

“How Do You Spell Hero?”
April 5, 2020

Music for Gathering

Recording by Shana Aisenberg

Welcome/Chalice 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.

Today, 2000 years out from the day Jesus of Nazareth rode into Jerusalem on a donkey – an unlikely hero with a message of love – we explore what we mean today by the word “hero.” We’ll do that with the gentle sensibilities of Worship Associate Margaret Rieser, the adventure of Marion Posner’s Time for All Ages, and music not only by Shana Aisenberg but magical hymns she has “spliced together” with voices and instruments called in from our various homes.

We UUs live not by creed but by a handful of guiding principles. May the heroes of this pandemic remind us of our first principle, that we affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person. In that spirit, we join UUs everywhere in kindling the flame of our chalices. In good times and in hard times, we light this beacon of hope and symbol of love.

Centering Music “River Rising “ by Shana Aisenberg

Opening Words Worship Associate Margaret Rieser

We come here this morning to feed and nurture our spirits.
To remind ourselves of our commitment to walking the path of love together.
We come to grow and to celebrate the strength of our own souls.
We come to stand as one against anything that would diminish the human spirit.
We come to drink deeply from the well of grace and faith that we find in beloved community.

Hymn: WHEN OUR HEART IS IN A HOLY PLACE

A Time for All Ages Marion Posner

Joys & Concerns

Meditation Rev. Betsy

We give thanks for the blues and greens around us, the majesty of mountains, life-giving rain, and signs everyday of spring.

We give thanks for all that grounds us:

Routines that give us comfort, understandings we've worked hard to reach, wise words that guide us, and passions that lift our spirits

We give thanks for the faith that we have in each other, strangers and beloveds. We are grateful for each others' stories and silliness, and struggles too. Even as we worry and hurt together, we give thanks for this, our life.

[Lift up joys and concerns in the Chat space....]

We face an uphill climb. May it call out our best instincts — love, neighborliness, compassion, courage, and a sense of caring for every being on Earth and for Earth herself. We pray in the name of the Love that holds us all. Blessed be. Amen.

Reading

Our reading comes from a collection of interviews this past Wednesday (4/1/20) in the *New York Times*. The article was entitled: "Exposed. Afraid. Determined."

It tells the stories of 19 New Yorkers who, like millions of others, work on the front lines, every day in the direct path of Covid-19. Many cannot risk losing their jobs – jobs that are considered essential: a pharmacist, a firefighter, a mail carrier, an ER doctor, a homeless outreach worker, a funeral director, a physical therapist, a grocer, a police officer, a poultry-plant worker. Each spoke a difficult truth:

A flight attendant: The other day, I washed my hands 20 times on a two-hour flight....

An office cleaning manager: Everyone is afraid of getting infected. But even more — it makes me so sad to say it — they're afraid of being without work. So they put themselves in the hands of God and hope.... The thing *is* to get food on the table.

A food pantry worker: For a lot of the volunteers still coming in...it's very much a God thing, a calling.

A school cafeteria cook: ...these students depend on those free breakfasts and lunches every day, and...their parents do, too.

A midwife: I'm doing a lot of...planning...cheerleading for the staff. I didn't realize it was a skill, but it is...keeping people safe, keeping people calm, keeping your team unified....I started sobbing the other morning when I saw that the virus had arrived in Africa...What really hit me was the fact that *my society* is becoming unstable. I've worked...in so many different countries... [until now] I've always had an out....I go back to my secure, first-world life.

A defense lawyer: ...Some [prison] guards have gloves, but nobody [the inmates] see is wearing masks. The guys are still sitting together and using the same phones.

A food deliveryman: Always, I use my bike. If you cross the Manhattan Bridge, it's...beautiful up there...boats passing underneath....I'm not going to lie, I'm frightened....I must talk to a hundred people a day....When I wake up every day, I tell God, "God, please take care of me."

"Exposed. Afraid. Determined."

HYMN: SIMPLE GIFTS

Reflection Rev. Betsy Tabor

How to you spell "hero"? Oh, for simpler times.

A dear friend with the warmest of hearts called last week, delighted in having her first order of groceries delivered. "I really wanted ice cream this week," she joked, "but was I ready to DIE for it?"

She caught me in a cranky mood, a familiar symptom of anxiety these days. Apparently someone *was* ready to die for your ice cream, I thought. What makes it OK to pay someone else to take that risk and have them shop for our groceries and deliver them to our door? Such are today's heroes.

A mix of guilt and tenderness rises up when the familiar young man at the bakery, still there, still working, takes my order or when the cashiers we know by name at the market pick up every dangerous item from our cart, weigh and tally them, and then take into their hands – again – our cash, our credit card. More unlikely heroes. Or are they saviors? Today's heroes *are* making our lives possible.

The list of them never ends. Heroes who handle money. Heroes who travel for their daily work over land and sea and through the air—flight attendants, pilots, ship captains and sailors, bus and truck drivers. Those who staff daycare centers are heroes. Those who work in restaurants and hotels as receptionists, servers, housekeepers are heroes. Our heroes in health care are surely saviors – nurses, doctors, aides, EMTs, paramedics, technicians, therapists, researchers. Heroes staff our hospitals and nursing homes: medical staff, assistants, and housekeepers who have close contact with patients.

Today's heroes keep showing up for work. Exposed, afraid and determined. Some are proud to be working. Some have no choice. Some work out of principle. Others need the money. They are all brave. Day after day, today's heroes put their lives in direct contact with covid-19. On some level, they are placing the value of others' lives, *our* lives, above their own. You might say they are loving others more than they are loving themselves. The Golden Rule of so many religions.

How complicated. This pandemic asks us to do some difficult calculus. Without an income stream, which bill do we pay? Who will take the risk of buying my groceries? Me? My partner? A friend? Or an underpaid worker who has no choice but to do this job? Today's heroes hit our justice-seeking selves where we live.

Our emotions run wild, don't they. Fear of the virus. Guilt around privilege. Untold sadness and dread. Righteousness (there's nothing worse). And we need to laugh. And be happy. We know we need that to be healthy. But humor can feel so out of place in this most serious of times.

Sometimes it's hard to go there. Like the email that came in the other day about a young family, trapped in the comfort of their lovely home, who made a darling musical about the pandemic. I love the absurd – and musicals, too – but I couldn't bring myself to open it, still haven't, hard pressed to go there when the wheels have fallen off the bus for so many millions and millions of people.

As people of conscience, part of our sacred work is to open our hearts. This happens when “the other” becomes our focus. While today's heroes put their lives at risk doing what we call “essential” work, we find that staying at home to flatten the curve, and protect ourselves, is not only a privilege but a burden. Vividly aware of these heroes, we feel grateful and...and undeserving, too.

Of course, we worry not only about our loved ones and ourselves. Today, the plight of our heroes could not feel more real, more painful, more wrenching. Our hearts, expanding, hurt. What can *we* do? Not for our conscience, but for them?

Many of us are saving money today on lattes and meals out, on trips not taken. If we have the means, we can and we must be lavishly generous to these heroes. Stash a dozen Dunkin' Donuts gift cards in the car – their motto these days is, “We've got your back.” Give them away. If you can, keep a stack of \$5s or \$10s or \$20s handy. Give *them* away.

What can we do for today's heroes? *We can look them in the eye and thank them.* We can find the words (not easy) and say them out loud. Thank you for the risk you're taking by cleaning here. By continuing to work. Thank you for stacking these store shelves. Thank you for working this cash register. Thank you for shopping my list because I was afraid to. Thank you for coming to my door with groceries, with mail, with heating oil. Thank you for risking your well-being and the well-being of your loved ones.

What can we do for today's heroes? *We can listen.* Look them in the eye and ask: How are *you* doing with this? How is your family doing? How are they dealing with your being out in the world working?

What can we do for today's heroes? *We can pray for them.* And tell them we're praying for them. If anyone has said to you, “I'm praying for you,” you know the value of hearing these words. And we do pray for today's heroes, don't we? We think of them. We hold them in your aching heart. We think positive thoughts for them. We wish good things for them. We so want them to survive and thrive. That felt vibration within? All of that is praying...hoping...opening the heart.

What else can we do for our heroes? *The day will come when it will be our turn to take action.* The day will come when those on the front lines, worn and changed forever, will be ours to care

for, to love, to help heal and make whole. The day will come when we can help pick up the pieces for those who have lost so much.

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And now some moments of sharing. In one or two sentences, please, tell us who is a hero in your life today? You can raise your hands (under “Participants”) and we’ll call on you. Or continue to share in the chat space.

Kathy B: My sister Marion lives in Port Huron, Michigan, takes care of my 104-yr-old father, and she is a cashier at the Kroger grocery store.

Hannah D: I think the teachers who are providing as much normalcy as they can for kiddos right now are heroes. Drew’s school has done a really amazing job.

Hope H: I gave blood this week up in North Conway, and certainly all the Red Cross people who were there hosting the blood drive so that those of us who can do that simple task – we know it’s so helpful.

Barbara L: The many people around here who are sewing cloth masks for people to wear without using the supplies that medical people need so desperately. It’s just amazing to see many of the machines humming around here.

Shana: I’d like to bring up both my partner Gale, who’s a nurse practitioner and working every day, and also my father at age 89, who is still a practicing psychiatrist and is still figuring out ways to see his patients, whether it’s by Zoom or even sometimes still in person.

Barbara B: I’m thinking of the mail carriers. I walk down and get my mail, and I leave it in the garage for two days to air out, while they have to touch it every day, every hour.

Betsy L: My daughter is my hero. A lot of us in the Book Group have talked about the fact that our children have become the parents. Peg goes shopping for me and gets the mail for me and goes on walks with me. I am so thankful to be able to stay at home and not have to do all those things.

Susan B: I have such respect for the staff at Brett School that, besides doing all the educational outreach, are delivering 120 meals a day. The teachers and everyone are taking turns on the bus, and they’re also packing the food from Tamworth for End 68 Hours of Hunger for over the weekend.

Eve G: My hero is one of our own, Ricky B, who offers to shop for me whenever she’s going out shopping. Without her, I would be breaking the rules of seniors going out shopping – I would be shopping myself and exposing myself to whatever’s out there. So thank you, thank you, thank you, Ricky.

Peter: I found what you had to say so moving. My heroes are the millennials. I think they are an amazing generation. I'm in the health care field myself. I'm staying back here, looking at patients on screens, and they're out there in the world, driving them to appointments and making sure they get their check and their food and their medication. I am so astonished at their bravery and their kindness. They are my heroes, and I tell them that.

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This morning, we join today's heroes in feeling exposed and afraid and determined. We join them, too, in loving this beautiful, perplexing thing we call life. May we keep on finding ways to close the distances between us. May we keep saying "yes" to the invitation to open our hearts to the reality that we are, all of us, inextricably and achingly interdependent. And may the day soon arise when together we look back and see how Love brought us through.

So may it be.

The Morning Offering

Anthem

"Hector the Hero"

James Scott Skinner, 1903

Hymn: SOON THE DAY

Reminders

- Be sure to send the Office (UUFES, Box 474, Tamworth 03886) \$110 for your personal brick on our garden path. At least one brick will be devoted to this pandemic, so please put your mind to what the 3 lines on it should say and bring your ideas to the Tuesday Check-In at 3.
- If you want to know about next week's service, or ways you can help, or ways you can get help, or if you know someone who needs help, sign up for our newsletters at www.uufes.com
- Lastly, we'll meet in "breakout groups" during coffee hour today – an experiment! Stay for as many 10-min "breakout sessions" as you want.

Shared Affirmation

Love is the spirit of this Fellowship,
 The quest for truth is its sacrament,
 And service is its prayer.
 This is our great covenant:
 To dwell together in peace, to seek truth in love,
 And to help one another.

Extinguishing our Chalice

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth
 The warmth of community or the fire of commitment.
 These we carry in our hearts.

Benediction

May the longtime sun shine upon you
All love surround you
And the pure light within you guide your way on.

You can view this service for 90 days after 4/5/20 at:

https://uuma.zoom.us/rec/share/w_J_H7r953lLZ5Hd0UCCdIc6GaL-aaa8hyBL8_VemE1cCylVYMa1qNcGniLt-6m