

**“Life Has Never Looked So Good”**  
**March 29, 2020**

*“Never know how much I love you, never know how much I care....” - Peggy Lee*

**Music for Gathering**

Recording by Shana Aisenberg

**Welcome**      Rev. Betsy Tabor

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

In two weeks, we have changed the way we live. Out of fear at first, but, more and more, it's love that's keeping us going. Love for each other and love of life. We'll go to great lengths to live. We might as well sing love songs to life, "I'll do anything for you, Life, anything, 'cuz you mean everything to me...." Before Co-vid-19, we never knew how much we loved life. We may as well sing with Peggy Lee: "Never know how much I love you, never know how much I care." (That one's aptly called "Fever.") And so a service about this life we love.

[Some of you have asked for orders of service. Every Zoom service is an experiment at this point, but know that we'll always start in an expansive spirit of welcome and gathering, all ages together. We'll go deeper with a quiet time of contemplation and prayer. We will sing and reflect on a theme – today's is "Life Has Never Looked So Good." Messages and homilies will run briefer than sermons, and we'll always invite a giving of gifts.] As for this service, we realized yesterday that it has lots of waltzes, so if you find your feet moving, feel free to get up and move....

In the spirit of creativity borne of necessity, let us join UUs everywhere, at home with our chalices, in kindling the flame.

In good times and in hard times we light this beacon of hope,  
sign of our quest for understanding and love.

**Centering**      “Hard Times Come Away No More”      Stephen Foster, 1854      (Shana)

**Opening Words**

We come together this morning to remind one another  
To rest for a moment on the forming edge of our lives  
To resist the headlong tumble in the next moment,  
Until we claim for ourselves awareness and gratitude,  
Taking the time to look into one another's faces

And see there communion: the reflection of our own eyes.  
 This house of laughter and silence, memory and hope,  
 is hallowed by our presence together. - UU Rev. Kathleen McTigue

**Hymn: GATHER THE SPIRIT** (singing along with a UUFES choir recording!)

### Shared Affirmation

**A Time for All Ages** Alice Posner/a.k.a. Lady Mildred

### Joys & Concerns

#### Meditation

We give thanks.  
 For this day, this time together, this breath.  
 We give thanks for neighbors - phone calls - for moments of peace amidst the heartbreak.  
 And we give thanks for memories of a simpler time, just weeks ago.  
 We are grateful for the wisdom that's coming to light in our lives  
 And helping us weather the storm.

[Lift up of joys and sorrows on chat page]

We pray for those battling this virus  
 In beds, in nursing facilities, and on the front lines in scrubs, ambulances and hospital tents.  
 We hold our elders in the light as they face weeks, maybe months  
 without hugs or any direct contact with loved ones....  
 We lift up those who are more vulnerable to illness at this time  
 to the forces of healing and renewal that we know by many names.

Let us breathe together.  
 May your life force within be strengthened.  
 May your spirit be calmed.  
 May your heart be at peace.  
 Blessed be. Amen.

#### Reading

“Next Time” by Joyce Sutphen

I'll know the names of all of the birds<sup>[SEP]</sup>  
 and flowers, and not only that, I'll<sup>[SEP]</sup>  
 tell you the name of the piano player<sup>[SEP]</sup>  
 I'm hearing right now on the kitchen<sup>[SEP]</sup>  
 radio, but I won't be in the kitchen.<sup>[SEP]</sup>

I'll be walking a street in<sup>[SEP]</sup>  
 New York or London, about<sup>[SEP]</sup>

to enter a coffee shop where people are reading or working on their laptops. They'll look up and smile.

Next time I won't waste my heart on anger; I won't care about being right. I'll be willing to be wrong about everything and to concentrate on giving myself away.

Next time, I'll rush up to people I love, look into their eyes, and kiss them, quick. I'll give everyone a poem I didn't write, one specially chosen for that person. They'll hold it up and see a new world. We'll sing the morning in,

and I will keep in touch with friends, writing long letters when I wake from a dream where they appear on the Orient Express. "Meet me in Istanbul," I'll say, and they will.

### Music

"The Cuckoo Waltz"

(Tammy and John Flanigan)

### Reflection

*Life Never Looked So Good*

Rev. Betsy

Next time, we think, we'll be more mindful, more appreciative, more loving. But right now? We are hurting. Afraid. Danger lurks in our houses, on our hands. It makes dear friends afraid of each other. In one moment we lovingly keep our distance, wanting to protect them lest we *have it*. And in the next moment *we* back away – what if *you* have it?

Fear stalks us, keeps us up at night. Fear for everyone we know and everyone else, too, fear for ourselves. Bad news feeds our anxious minds – our worries compounding as cases mount, as boomers see empty grocery shelves for the first time.

My mind keeps going back to the ordinariness of a couple of weeks ago. A friend's birthday dinner – all of us buzzing around the kitchen, each in charge of making a dish. Or the sandwich in the sun that warm week – two of us perched at a wobbly table, catching up after a long time. Nothing out of the ordinary at the time, but now these simple events feel precious.

Today, people are navigating birth and death, the great passages that bookend life, alone, no hand to hold. People near the end of life see their loved ones through a window, at best, or with a telephone held to the ear. Today's father and kids, not allowed in the hospital, leave town when the new baby comes. Strangers coach the mom, who then carries her newborn out into the world to quarantine.

Somewhere here, the line blurs between fear, a thing of the mind, and sadness, a thing of the heart. We are living with a deep sense of loss. We all know loss. Many of us have weathered health challenges, accidents, deaths, dashed dreams. We know what it is to lose life as we once knew it.

Today, we all are grieving. We have all lost that life we counted on. Just weeks ago we were complaining about the weather, squabbling with each other about who knows what, spending more time than we wanted to on our screens. Making plans and living without thinking too much about it.

Today that life has never looked so good – when we could decide whether to meet up, when we could visit Phyllis or Willie if only we could find the time, when we could go to a movie or unpack our groceries without a thought to safety.

Our hearts hurt. “When do I get my life back?” we ask – the life, come to think of it, that we love.

As for life [wrote Mary Oliver],  
I'm humbled,  
I'm without words  
sufficient to say

how it has been hard as flint,  
and soft as a spring pond....<sup>1</sup>

The ache that doesn't go away, “soft as a spring pond”? It isn't fear – it's love.

At a Zoom check-ins this week, we saw a painting by the late, loved Susan Forsman in memory of her cat, who lies lifeless on the canvas. In the top corner, tears fall from a woman's eyes, at first a stream that trickles, then a river that flows through the painting. The tears glisten in the light, sweet and sad and loving. Soft.

We are staying at home, forced there by fear, continuously vigilant. And...our lives now quieter, our calendars emptier, we are also strangely enlivened. We hear birds singing, see them in the air, nest-makings in their beaks. Buds are getting fat. Red. We savor hearing the voice, the laugh of an old friend. And we see, right now, live and in real time, dozens of dear faces – how extraordinary! Like Susan's river of loving tears, we live in a stream of love that flows within us, and between and around us.

We come now to a time of sharing. What little thing has filled you with gratitude? What sight or sound has surprised you and lifted your spirits? What, in the past weeks, has helped you see that “life has never looked so good”? Where for you does the stream of love flow? [Community sharing.]

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Oliver, “Little Afternoon at the Edge of Little Sister Pond”

A neighbor calls, offering to pick up groceries. She reports back – still no rice, no flour, no toilet paper! (singing) “You can’t always get what you want, you can’t always get what you want...but if you try sometime--you’ll get what you need!”

Next time, we’ll pay more attention. But right now, what *do* we need? And what shall we feed, the fearful mind or the loving heart? We’re home. We’re staying here. We want life. Let’s feed it.

We see the life force in back yards and woods, tender green sprouts pushing their way past soil and rock. To live. And grow. And thrive. Our hearts feel it all – the struggle and the love. It’s OK to find joy in this upside-down time. It’s OK to give each other permission to be allowed to feel love. Love for life. So may it be.

### **Call for the Offering**

It is time for the morning offering. Now more than ever, UUFES depends on this congregation to stay financially strong so that salaries and bills continue to be paid. We suggest a tall glass for your weekly offerings – every Sunday put in it a check, cash or an IOU. Keep it where you can see it, and let it remind you of UUFES’s place in your life.

Then, once a month, send a check off to UUFES. Thank you for giving generously. (Box 474, Tamworth 03886)

**Anthem**                      “My Own House”                      Scottish folk                      (Shana)

### **Closing Words**                      Betsy

The pundits prophesy about next time. Next time, when all this is a memory, what will humankind have learned? Next time, will humans remember how Mother Earth healed before our eyes in a matter of weeks? Next time, will we be able resist the temptation to go back to our old ways, or will we create a cleaner, calmer, quieter future? Time will tell.

What we do know right now is what grounds us today. We close with Mary Oliver’s poem, “When I Am Among Trees”:

When I am among the trees,  
especially the willows and the honey locust,  
equally the beech, the oaks, and the pines,  
they give off such hints of gladness.

I would almost say that they save me, and daily.  
I am so distant from the hope of myself,  
in which I have goodness, and discernment,  
and never hurry through the world  
but walk slowly, and bow often.

Around me the trees stir in their leaves  
and call out, "Stay awhile."

The light flows from their branches.  
And they call again, "It's simple,"  
they say, "and you, too, have come  
into the world to do this, to go easy,  
to be filled with light, and to shine."

### **BLUE BOAT HOME**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YtZUM0JhLvc>

### **BENEDICTION**

May you leave this circle knowing you are good and knowing you are loved.  
Take your love from this place. Share it with the world. Stay safe until we meet again.  
And may the longtime sun shine upon you,  
all love surround you,  
and the pure light within you guide your way on.

Thank you for visiting our website. We look forward to seeing you again soon! Thank you for  
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Recording link, available 3 mos from 3/29:

[https://uuma.zoom.us/rec/share/xch\\_P-  
vr31OcpXCxmT2W6ceIK7saaa8hnAYqKcIzByIwu\\_-BR-  
cfDXu6FNozOEQ](https://uuma.zoom.us/rec/share/xch_P-vr31OcpXCxmT2W6ceIK7saaa8hnAYqKcIzByIwu_-BR-cfDXu6FNozOEQ)