

## **“In These Trembling Times”**

March 28, 2021

### **Welcome and Lighting of Chalice** - Rev. Betsy Tabor & UUFES Youth

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

This morning's service is called “In These Trembling Times.” Do they feel that way to you? It takes a lot to live in this world. Last night the Jewish holiday of Passover began with telling again the story of a people breaking through the bonds of slavery. We also observe Transgender Day of Visibility next week – another story about vulnerability, struggle and emergence. And it's Palm Sunday – when the teacher and activist Jesus of Nazareth rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Talk about vulnerable.

Around here, tender green shoots are pushing their way out of the cold earth. A fragile world hovers on the edge of re-opening. We've proven ourselves resilient this year, and many people also feel vulnerable. This is a time to treat one another kindly and with gentleness.

### **Centering Music** - “Dayenu” (Passover song of gratitude)

*It would be enough....*

Played by Shana Aisenberg, UUFES Director of Music

### **Shared Affirmation**

#### **Hymn** - “Soon the Day”

#### **A Time for All Ages** - Alice Posner

#### **Reflection** - Shana Aisenberg

As we approach International Transgender Day of Visibility this Wednesday, March 31st, I've been hearing diverse perspectives within trans and non-binary communities. There are many conversations about nuances of language. Some celebrate TDoV with pride. Others take issue with the word “visibility.” Not everyone can be visible, due to concerns of safety, discrimination, families not accepting, and violence, especially for Black trans women. The word “visibility” also excludes people who can't see. And, is being seen enough? Or should the day be re-named Trans Day of Justice? Lastly, the word transgender isn't inclusive of everyone's identities.

Legendary Stonewall activist Miss Major Griffin-Gracy recently tweeted “I don't really understand why we need a Day of Visibility, since for most of us, especially Black girls, we are as visible as we need to be. Our visibility is getting us killed.”

Some within the trans community endeavor to “pass”, to blend in, to conform to binary gender appearances, even to pass as cisgender, not ever telling anyone of their history. I can understand why they've chosen to not be visible. For others of us, that isn't possible, we can't hide who we

are. However, visibility, living openly in the truth of ourselves, can sometimes extoll a high price.

On April 25, 1993, Misty, a trans friend, and I attended the March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation. We marched with various contingents that day, and found the trans contingent at the end of the afternoon. When I arrived, sunburned, to my home in rural Virginia that evening, I had the profound realization that I'd felt completely at home among that small group of two dozen trans women. I started my gender transition the very next day.

Since then I've experienced instances of discrimination. Musicians with whom I'd played for years suddenly stopped calling me for gigs. Students, or parents of students, decided to discontinue their music lessons with me. A summer music camp where I'd taught for 10 years, with rave reviews for all of my classes, didn't hire me back for a summer season. They later hired me back the following year, after asking if I would be willing to present as "male." Some discrimination I experience is more subtle, perhaps unintended, but still landing as micro-aggressions. An example of this is misgendering, people using the wrong pronouns, or addressing me as sir. This happens all too often.

Due to discrimination and its associated stresses, I de-transitioned in 1994, returning to male presentation and name. This wasn't because my feelings of my gender had changed. They hadn't. It was what I needed to do to make a living, in a world that didn't seem ready to accept me as who I am. I eventually transitioned again in 2012, almost two decades later. This year, TDoV coinciding with Passover, the metaphor of 40 years in the desert feels apt, connected to current struggles for liberation and justice that many continue to face during this pandemic year.

In a way, everyday is TDoV for me. I am visible, when I go out for walks and chat with neighbors in my small town; go to the grocery store; teach lessons; and when I talk or sing, with my baritone voice. I recently received a card in the mail, from the mother of a non-binary child, thanking me for the positive example I was for their kid.

Author Julia Serano writes: "In trans women's eyes, I see a wisdom that can only come from having to fight for your right to be recognized as female, a raw strength that only comes from unabashedly asserting your right to be feminine in an inhospitable world."

I'm deeply affected when I read news of legislative attacks on the trans community. Over 80 bills prohibiting our trans youth from participating in sports, or limiting their access to gender-affirming healthcare, have been introduced across the country since the beginning of 2021. I always feel heightened anxiety to read reports of violence against trans people. Other news, such as Dr Rachel Levine's recent appointment as Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services, feel hopeful, empowering. However we still have a long way to go, to achieve true equality, justice for trans and non-binary people. So that it is truly safe to be visible.

**Reading** - "Your stories belong to you" by Teresa I. Soto Barbara Lubin

dear trans\*, non-binary, genderqueer  
 and gender-expansive friends and kin  
 (and those of us whose gender is survival):  
 let me explain. no,  
 there is too much. let me sum up\*.

you are not hard to love and respect;  
 your existence is a blessing.  
 your pronouns are not a burden or a trial;  
 they are part of your name, just shorter.  
 someone getting them wrong is not a  
 poor reflection on you. it is not your fault.  
 your body (really and truly)  
 belongs to you. no one else.

the stories of your body  
 the names of your body's parts  
 your body's privacy  
 the sum of your body's glory.

it is not okay for anyone  
 to press their story of you  
 back to the beginning  
 of your (of our) liberation.  
 we will find the people ready to be  
 on the freedom for the people way.  
 we will go on. no one can rename you  
 Other, it can't stick, as you offer the gift  
 of being and saying who you are.

mostly, though, your stories belong to you.  
 your joy and complexity are beautiful  
 however you may choose to tell it (or not  
 tell it). some folks (cis) may take their liberty  
 for an unholy license. you are beloved. please  
 keep to our shared tasks of

healing  
 getting free.

**Joys & Concerns** - "To Spring" by Edvard Grieg  
 Played by Eve Goss**Hymn** - "Find a Stillness"

**Meditation/Prayer**

We give thanks  
for signs of spring  
for small kindnesses

We are grateful for each other  
loved ones, everyday folks, and strangers too  
every person an opportunity for love or to daring to love.

We remember Mark Allen, ill in the hospital, awaiting a third surgery.  
He so appreciates hearing from us these long days.

Far from this place, we remember loved ones of the 90 people killed in Myanmar in a crackdown  
of security forces - and the dozens injured in a Palm Sunday bombing in Indonesia.

We struggle to bloom, or even imagine blooming. And we remember that blooming is especially  
hard for marginalized people. Now a lament about how much this country's *othering* takes away  
from people of color, from transgender and non-binary people, and many other people on the  
margins. In the spirit of recognizing each other's journey....

**For times we lose sight of the dignity of the most vulnerable person in the room,**

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

**For letting my struggle blind me to another person's truth,**

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

**For needing courage to advocate for those who has lost their sense of agency,**

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

**For missing an opportunity to help another person's chances of succeeding,**

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

**For feeling helpless about reckoning with the truth,**

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

**For waiting and not yet finding the way to make a difference,**

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

**And lastly, for losing sight of our unity,**

We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.

In the name of all that is good and true and holy, Amen.

**Reflection** - Rev. Betsy Tabor

“Why am I a slave?” asks the Black man. “Why can others live and move around freely? Why am I a slave?” This haunting lament begins the video series “Amend” about the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment. His question resonates. We know what it feels like to be on the outside. Who hasn’t asked, why am I being treated this way? Why is “what I’m trying to be” so hard? May ask, why are “people like me” treated like this? We’ve wondered: Where and how can I be me?

Sometimes we love our amazing life. Other times, we’ve wanted to feel more at home in the world. Free and safe enough to push through our vulnerability and bloom into our biggest selves.

Even as America moves toward herd immunity, even as we begin to recognize the taste of *hope* again, a palpable fragility hangs in the air. This year, we’ve learned how much we don’t know, how fast things can change, how fragile life is. This awareness makes us proceed gingerly.

In some ways, these times feel more fragile than a year ago when the pandemic hit. We had our marching orders then, and as science revealed more about the virus, there was no wiggle room about what everyone was asked to do. The drill was to lock down, stay home, and take no chances. Thankfully, many did so.

Today lacks that all-on-one-page feeling. People have choices now. It’s up to each of us how to respond. How will you go back out into the world? When will you feel ready? How do you feel about being vaccinated? Some folks are gung-ho to get the shot, socialize, and travel, and others feel hesitant, vulnerable, unsure, perhaps pressured. And so we will disagree with each other, judge each other, feel pushed or held back by each other. How shall we respond?

Most of us have held ourselves together for a long time. Kept our fear and frustration under control. But pressure can build under the lid of appearing to cope – like the virus, that pressure is not visible. Now and then it erupts – we’ve seen this in the recent shootings. I’m told that people who cut hair for a living are seeing not only hope, but also a lot of fear and anger these days.

Vulnerability is running high, too. An old acquaintance sends a Face Book friend request a few weeks ago. Too busy to respond, you find out that they suicided last week.

Remember. Even in normal times, everyone whose path we cross is carrying a heavy burden. As vulnerable as we may feel, it’s good practice to start with kindness. Now more than ever, the world calls us to be gentle with each other. And while we’re in this in-between time – hopefully on the cusp of hugging and shaking hands and gathering – chances are there is more going on beneath the surface than meets the eye. The trauma of this year has added to the burden we carry. More than disruptive and disturbing, it has been a terrifying and, for many, devastating experience. We are survivors. We need to heal.

Imagine life, if we approached everyone with uncommon gentleness – as if they were in a hospital bed or coming to terms with a loss, a diagnosis, or a terrible disappointment. Like the tender green shoots of spring, many of us have worked hard to push through to this moment.

While the struggle may not be visible, often it is here in plain sight. May every Asian or Black or brown face trigger in us generous caring. May we translate every experience of “the other” into an opportunity for genuine kindness. Perhaps we’ve learned more this morning about how much effort many transgender people have to muster to just get through a day. And every time we see people entering synagogues and mosques in this country, may we not forget what the struggle for identity and the longing for safety must be every day. May we pay attention, notice, and respond with open hearts.

Beneath the daily reality we try to project –whether we relate to the dominant white, CIS-gendered culture or travel a steeper, rockier path – everyone is somebody. Everyone wants to bloom and be treated as that beautiful, blooming somebody: seen, appreciated, and loved.

In these trembling times, let us honor every person with uncommon gentleness. Let us remember every person’s somebody-ness and lead with kindness. May we hold each other carefully.

So may it be.

**The Morning Offering** - “Sing a Song of UUFES” by Shana Aisenberg  
With Shana, Pamela, and Kim to the tune of “Sing a Song of Sixpence”

**Anthem** - “There’s a River Flowin’ in My Soul” (not recorded for copyright reasons)

*There’s a river flowin’ in my soul,  
And it’s tellin’ me that I’m somebody,  
There’s a river flowin’ in my soul.*

### **Community Response**

1. *IN WHAT WAYS HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THE KINDNESS OF OTHERS THIS YEAR?*

11:01:59 From Sandra C : Clerks at Hannaford on Senior Shopping Day making me feel safe.

11:02:25 From Cindy E: My daughter drops off leftover meals for me!

11:02:33 From Eleanor J: Our wonderful UUFES church services.

11:02:52 From Margaret R: My beloved minister, Rev. Betsy Tabor, has taught me so much about love and the importance of connection.

11:02:56 From Betsy L: I so appreciate my daughter, Peg, doing my shopping for me for a whole year!

11:02:57 From Marsha C : My youngest son taking charge of navigating our Seder over Zoom.

11:02:59 From Hodge Family : At the beginning of the pandemic, Lianne Prentice, the director of the Community School in Tamworth, has been making meals for the community. The meals are for anyone who needs them. This made me feel better about the scariness of the virus...it let me know that there are people out there who will go above and beyond to take care of each other.

11:03:11 From Peggy P: I second that Eleanor!

11:03:15 From Ann & David W: UUFES choir singing alone at home, then blended by Shana into real music.

11:03:19 From Sam P-Poetry.Seriously: De- Light of de-UUFES and de-UUFESians!

11:03:35 From Hope H: Friends listening when I needed to share my concerns.

11:03:59 From Kim H-virtual choir: All the opportunities to sing virtually....

11:04:13 From Barbara B: Having UUFES offering zoom Sunday services and poetry Tuesdays

11:04:25 From Pamela A: Gifts of phone support, meals and cards during our Covid quarantine.

11:04:59 From Shana A: Simple interactions with neighbors and strangers feel more intimate, connected.

## 2. *WHAT ACT OF KINDNESS DO YOU PLAN TO UNDERTAKE THIS WEEK?*

11:05:32 From Barbara B: Calling folks whom I haven't heard from.

11:05:39 From Kim H: A phone call to an elderly aunt that I have not called in a while.

11:05:46 From Hope H: Freshly baked bread. And handmade cards.

11:05:51 From Laura C: Some long-overdue thank you notes.

11:05:53 From Sandra C : Personal, handwritten notes.

11:05:55 From Cindy E: Connecting with old friends!

11:05:56 From Annie P : Saying a loud HELLO, when you can't show your smile under your mask to a stranger.

11:05:57 From Lynn H : Me too Kim.

11:06:05 From Eleanor J : I think it would be nice to take a prayer shawl to Mark.

11:06:32 From Annie P: Lisa L may appreciate a note during her Covid recovery.

11:07:06 From Pamela A: Reaching out after a long, unresolved fractured friendship.

11:07:25 From Peggy P: Keeping in touch with my sister every day. She is grieving the loss of her beloved and dealing with chemotherapy.

11:08:07 From Shana A: Reaching out to old friends, calling to say hello.

11:12:04 From Eleanor J : Having a couple friends check in every morning with a quick text.

**Hymn** - "I Wish I Knew How"

## **Extinguishing of Chalice**

### **Reminders**

- Who needs a call? Who needs help?
- Coffee hour

### **Benediction**

In these trembling times, may we remember everyone's somebody-ness and lead with kindness. With uncommon gentleness. May we hold each other carefully.

**Postlude** - "You Are Our Sunshine" by Pamela Ambrose, to the tune of "You Are My Sunshine" with Kim, John and Tammy and Annie

This service can be viewed until June 28 at:

[https://uuma.zoom.us/rec/share/DksRgt3oNCT9Xqe0gz0oL6EdLUfh0IR7B-RwCWlx5UkqH832o\\_R6-daR8AzCE0a2.yRE0-LS\\_dkYWxW-w](https://uuma.zoom.us/rec/share/DksRgt3oNCT9Xqe0gz0oL6EdLUfh0IR7B-RwCWlx5UkqH832o_R6-daR8AzCE0a2.yRE0-LS_dkYWxW-w)

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