart full or heart empty, with spirits high or low, rested or tired, hopeful or despairing,  
Whether we have come here out of habit, conviction, loneliness, or curiosity,  
You belong here because you are here, and all that you have and all that you are is welcome here.  
This morning we are, together, the heartbeat of this congregation.

**Welcome – Worship Associate**

**Story for All Ages**

This is my good friend Fudgie Bear, who lives in a cave in the forests of Baraboo with his Mama Bear and Papa Bear, and also his Grandpa Bear, and his brother and sister, Arabica and Espresso.

Well, the long winter has finally ended, and the snow has melted, and the land around us is decorated again with green grass and green leaves and flowers. The oldest bear in

Fudgie Bear’s community decided that it was a good time to have a big picnic to celebrate the changing of the seasons. She called together all of the bear families to help her plan the event. “I will cook a wonderful feast,” she said, “if each of you will bring a jug of your very best apple cider for us all to drink.” The bears agreed, “of course, of course; each of us will do our part.”

But as soon as they got home, Papa Bear was already angry at himself for agreeing to give away a whole jug of delicious apple cider. He loved cider, and it seemed that there was never enough of it by the end of winter. “There must be another way,” he thought, and he sat down in the shade to think of a plan. Soon, he was snoring away.

But when he woke, a very sneaky idea had come to Papa Bear. He said to himself, “Everyone else will also bring jugs of cider, and we will pour it all together into a great bowl for everyone to serve themselves from. No one would notice if I filled my jug with water instead; it would just get mixed in with the rest of the juice, and then I can keep our cider all for myself.”

And so, the day of the picnic came, bright and sunny, and everyone dressed up in their good clothes to get ready for the feast. Papa Bear secretly went to the spring to fill their jug with water, which he was going to pour into the cider at the party. Fudgie Bear helped by carrying the heavy jug very carefully as they walked to the picnic area. Just as Papa Bear thought, everyone was pouring their jugs together into a great bowl for everyone to drink from.

First there was dancing and entertainment, and the smell of the food was wonderful – everyone was in such a good mood to be together on such a beautiful day, and bears get very hungry after the long winter. Then a loud bell was rung, and everyone found a place to sit. Everyone’s cups were filled from the bowl of cider, and they lifted their cups together to drink. It was a warm day and everyone was thirsty from so much fun and eager to taste the sweet cider, but what do you think they tasted instead?

It was nothing but water! It turns out that *every* family had filled their jug with water instead of cider, each of them thinking that just one jug wouldn’t be noticed. They were so embarrassed, but they kept drinking from their cups as if it were the sweetest juice they had ever tasted.

And that day, the community of bears had a new saying: “If you want drink the sweet juice, you must be willing to give some also.”

*Children are sung out with:*

For you shall go out in joy (X2)

And come back in peace (X2)

Blessed be

### **Offering Words –Worship Associate**

**Offertory Music- Brother James Air arranged Searle Wright**

### **Joys and Concerns – Worship Associate**

**First Reading** adapted from “How We Get Hooked and How We Get Unhooked” by Pema Chödrön

Someone criticizes you. They criticize your work or your appearance or your child. At moments like that, what is it you feel?

The Tibetan word for this is *shenpa*. It is usually translated “attachment,” but a more descriptive translation might be “hooked.” When *shenpa* hooks us, we’re likely to get stuck. At the subtlest level, we feel a tightening, a tensing, a sense of closing down. Then we feel ourselves withdrawing, not wanting to be where we are. That’s the hooked quality. That tight feeling has the power to hook us into self-criticism, blame, anger, jealousy, and other emotions which lead to words and actions that end up poisoning us.

*Shenpa* thrives on the underlying insecurity of living in a world that is always changing. We all want some kind of relief from that unease, so we turn to what we enjoy -- food, alcohol, drugs, sex, work, or shopping. In moderation what we enjoy might be very delightful. But when we empower it with the idea that it will bring us comfort, that it will remove our unease, we get hooked. It doesn’t necessarily have to involve consumption; it can be saying mean things, or approaching everything with a critical mind. That’s a major hook. Something triggers an old pattern we’d rather not feel, and we tighten up and get hooked into criticizing or complaining.

When we talk about refraining from *shenpa*, we're not talking about trying to get rid of it; we're talking about trying to see the *shenpa* clearly and experiencing it. If we can see *shenpa* just as we're starting to close down, when we feel the tightening, there's the possibility of catching the urge to do the habitual thing, and *not doing it*. When we feel the tightening, somehow we have to know how to open up the space without getting hooked into our habitual pattern.

Learning to recognize *shenpa* teaches us the meaning of not being attached. All we wanted to do was not feel our uneasiness. But when we do this we never get to the root of this practice. The root is experiencing the itch as well as the urge to scratch, and then not acting it out. We see how we get hooked and how we get swept along by the momentum, and we realize that the secret is -- don't bite that hook.

## **Meditation**

The philosophy of Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl has been summed up as this: "Between a stimulus and our response to it, there is a moment where we can pause. In that space lies our freedom and our power to choose a response. In this response lies our growth and our happiness."

Breathing and relaxing, I invite you to find in your life some small annoyance or provocation, not so big that it's overwhelming, but just a minor one. Perhaps it's a really challenging person at work, or something a member of your family does that frustrates you. Continuing to breathe while remembering this encounter, what reaction do you find typically arises in you? Defensiveness, impatience, anger, fear? Rather than reacting immediately, imagine yourself taking just a moment before responding, breathing into your emotion and feeling it loosen its hold on you, feeling it weaken and dissolve. Now imagine responding with your best self, mindful of this annoyance but no longer controlled by the emotions of the moment. Hold on to this feeling of strength and clarity, for it will be with you when you're faced with the moment again.

Breathing and relaxed, I invite you back to this space and this beloved community of seekers, that we might move forward together.



**Second Reading** “I Want to Be with People” by Dana Worsnop

Often people say that they love coming to a place with so many like-minded people. I know just what they are getting at -- and I know that they aren't getting it quite right.

I don't want to be with a bunch of people who think just like me.

I want to be in a beloved community where I don't have to think like everyone else to be loved, to be eligible for salvation.

I want to be with people who value compassion, justice, love and truth, though they have different thoughts and opinions about all sorts of things.

I want to be with independent-minded people of good heart.

I want to be with people who have many names and no name at all for God.

I want to be with people who see in me goodness and dignity, who also see my failings and foibles, and who still love me.

I want to be with people who feel their inter-connection with all existence and let it guide their footfalls upon the earth.

I want to be with people who see life as a paradox and don't always rush to resolve it.

I want to be with people who are willing to walk the tight rope that is life and who will hold my hand as I walk mine.

I want to be with people who let church call them into a different way of being in the world.

I want to be with people who support, encourage and even challenge each other to higher and more ethical living.

I want to be with people who inspire one another to follow the call of the spirit.

I want to be with people who covenant to be honest, engaged and kind, who strive to keep their promises and hold me to the promises I make.

I want to be with people who give of themselves, who share their hearts and minds and gifts.

I want to be with people who know that human community is often warm and generous, sometimes challenging and almost always a grand adventure.

In short, I want to be with people like you.

**Hymn** #145 As Tranquil Streams

## **Sermon – All in the Family: Systems in Pursuit of Beloved Community**

When I heard that the topic for this month would be Beloved Community, of course as a historian my inclination was immediately to wonder about its backstory: how did older religious concepts become the idea of Beloved Community we have today? And, at the heart of this history is the question: What's the point of a religious or spiritual community? What are we here to do?

The ancient Hebrews of the Old Testament held the idea that God had created Earth and Heaven in a reasonable, purposeful arrangement. Humanity's job therefore was to live in harmony with this divine plan, an idea that is still very much alive in modern Judaism. As Christianity emerged from the collision and combination of Hebrew religion and Greek philosophy, early leaders struggled to hold these two very different cultural worldviews together. Jesus addresses this in the New Testament by saying that righteousness is not about what we eat and drink or how we dress, but about our mental or spiritual state. "For indeed," he said, "the kingdom of God is *within* you." Rather than focusing on right action, Christianity became the one major world religion that makes *right belief* its condition for membership.

However, within Unitarianism and Universalism, this movement's religious ancestors, the goal of religion was expressed in increasingly inclusive ways. Our religious forebears resented the oppressiveness of church creeds, and they cast their vision in ways that affirmed each seeker's personal conscience and individual spiritual path.

Because this is so different from how most American believers understand religion, it's worth noting that we are often asked, why do you even bother coming together? One answer might be, because we're better people together. In spite of our nervousness about conformity and oppressive religion, we still recognize that humans thrive best when we get to know one another and trust one another. We thrive best when we learn what inspires each other, what brings each other joy, and what brings each other pain. We

thrive best when we strive together to translate our individual experiences and visions into communities of shared action.

With this conviction in mind, perhaps it's not surprising that the idea of Beloved Community has found so much favor in Unitarian Universalist circles. American philosopher Josiah Royce coined the phrase in the early 20th century, but it was decades later, when Martin Luther King wove this concept into his sermons and speeches, that we were really drawn to it. He articulated a love which would bring about miracles in the human heart, and encouraged others not only to win freedom for themselves, but to appeal to the heart and conscience in others so that they too would be won over. For King and his followers, Beloved Community was the most powerful remedy for what he called the Triple Evils of Poverty, Racism, and Militarism. And he was convinced that our religious communities were the places most likely to bring about this change of awareness and change of heart in the American people.

In this 50th anniversary year of King's assassination, I think we have to admit that his dream of creating the Beloved Community among America's divided peoples has been at best a partial success. For a relatively simple concept, the Beloved Community has been surprisingly difficult to create. Despite being better together, it is often difficult to be together – but why should this ideal be so hard for us? I'm not going to try to give all the answers, since we have a whole month to explore this rich topic together, but I want to focus this morning on one possible angle.

As a way of getting into this topic, I want to share with you what's been going on in my life. Since I saw you last in February, I've been diagnosed with a life-threatening disease. The good news is that it's being successfully treated by a wonderful medical team and, although I'll always have to be on the watch for it, I'm recovering well with the help of a lot of new medications and only a minor bit of surgery.

If I hadn't gotten this treatment, the condition would have been fatal, but my doctor reassured me that my life will not likely be shortened at all. In fact, she said, what will

much more likely kill me is one of the diseases that runs in my family – high blood pressure, prostate cancer, diabetes. In the midst of my relief, I have to confess that part of me was actually arguing, “Wait a minute – that’s not fair that I’ll probably die of something that I’m inheriting from *other* people!”

This also got me thinking about the other qualities I’ve acquired from my family without my consent – my restlessness, impatience, and temper; my tendency to over-intellectualize; and my argumentativeness. I didn’t develop these traits because I wanted them, or because anyone told me to adopt them, but because in the first 18 years of my life, they were my family’s “normal.” How we handled conflict, how we handled sadness, how we expressed anger (or didn’t), how we treated other people – all of these familiar, comfortable responses come so naturally to me, not because anyone ever forced them on me, but because they were our “normal”.

Although I didn’t choose any of these things, they are mine nevertheless, and I’d be a fool to think otherwise. And I’m the one who has the most power to decide how they impact my life.

All of this has reminded me that regardless of how much we view ourselves as individuals, we are still powerfully and subtly formed and guided by the larger system.

It’s no secret that many people realize at one point or another in their adulthood that they’ve become one of their parents, and some have recognized that they have married essentially a copy of one of their parents. Again, all of this happens without us consciously choosing to do so, but merely seeking roles and relationships that are familiar and comfortable, even if some of them also turn out to be deeply unhealthy.

An entire field of study emerged in the 1960s, as psychologists saw that our struggles aren’t contained only within ourselves, but are also preserved in the web of relationships we occupy with those around us. This discipline came to be known as family systems, because most of us are influenced throughout our lives by the family connections that

were the “normal” during our childhood. A few decades later, a rabbi and therapist named Edwin Friedman recognized that congregations could also be interpreted as family systems. That is, the same principles that exert so much invisible force on us in our families also seem to influence how we participate in communities like this one. And each of us brings to our congregation the various versions of “normal” that we absorbed in our family, so you can imagine how easily misunderstanding and friction arise. Friedman’s 1985 book *Generation to Generation* is on practically every minister’s shelf, and I can’t even count the number of times a colleague wearily remarked to me, “I was just reminded again today that Friedman was right.”

What Friedman and others have helped us learn about human systems is this:

First, although we are accustomed to thinking of ourselves as individuals first, we are guided with surprising force by the relationships that were part of our earliest formation. And this influence can also reach across the generations – we can continue to act out patterns of responses and roles that we inherited from people who are no longer alive. The reverberations from an alcoholic great-grandfather, for example, can continue to cause dysfunction in the family generations later, long after he had died and others had unknowingly stepped in to fill his role.

Second, *changes* introduce anxiety into a system. When a major crisis strikes a family, such as a death or serious disease, the familiar roles and patterns are threatened, and emotions and bad behaviors are likely to run high. Changes that we think of as good, too, create this anxiety – winning the lottery, having a baby, moving a congregation into a new building. If you want to see an unvarnished display of all of the roles and tensions in a family system, come to a wedding... or, more precisely, to the wedding rehearsal, where no one’s putting on their best face for an audience.

Third, systems will *resist* this anxiety and change, almost at any cost. Families and congregations and communities will try to return to their accustomed state, often without any of their members even realizing that it’s happening. Some of you may remember the

outstanding 1980 movie *Ordinary People*, which continues to be one of the best film portrayals of family systems. After the elder son in an affluent family dies in a boating accident, which his younger brother survived, their family struggles to accommodate the tragedy. Each member reacts by trying to remain in their accustomed role, with the father stuck as peacekeeper, the mother stuck in idolizing her dead son, and the younger son hospitalized, unable to make sense of his family's pressures on him. The movie concludes with an uncharacteristically realistic ending – the mother lashes out at the others in her efforts to force things back to “normal,” and she ultimately leaves the family rather than change.

Our culture's emphasis on individualism leads us to look for understanding in the wrong places – for example, in the movie *Ordinary People*, others tried to diagnose the surviving son as the problem, because he was the one showing symptoms and was hospitalized. Unitarian Universalism is especially entrenched in viewing situations in terms of the individual, and as Angela Davis warns us in the quote on our order of service, this repeatedly gets in the way of our collective liberation.

What do I hope that the insights of systems theory will contribute to this month's worship topic? We are powerfully shaped by systems of relationships from our past and present, but the place where we can exert the most control over our world is with our selves. What we *can* do to shift the system toward Beloved Community is refuse to react in the same old ways when change brings anxiety.

This requires that we *not* get hooked into our lifelong habit of reacting, but pause, take a breath, acknowledge the hook, and not bite it. Our first reading this morning by the Buddhist nun Pema Chödrön is without a doubt the most important article I have read in the past year, and she explains how this practice has helped many of us to live more in the spirit of Beloved Community.

When I was working as a hospital chaplain as part of my ministerial training, the goal was a similar one -- to simply *be present* with our patients. The hook we had to watch out

for was the temptation to “fix” things: the patient’s anger toward their doctors or their family, their cries of pain or fear, their nervousness about having a religious professional visit them. Our job was simply to be with them and demonstrate how to be with themselves, present with all of their emotion and anxiety without rushing in to extinguish them, and it was one of the hardest lessons I’ve ever had to learn.

I was also able to practice not being hooked over Christmas as I visited with my relatives back in Missouri, every one of them likely to trigger some of my old emotional habits and unhelpful reactions. But I had just read Pema Chödrön’s article a week before, and I was able to get through the entire visit simply by realizing when others were trying to push me into an old role, and refusing to be drawn into conflicts that no longer mattered to me. It was the best visit I had had in years.

The work of building Beloved Community will always introduce change, and our task is not to flee into old reactions of anxiety and defensiveness.

I can offer you no greater vision than this, from the Unitarian Universalist Association’s “Be the Love” program:

Beloved Community is honored and lived into when:

- we participate with each other through experiences of loss, longing, pain, joy, and wonder;
- we share the truth about our lives and know that our truth is heard and understood;
- we receive each person as a gift and make a place for them;
- we give expression to our feelings and gratefully receive others’ expression of theirs;
- we carefully work through knots of confusion and disagreement in order to learn what we could never know alone.

We are striving to build lives of connection, creativity, joyfulness, vitality, and deep engagement with Life. When we are engaged in this work, we experience Beloved Community.

May this vision guide your minds and hearts and hands, that we all take part in creating a world more beautiful and just, within us and around us. May it be so.

**Polylogue (If desired and there is time)**

**Extinguishing the chalice** words by Rev. Kathy A. Huff (adapted)

**Hymn** #298 Wake Now My Senses

**Benediction – adapted from Erika Hewitt**

Whether you're here because Lake Country is part of your Sunday routine or this morning you simply needed to reach out to others, we gather to proclaim that we belong to one another, and that others belong to us.

Broken hearts are welcome here.  
Anxious spirits are welcome here.  
Minds uncertain what to think.  
Stubborn habits that trip us up.  
Fragile, shell-shocked souls.

All are welcome here, not because this community will rush to fix them with easy solutions or promise the right way forward.

Rather, we offer something far more fragile, and far more powerful:  
our need to be together,

our need to connect with the Source that moves within us and among us,  
and our need to make one another a little bit braver and wiser  
before returning to the service of life.

May it be so.

**Postlude: Toccata Giocosa by Ian Hunt**