

*What About the Children?
May 10, 2020*

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.

On this Mother's Day, when mothers and daughters, children and grandmothers are apart, we light this chalice for *all* who mother by nurturing a young person, by caring for the people around them, and by kindling the light of truth and kindness in one another. May peace be with us.

Centering Music Ancient Mother

Teens in the Time of Covid-19 - A Reflection Margaret Rieser, Worship Associate
Living under a stay-at-home order is challenging in so many ways. We are challenged by ordinary tasks, like how to get food or to remember what day of the week it is. We have grave concerns for the well-being of loved ones, due to their health, their job or where they live. Some of us struggle with feelings of loneliness and anxiety. We get bored, we crave real information. Some of us feel scared. We wonder if we'll get out of this alive. Such hard, hard times.

We are so blessed to have each other, to find comfort in this beloved community.

For those who have children living with us right now, these times present an added set of challenges. How do we help our children navigate this situation when we're only just learning how to do it ourselves? As parents, more than anything, we want our children to grow up to be happy, healthy and responsible. We want them to find joy and hope in their daily lives, to take actions that help them feel strong and resilient, and to understand deeply the call that comes with being human, which is to take care of ourselves, each other, and the environment that sustains us.

How do we do this right now, when we're struggling to feel strong and resilient ourselves?

The common wisdom, captured in the airlines' instructions to "put your own oxygen mask on first before helping small children or others who may need assistance," is a useful reminder at times. Yes, if I am having trouble breathing, I am not going to be able to help my child. But what if I am having trouble sleeping? What if I have a day when fear gets the upper hand? How can I take care of my child when I am unable to solve these problems?

Self-care is important for parents, but caring for our youngsters is important for our well-being too. In fact, the line between self-care and care for our children becomes blurry as soon as we move away from the black-and-white example of oxygen masks. Again, how can I possibly care for myself without caring for my child?

As with everything else in life, it's complicated. We are all in this together. My well-being is affected by how my children are doing. My children's health depends on my own.

These days I am staying at home with my 15-year-old son, who is incredibly creative and on a *good* day experiences school as a form of torture, and my 19-year-old niece, who is passionate about the outdoors and just completed her second year of college. These are some of the questions we are struggling with these days:

When can I hang out with my friends?
 Why can all my friends hang out with each other and I can't?
 What is school going to be like in the fall?
 Can I not go to school if it's going to be online?
 When am I going to be allowed to hug someone?
 Will my summer job exist? Why do they keep changing the start date?
 When will I have any idea about my future?
 If I isolate from you, can I be with my friends?
 Why can't I stay up all night and sleep all day?
 Why should I do school right now? I'm not learning anything.
 WHEN WILL LIFE BE NORMAL????

It's hard being a teenager in the best of times. It's really hard being a teenager right now. And without wanting anyone to feel sorry for me, can I just say that it's really hard being the wise, resilient parent of teenagers.

In divinity school right now, we are learning how to pray. Thank God, because I need it now more than ever:

Source of all that is wise and good, please guide me on this wild journey. Offer me opportunities to learn how to be there for my children these days, to find the well of patience and hope, that I may share with them. Give me the wisdom to sit with them as they sit with their questions, knowing that I don't have any more answers than they have. Help me be steadfast in my belief that we will all get through this together.

Hymn "This Little Light of Mine"

Young Families - A Reflection Amanda Harris

That's a great way to start talking about how "littles" and families are handling this new experience. I think I should start with what Caden said when I asked him this weekend, "How has it been for you?" and his answer was, "It's been horrible."

I don't think it's been horrible. I think that because I've watched as, over the last two months, my 8- and 4-year old have spent more time outside, collecting rocks and figuring out which birds live in our neighborhood, learning to ride their bikes, and learning to be independent.

I asked some of my friends. Just about all the parents I know are working parents. That means that they are either hovering over their kids in shifts so they can "do school" while still working,

or they are shutting the door against their kids and expecting them to become independent, which is kind of what has happened in my house.

I think, if nothing else, kids right now are learning to be alone in ways they didn't have to be before. They're learning how to play by themselves because they don't have schoolmates. They're learning how to imagine things for themselves because they don't have a teacher directing their short-story writing projects. They don't have a classmate to bounce ideas off of.

But I think they're also learning what kind of people they are, and I've noticed that with my own two kids. So, while it's not been "horrible," as Caden described it ("It's horrible!" he says), I do think it's been an experience ("I hate Corona School!" – laughing) in independence. And on that note, I'm going to go on Mute!

A Time for All Ages Alice Posner "Layla's Happiness" by Mariahadessa Ekere Tallie

"Songs My Mother Taught Me" Antonin Dvorak Betsy Ginsberg's Quintet

Reading "On Children" by Kahlil Gibran (read by Sam Perry)

And a woman who held a babe against her bosom said, Speak to us of Children. And he said:

Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.

They come through you but not from you,

And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,

For they have their own thoughts.

You may house their bodies but not their souls,

For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.

You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.

For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.

You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.

"Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" (African-American spiritual)

Performed by Shana Aisenberg

Joys & Concerns

"Prelude" Sergei Rachmaninoff

Performed by Eve Goss

Meditation Rev. Betsy

We give thanks – for the birds and bees ☺ whose activity we hear more loudly than ever in today's quieter than usual world.

We give thanks for the gift of life and the woman who birthed us. We give thanks for everyone, women and the men, who have mothered us with a kind of love we cannot live without...who've held us in hard times; helped us take risks; who've mothered us by helping us weather disappointments and celebrate successes, too, however small.

Today we remember mothers struggling to provide, working hard to parent. We honor women who long to be mothers and we grieve with mothers whose children have died.

May we find what we need this day around mothering: compassion, perhaps forgiveness, appreciation. May we in turn find life-giving ways to be. Amen.
[Respond to Joys and Concerns.]

“Spirit of Life”

Reflection *What About the Children?* Rev. Betsy Tabor

Like children, we're full of unanswerable questions. When will this end? How long do we have to wear masks? Does it matter? When can we go to UUFES? Celebrate graduation? Get married? Have our memorial service? And who among us will be the lucky ones to see more birthdays? If not me, how do I want to live this time that remains?

Who's not freaked out? We watch ourselves cycle back and forth through the Kubler-Ross steps. Now fear, now depression, now dread, now sudden distracted delight at the Baltimore oriole out the window, now love of life, now reverence for Earth, now sadness/grief about Earth, now rage and helplessness, now impatience, back to amazement as the trees leaf out apple green, now cautious optimism and hope...and, now again, fear that the monster will choose us next.

This thing has grabbed and shaken us like nothing ever before. The news cycle doesn't help. It feeds our intense moods. It feeds a collective worldwide *corona-coaster* of reaction.

Sometimes our own thoughts and worries get in the way of seeing clearly, but this week, I'm finding that stories about children are breaking through my angst. To me it feels as if our young people are turning us away from our spinning thoughts and inviting us to pay attention. How *are* the children?

This past week – on zoom, on the corner, on the phone, in the news – people told stories about kids. Kids of all ages. High school seniors missing out on graduation, summer jobs gone or up in the air, college admissions almost beside the point, what's next a big question mark. This week I heard so many stories about sports and kids whose plans to run, play hockey, go to camp have gone way.

I heard repeated, similar stories, too, about siblings – how this sibling has lost everything that mattered when school stopped (time with friends, the excitement of the class musical, summer in the show at the park) while that sibling has felt delighted and relieved to get to stay home in their PJs.

I've also heard and corresponded with friends about grown-ups, such as we are, struggling with old hurts and seeing possible healing in this time of Covid-19 – stories of mothers and mixed messages of acceptance and perfectionism, stories of forgiveness. I've heard stories too of grandparents, safe at home, with a hint of coming to rue this reality in which our keeping safe and well means locking up, limiting the lives of our children's children.

For people of privilege, able to shelter in place, the situation a short while ago was simple: Just stay home. Now we're in a new moment when each of us has to decide how and when and whether to risk re-entering the world. A time of hard questions.

German poet Rainer Maria Rilke, wise beyond his years at 28, warned us about looking for answers. Ours, he said, is to live our questions:

...have patience with everything unresolved in your heart [he wrote]...try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.

Questions flood our being these days when adversity strikes at the life we thought was ours to live.

For a little kid, how can you understand when you can't go out and play? Or when adults around you are acting really weird, stressed out and distracted? How can a toddler take it in that everyday things are suddenly dangerous, having to be washed and wiped and, well, not as fun as they used to be?

For an elementary school kid, what must it be like to not leave the home every day for school or meet with your home-school teachers, not to be with people your own age?

Teens, said educator Maria Montessori, need to be together. At this point in their life, each other is all that matters, all they can concentrate on. She believed, I've been told, that the best thing for teens is to put them in the field to work and talk. Today, life gets complicated when all you care about is your peers but being with them puts your family at mortal risk.

Young adults are full of questions, too. Arguably, people in their 20s and 30s are not children. Arguably, they're not adults either. When many leave home for school or work, when that time comes to flex their wings, to find out what turns you on (not to mention who), when that unsettling time comes to look at your identity and discover who you are and what matters to you, independent of (maybe despite) your family of origin....How utterly unsettling and frustrating it must be to navigate this critical stage of development when your social contacts are reduced to your roommates, maybe a romantic partner or – perhaps the most challenging – your parents?

So what *do* our children need?

You may have heard the “This American Life” story about the little girl always asking her professor father questions. He feels annoyed and bombarded by them and asks her to just make a list and he’ll answer them. She does, and they are doozies! They’re about the purpose of life, what happens when we die, why do we care so much, what is time? The academic father sets to working on the questions – for years he thinks and researches them. But by the time he finally presents her with his beautiful answers, she’s forgotten she’d ever asked and isn’t so interested in what he’s written. All she’d wanted back then was to be with him. Seen by him. Talking. About nothing really. She just wanted his presence.

Today, we are living in uncharted territory. The world has changed.

Once upon a time, the grown-ups in this circle were busy toddlers, then schoolchildren exploring and playing and learning with each other. We vividly recall teenager ups and downs , then as young adults, figuring out what was next. And while many of us have suffered hardships and loss along the way, few of us have lived with the scale of adversity that today’s children face. Some amongst us remember WWII and the Great Depression. But we all are new to a global *randomly killing virus*. We face a level of uncertainty and fear we’ve not known before – the *same* uncertainty and fear that the generations right behind us are facing.

In the face of Covid-19, when little ones ask us imponderable questions...when we see those same questions in a teenager’s eyes....when we witness young adults struggling with what’s next in their career and education and relationships, we only have so many answers. It is for all of us to live the questions...to live *into the answers*.

Do we need prayers at this time? Yes, by whatever name you call your heart’s longings, by whatever name you call holding one another in your heart or weeping at the beauty of the morning light. Yes, we need to hope and pray, give thanks, to behold the world in awe. We need to lament and to find helpers, too, as Mister Rogers once said. We know to do this.

And what *about* the children?

Find ways to be there for them. With them. Let them know they’re not alone facing this new world. Love them if only with your eyes. Love the kid down the street. Love the girls on the sidewalk, maskless and laughing. They’re scared, too.

Love the generations at our heels with your presence. Make time for them...beyond helping with school, beyond giving structure to their day, beyond laying down the law. Make time to see them. To listen, that’s all. We’ll be rebuffed, we know that. But ours is to return again and again – present, with our full attention — to hear their laments, as painful as ours; to honor the hopes and the questions they dare voice.

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In keeping with the theme of turning outward toward the next generations, I invite you to think about how you can *be present* to the young people you know, whether you know them well or just a little bit. What do you want to bring to your interactions with young people? Not what can

you *tell* them – only they can figure themselves out. I invite you to briefly share how you want to be present as young people and their questions they're living into.

Kim H: It's funny that we're all so quiet and that we all have many thoughts about this. Like you said, I think about being present. As a mother to my own kids, I was young and not sure what I was doing. Now that I'm a grandmother, I cherish just hanging out with them and not having to worry about mothering kinds of stuff: "Am I imparting the right things to my children?" You can just enjoy. I try to do that even over video chats...and just get silly with them. I want to be the person they'll want to come be with and hang out with, watch the football game with – like introducing my grandson to the Patriots and that sort of thing – just being present and having fun with them.

Rod F: I have a next-door neighbor. I mean really, really next door – at the other end of my house. I can open one door and be in her and her mother's quarters immediately, so it's a very, very close neighbor. We bring desserts to each other. Her name is Abby, she's twelve years old and a lovely young woman, goes to the Waldorf school. I am enjoying encouraging her budding interest in bird life. We have a good bit of bird life around here. The other day I saw a brown thrasher, which is a very dramatic bird. She was curious about it, and I told her a little bit about it. The other day, she corrected my mis-identification of what I thought it was a song sparrow....She corrected me, and she was right. Encouraging a young person's learning about the world is a very, very enjoyable activity.

Amanda H: So my kids like to just talk. They talk all the time. And sometimes they can be really annoying, but I find that if I stop and just listen, they are coming up with the strangest possibilities for machines and alien adventures and what to do if the zombies attack. And sometimes just letting them go down that rabbit hole of thought is completely delightful. It's nice to just stop being an adult in that moment and stop being like, "Well, that wouldn't happen" or "No, that's not possible" but instead: "So what if that did happen, where would you go?" It's fun to let them take control of the possibility for the future and see where they go with it.

Mary Alice L: My little one is not so little, she's 23 years old, and she arrived from LA last night. I had an interesting dilemma, in that I was so excited to pick her up, but I realized I had not gone near another human being since late February. And at the same time as I was really anxious to see her, I was also really anxious to be near another human and to touch her. When she got in the car, she kept the mask on and we both used hand sanitizer. But I touched her hand and shared with her that I'd not touched another human in so long. I'm delighted to have another human here. She's making sour dough in my kitchen. I realized that the anxiety of being near another person is slipping away a little bit more slowly than I thought it might. I'll go give her another hug.

Pamela A: My 19-year-old granddaughter Morgan has had lovely black silky hair almost down to her waist. I take it that she's rather bored. She video-chatted with me and said, "Mimi, I just shaved my head." My initial response was something I probably shouldn't

say on zoom, but I caught myself instead and said, “Morgan, it really pops your eyes!” I guess we really have to roll with these challenges and these times.

Sam P: This is kind of an opposite way, this is appreciating how the childhood in us can come out at any time. I had two uncles, Uncle Greg and Uncle Winny. (This is to Rod’s point around bird watching, which is a good thing to do right now – and could happen in this day and age, and in isolation). They lived in houses looking out at the same back field. In their 80s, Uncle Winny was colorblind, and Uncle Greg couldn’t hear very well. And so they would call each other back and forth on the phone when there was a bird that they couldn’t identify, knowing that the other aspect might help them do it! I just remember that, thinking of the bird watching that some of us are doing right now more than ever, reminding us to touch base with various faculties (somebody in a meditation yesterday talked about breathing through their ears). Just think of the curiosity and playfulness that doesn’t need to be age-bound in our lives.

Even more than our research and resume-writing skills, more than the wisdom we’ve picked up along the way, the young people who will inherit the world need our steady presence, our love, up close or from afar. May we give it generously.

The Morning Offering

We thank Reverend Mary Edes, former minister here and master musician, for gifting UUFES with her recording of John Mark Harrison’s song, “Grateful.”

Closing Betsy

Reminders

- Plant sale: Divide and pot perennials because we may have a Plant Sale.
- Explanation of break-out groups at coffee hour.
- A word from the GB about UUsed this summer - David Wilkins

Shared Affirmation

Hymn “We Laugh, We Cry”

Extinguishing the 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

“...have patience with everything unresolved in your heart...try to love the questions... the point is to live everything. Live the questions...Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.”
(Rilke)

May the longtime sun shine upon you, all love surround you, and the pure light within you guide your way on.

This service (2 recordings) can be viewed until 90 days following May 10 at:

<https://uuma.zoom.us/rec/share/3swyCpX8719OG53huWWAfY54Mb78eaa8gHce-qYFmkfCOVLifgoroWeVcCrIOWKa>

Access Password: 3z%=!y9+