



Soul Matters

November 2016

***What Does It Mean To Be
A Community of Story?***

**Resources & Inspiration
For Worship**

*Note: Since November contains the Presidential election and Thanksgiving, we've divided the resources into three areas: **Story (in general), Election and Thanksgiving.***

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I. Calendar Inspiration: Important November Dates

● **General:**

- Adoption Awareness Month
- Alzheimer's Awareness Month

● **National & Cultural:**

- Dia de los Muertos and All Saints' Day - Nov. 1st
- US Presidential Election - Tuesday Nov. 8
- Veteran's Day - Friday, Nov. 11
- Thanksgiving - Thursday, Nov. 24

● **Religious:**

- Advent begins Sunday November 27th - through Dec. 24

● **Unitarian Universalist:**

- Francis David dies in prison – Nov. 15, 1579
- Guest at Your Table

● **For Fun and On the Fringe:**

- Carl Sagan's Birthday – Nov. 9
- Evolution Day – Nov. 24

II. Chalice Lightings/Opening Words

General

This light we kindle
is set in the lamp of our history
[and beckons us toward our common story]
We inherit this free faith
from the brave and gentle, fierce and outspoken
hearts and minds that have come before us.
Let us be worthy inheritors of this faith
and through our good works, pass it boldly to a new generation.
By [Audette Fulbright Fulson](#), with adaptation

With humility and courage born of our [common story], we are called as Unitarian
Universalists to build the Beloved Community where all souls are welcome as
blessings, and the human family lives whole and reconciled. With this vision in our
hearts and minds, we light our chalice.
—*“A vision for Unitarian Universalism in a multicultural world” by the Unitarian
Universalist Association (UUA) Leadership Council*, with adaptation

From the power of our memory and history,
With high hopes for the days that lie ahead,
We gather to craft the destiny we share with one another.
We gather with faith in the practice of democracy.
We gather with hearts and minds open
To the wisdom in every voice among us.
In our gathering,
May we dream and design a bold future.
[May we imagine a new story that widens the circle]
May we bring our best selves to this service,
And may we dream these dreams
And do this work
With love.
Amen.
By [Heather K Janules](#), with adaptation

We meet on holy ground,
Brought into being as life encounters life,
As personal histories merge into the communal story,
As we take on the pride and pain of our companions,
As separate selves become community.
How desperate is our need for one another:
Our silent beckoning to our neighbors,
Our invitations to share life and death together,
Our welcome into the lives of those we meet,
And their welcome into our own.
May our souls capture this treasured time.
May our spirits celebrate our meeting
In this time and in this space,
For we meet on holy ground.
By Richard S. Gilbert

Thanksgiving

A Thanksgiving Blessing By Naomi King

<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/184352.shtml>

Let us join hands and hearts in gratitude on this wondrous day where we have the abundance of our lives before us. We remember this day of bounty all of those who do not have enough, who are afraid, who are lonely, and who suffer. We wish for the abundance of this world to be shared, for fear to become love, for the lonely to feel welcomed, and for the suffering to know rest and joy. For the labors, the love, the care that gave us the delights of this and every day, we say "thanks!" For the nourishment of our spirit, the challenges that strengthen us, and the friends we have on the journey, we sing "thanks!" For all that is our lives, for these good gifts, we whisper, "thanks!" Overflowing with gratitude, let us shout, "thanks!" Amen.

III. Meditations & Prayers

Story

The Church is a body By Victoria Weinstein

<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/5543.shtml>

The church is a body.
May this body breathe and be together in the spirit of hope
May it feel held by comfort.
Those who seek consolation, may they find it in the solace of this moment.

The church is a body.
It is as strong as all the people who have ever gathered within its walls.
It is the power of all they dreamed and all that they have done.

The church is a body.
It is as vulnerable as the most newborn and untried of its members.
It is ancient, and it is ever new.

The church is a story.
It is the story of lives that are interwoven,
brought together in this place and this time
for the simple purpose of caring for one another,
and helping one another along the arduous path from birth to death.

The church is a vision.
It is a vision of unity amid diversity,
It is a vision of reverence for all of creation,
It is a vision that beckons us beyond the concerns of our own skins.

In the silence, may we abide as one body in the spirit of faith, hope and love that is the story and the vision of this church.

History's Road By Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley, Clyde Grubbs
<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/prayer/historys-road>

The road of history is long, full of both hope and disappointment. In times past, there have been wars and rumors of wars, violence and exploitation, hunger and homelessness, and destruction of this earth, your creation.

We have become a global village, with a growing realization of how fragile this earth is, and how interconnected we are to each other and to all creation.

We cannot continue to live in the old way. We must make a change, see a new [story]. A [story of] peace and justice and a healthy planet.

O Great Creative Spirit: You have given a vision of the good, and we yearn for [a new story and] a new way. But where are we to find the courage to begin this work? We know that a different tomorrow is possible, but how can we build it?

We think of the prophets, women and men, who voiced unpopular opinions, who made personal sacrifices, and sometimes lost their lives, for the sake of justice.

We think of Isaiah, who called out to let those who are held in captivity go free, to give solace to the poor and homeless. Let us be inspired by all who work to overcome misery, poverty, and exploitation.

We think of Harriet Tubman, who called out to people of goodwill to join her on an underground railroad, to lift a dehumanized people from the bondage of slavery to the promise of freedom, even when it meant challenging unjust laws. Let us be inspired by those who are outlaws for freedom.

We think of Gandhi, whose belief in "Soul Force"—the witness to Love's Truth—helped to overthrow the oppression of an empire and gave witness to the way of nonviolent action. Let us be inspired to become witnesses for peace.

We think of Chief Seattle, who reminded us that we belong to the earth, not the earth to us. Let us be inspired by all those who work for the healing of creation, of Mother Earth and all her creatures.

Who are the prophets who inspire you? They may be well known, or known only to you, offering personal inspiration, courage, and hope.

May they join a great cloud of witnesses to a new way of life—the way of peace and justice, the way of justice lived according to the way of peace, the beloved community.

So may it be. Amen.

Election

Election Day By Gary Kowalski

<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/election-day>

It is the day before the election as I write these lines, and whatever the outcome, I will be glad when it's over. Some will be elated by the results, and others will feel dejected, but regardless of who wins or loses, our world will still be broken and suffering from ills that government is powerless to cure. Our lives will still be chaotic and in need of tranquility;

grief and loss will continue to haunt us; we will still face the challenge of finding meaning and a faith that can sustain us through tough times.

Campaigning in America often carries messianic overtones, and politicians collude in the drama by puffing their biographies to mythic proportions. They make big promises, but no new administration can deliver friendship, peace of mind, personal integrity, or a sense of self-worth. Finding the qualities that make life worth living, building them into our daily lives, and passing them along to our children, will continue to be our personal responsibility, regardless of who controls town hall, congress, or the White House.

Voting is important, but there are many other ways in which we can exercise power in our own lives and influence the world for the better. Self-government, after all, begins at home: with how I treat my neighbor, relate to my family, care for my community, and how I work and play. Hope for the future depends less on who gets elected than on our ability to exercise our own power for good.

Thanksgiving

A Thanksgiving Meditation by Naomi King

<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/184353.shtml>

Every day we experience hunger and yearning:
for food, for approval, for respect, for love,
for meaningful work, for any and enough work,
for home, for family, for friends,
for health, for healing, for hope,
for the departed, for the newly arrived,
for the green trees, for the cool clean waters,
for shade in the heat of the day, and for stars to light the velvet night.
Every day we are invited anew to be thankful:

for food, for approval, for respect, for love,
for meaningful work, for any and enough work,
for home, for family, for friends,
for health, for healing, for hope,
for the departed, for the newly arrived,
for the green trees, for the cool clean waters,
for shade in the heat of the day, and for stars to light the velvet night.

Our hearts beating in liberating flight, we soar in gratitude for all the gifts we have in this day, in this lifetime of being, and turn again to share this bounty with all that is. Amen and Blessed

IV. Rituals

Cornbreak and Cider Communion in Refugee Times by Dawn Skjei Cooley

<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/ritual/cornbread-and-cider-communion-refugee-times>

Introduction

The Cornbread and Cider Communion is a tradition in some of our congregations. With gratitude for our freedom and for our abundance, let us celebrate this ritual today mindful of Syrian and other refugees who are unable to go home, those for whom we pray safe passage and a welcoming reception when they arrive at their destinations.

I invite you to come forward now to pick up a cornbread muffin and a cup of apple juice. Please take these back to your seats and hold onto them so that we can partake together.

People come to get cornbread and apple cider.

Sharing the Cornbread

Food is often a symbol of home. But what if you suddenly found yourself in a place where everything about the food was different? Imagine what it might be like to flee your homeland and the foods to which are accustomed and end up somewhere where you not only don't speak the language, but where even the basic fruits, vegetables and grains are different.

Just as tef is indigenous to the African continent, and millet is indigenous to the Asian continent, corn is indigenous to the North American continent. As we share our cornbread this morning,

Let us hold in our hearts all those, here and abroad, who have been forced to leave their homes.

Let us hold in our hearts all those, here and abroad, for whom home no longer exists.

Let us hold in our hearts all those, here and abroad, for whom home is no longer a place of safety.

And let us hold in our hearts all those, here and abroad, who no longer have a home.

Eat the muffin.

Sharing the Apple Cider

The only apples native to North America are crab apples. The ones we enjoy in this country today came originally from Asia, through the Middle East into Europe and then on to America.

As we share our apple cider this morning, may it symbolize the sweetness that can come from being open to new experiences – whether it be new foods, or new people. Let us remember how our lives are enriched when people share their gifts with one another.

Drink the Juice.

Conclusion

adapted from "A Thanksgiving Blessing" by Naomi King

Spirit of Life and Love,

Let us join hands and hearts in gratitude on this wondrous day where we have the abundance of our lives before us. This day of bounty, we remember all of those who do not have enough, who are afraid, who are lonely, and who suffer. We wish for the abundance of this world to be shared, for fear to become love, for the lonely to feel welcomed, and for the suffering to know rest and joy.

For the labors, the love, the care that gave us the delights of this and every day, we offer our gratitude.

For the nourishment of our spirit, the challenges that strengthen us, and the friends we have on the journey, we offer our gratitude.

For all that is our lives, for these good gifts, we offer our gratitude.

May gratitude for our abundance move us to act with compassion for those in need. Amen.

V. Music and Hymns

See link below for music by Soul Matters minister Mary Grigolia

<http://marygrigolia.com/music/music-soul-matters/>

Hymns

24	Far Rolling Voices
34	Though I May Speak with Bravest Fire
42	Morning, So Fair to See
47	Now on Land and Sea Descending
90	From All the Fret and Fever of the Day
92	Mysterious Presence, Source of All
96	I Cannot Think of Them as Dead
102	We the Heirs of Many Ages
104	When Israel Was in Egypt's Land
109	As We Come Marching, Marching
119	Once to Every Soul and Nation
121	We'll Build a Land
122	Sound Over All Waters
140	Hail the Glorious Golden City
145	As Tranquil Streams
149	Lift Every Voice and Sing
156	Oh Freedom
157	Step by Step the Longest March
169	We Shall Overcome
175	We Celebrate the Web of Life
177	Sakura
191	Now I Recall My Childhood
207	Earth Was Given as a Garden

221	Light One Candle
266	Now the Green Blade Riseth
276	O Young and Fearless Prophet
283	The Spacious Firmament on High
290	Bring, O Past, Your Honor
300	With Heart and Mind
309	Earth Is Our Homeland
326	Let All the Beauty We Have Known
330	The Arching Sky of Morning Glows
336	All My Memories of Love
358	Rank by Rank Again We Stand
404	What Gift Can We Bring
405	Do This in Memory of Me
408	Wonder of Wonders
412	Let Hope and Sorrow Now Unite
1001	Breaths
1008	When Our Heart Is in a Holy Place
1019	Everything Possible
1028	The Fire Of Commitment
1030	Siyahamba (We Are Marching)
1042	Rivers Of Babylon
1044	Eli, Eli (Walking To Caesaria)
1051	We Are...
1054	Let This Be A House Of Peace
1061	For So The Children Come

- 1062 All Around The Child
1066 O Brother Son
1074 Turn The World Around

VI. Stories for All Ages'

Story

The Storyteller By Evan Turk

<http://www.simonandschuster.com/books/The-Storyteller/Evan-Turk/9781481435185>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKV_ZBRRzXo

An original folktale that celebrates the power of stories and storytelling: Long, long ago, like a pearl around a grain of sand, the Kingdom of Morocco formed at the edge of the great, dry Sahara. It had fountains of cool, refreshing water to quench the thirst of the desert, and storytellers to bring the people together. But as the kingdom grew, the people forgot the dangers of the desert, and they forgot about the storytellers, too. All but one young boy...

Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge Paperback by Mem Fox

https://www.amazon.com/Wilfrid-Gordon-McDonald-Partridge-Mem/dp/091629126X/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1472670432&sr=1-1&keywords=wilford+gordon+mcdonald+partridge

Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge, a rather small boy, lives next door to a nursing home in which resides Miss Nancy Alison Delacourt Cooper, his favorite friend, because she has four names as well. When Miss Nancy "loses" her memory, the intrepid Wilfrid sets out to find it for her.

On the Day You Were Born Board book by Debra Frasier (Author)

https://www.amazon.com/Day-You-Were-Born/dp/015205944X/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1472670831&sr=1-1&keywords=on+the+day+you+were+born

In simple words and radiant collages, Debra Frasier celebrates the natural miracles of the earth and extends an exuberant welcome to each member of our human family. Accompanied by a detailed glossary explaining such natural phenomena as gravity, tides, and migration, this is an unforgettable book [that connects our individual story with the wider story of the interdependent web.]

Zen Shorts (Caldecott Honor Book) Hardcover by Jon J Muth

https://www.amazon.com/Zen-Shorts-Caldecott-Honor-Book/dp/0439339111/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1472670928&sr=1-1&keywords=zen+shorts

"Michael," said Karl. "There's a really big bear in the backyard." This is how three children meet Stillwater, a giant panda who moves into the neighborhood and tells amazing tales. To Addy he tells a story about the value of material goods. To Michael he pushes the boundaries of good and bad. And to Karl he demonstrates what it means to hold on to frustration. With graceful art and simple stories that are filled with love and enlightenment, Jon Muth -- and Stillwater the bear -- present three ancient Zen tales that are sure to strike a chord in everyone they touch.

Voices in the Park by Anthony Browne

https://www.amazon.com/Voices-Park-DK-Publishing/dp/078948191X/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1472671178&sr=1-1&keywords=Voices+in+the+park

Four different voices tell their own versions of the same walk in the park. The radically different perspectives give a fascinating depth to this simple story which explores many of the author's key themes, such as alienation, friendship and the bizarre amid the mundane.

The Whisper by Pamela Zagarenski

https://www.amazon.com/Whisper-Pamela-Zagarenski/dp/0544416864/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1472671331&sr=1-1&keywords=The+Whisper

Step inside the pages of a little girl's magical book as she discovers the profound and inspiring notion that we each bring something different to the same story.

The Danger of a limiting Story: from Rev. Gretchen Haley

Apparently the commander of a vessel that was engaged in maneuvers in heavy weather was on the bridge late one night when the watch (I think that is the right term), noted that there was another vessel visible directly ahead of them some distance away. The commander ordered the appropriate person to contact the vessel and order them to turn so that they would pass to starboard. There was an immediate response saying, "We suggest you turn immediately to port." The commander knew the formation of the group of ships with him, even though he couldn't see them, and responded with a sharp command for the vessel ahead of him (now closer) to pass to starboard. The vessel responded, "We suggest you turn immediately to port." The commander knowing he couldn't turn to port because there was another ship out there, pulled rank and informed the rogue vessel that this was Commander Jones on the USS Tweedledum on maneuvers and he expected the ship to get out of his way NOW. The reply came back, "This is the North Ipswich Lighthouse, Sir. I suggest you turn immediately to port."

Election

We Shall Overcome: The Story of a Song by Debbie Levy

https://www.amazon.com/We-Shall-Overcome-Story-Song/dp/1423119541/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1472670696&sr=1-1&keywords=We+shall+overcome+in+song

It only takes a few words to create change. It only takes a few people to believe that change is possible. And when those people sing out, they can change the world. "We Shall Overcome" is one of their songs. From the song's roots in America's era of slavery through to the civil rights movement of the 1960s and today, "We Shall Overcome" has come to represent the fight for equality and freedom around the world. This important book, lyrically written by Debbie Levy and paired with elegant, collage-style art by Vanessa Brantley-Newton, pays tribute to the heroic spirit of the famous song that encompasses American history.

Duck for President by Doreen Cronin

https://www.amazon.com/President-Times-Illustrated-Childrens-Awards/dp/0689863772/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1473784309&sr=8-1&keywords=duck+for+president

My fellow Americans: It is our pleasure, our honor, our duty as citizens to present to you Duck for President. Here is a duck who began in a humble pond. Who worked his way to farmer. To governor. And now, perhaps, to the highest office in the land.

Thanksgiving

A Turkey for Thanksgiving by Eve Bunting

https://www.amazon.com/Turkey-Thanksgiving-Eve-Bunting/dp/0395742129/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1472671447&sr=1-1&keywords=a+turkey+for+thanksgiving

Mr. and Mrs. Moose invite all their animal friends for Thanksgiving dinner and the only one missing is Turkey. When they set out to find him, Turkey is quaking with fear because he doesn't realize that his hosts want him at their table, not on it.

The Thanksgiving Door by Debby Atwell

https://www.amazon.com/Thanksgiving-Door-Debby-Atwell-ebook/dp/0618240365/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1473360769&sr=8-1&keywords=the+thanksgiving+door

When Ed and Ann's turkey dinner burns, they think their Thanksgiving is ruined. But what appears to be a disaster becomes a blessing in disguise when Ed and Ann unknowingly intrude on an immigrant family's own Thanksgiving celebration at their new restaurant, The New World Café. Once Grandmother silences her despairing family and invites the unexpected customers to join them, they all share an evening of friendship, good food, and lots of dancing—reminding everyone that Thanksgiving is about opening one's heart in welcome to the strangers who become friends and the disappointments that bring unexpected joys. (less)

VII. Extra Sermon Inspiration

*For much more inspiration,
see also the Soul Matters Small Group packet!*

Story

Brick by Brick

A Meditation by Meg Barnhouse, from "Did I Say That Out Loud?"

<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/brick-brick>

All summer, workers have been building a brick wall along the road by my neighborhood. Against the brutal heat, they stretch a tarp overhead to get a little shade. I've watched them take bricks in their dusty brown hands one by one, butter them thickly with mortar, line them up, and tap them down—row by row. One man who looks to be in his seventies is the leader. His skin is the color of bittersweet chocolate; his beard is gray. Slender and tall, he moves from one group of bricklayers to the next, reaching and bending, looking like a heron in a marsh. When he pauses, he stands very straight. I see him teach the others how to do the work.

He stoops over to look at a line of bricks, hands on his thighs, inspecting the work. Sometimes as I drive by, I see him put his hand on the back of the person he's teaching. Often they are both smiling.

He looks like he loves what he's doing. I wonder how he can love building walls, day after day, handling bricks, teaching the art of laying bricks. Is it the teaching he loves? Seeing how his students learn, what their styles are, how their work shows their character? Does he love the wall itself? Does he know about when it'll be done? Does he look forward to seeing it finished? Or does he love the process, the feel of the bricks in his hands, the squish of the mortar, the challenge of making the symmetry of pillars and arches, the geometry of it?

I think, from the look on his face, that he loves the process. I imagine that he never thinks about the end of the project, the completion of the wall. I think he will go on to the next wall as if it were just a continuation of this one, then the next one and the next, and never be bored.

I want to be like that, and I am, I guess. In my job as a minister, the bricks are stories. I hear stories of family and work, stories of loss and reconciliation, stories of rejection and disaster, illness and healing, birthing and dying. I tell stories every Sunday and in between, teaching, challenging, confessing, inviting people to learn and laugh and think.

Brick by brick, story by story, we build a church, seeing the patterns, the symmetry, the plain joy of setting one story on the other, sustained by the strong and beautiful structures they make. We will never be finished.

It's okay.

Poem: Why We Tell Stories For Linda Foster by Lisel Mueller

...because our children believe
they can fly, an instinct retained
from when the bones in our arms
were shaped like zithers and broke
neatly under their feathers

...because we were poor, we made up a tale
about a treasure mountain
that would open only for us

...because we were always defeated,
we invented impossible riddles
only we could solve,
monsters only we could kill...

Full poem can be found here:

<http://www.poemhunter.com/best-poems/lisel-mueller/why-we-tell-stories/>

Spiritual History By Mark L. Belletini

<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/poetry/spiritual-history>

Let my body remember.
Let my hands and feet remember.
Let my breath remember
those who have come before me,
those who have come before us.
Didn't Muhammad wait quietly in his cave?

And didn't Jesus sigh silently by the blue lake?
And Guan Yin, didn't she sit in silence
thinking about what to do before doing it?
And what was Siddhartha the Buddha doing
anyway under that tree if not just sitting quietly?
And Susan B. Anthony, didn't she push back
from her desk, and take a breath now and then?
And Florence Nightingale, didn't she
put down her nurse's hat
and think silently about what to write
in her essay on mysticism before she actually wrote it?
And Sophia Fahs, didn't she stop telling
stories sometimes and just sit there?
And didn't Black Elk just notice the sunlight
glancing off his chair sometimes?
And Starhawk, does she only talk and write, or
does she too keep silence?
Let us remember them all with our bodies.
Let us remember them with the silence
they too knew.

Top 10 Stories I wish all UUs knew by Rev. Gretchen Haley

Gretchen explains that it is a loss that Unitarian Universalists don't have a shared set of stories we could easily refer to as short hand in the way that Christianity or Judaism does. We have common songs, but we also need common stories. She created a list of the "top 10 stories she wishes all UUs knew."

Stories 1-3

<https://revgretchenhaley.wordpress.com/2012/02/20/top-10-stories-that-all-unitari-an-universalists-should-know-stories-1-3/>

Stories 4-6

<https://revgretchenhaley.wordpress.com/2012/03/12/top-ten-stories-for-all-uus-stories-4-6/>

Stories 7-8

<https://revgretchenhaley.wordpress.com/2012/04/24/top-ten-stories-for-uus-stories-7-and-8/>

Stories 9-10

<https://revgretchenhaley.wordpress.com/2012/06/01/top-ten-stories-for-all-unitari-an-universalists-stories-9-10-and-a-bonus/>

Podcast: Radio Diaries

<http://www.radiodiaries.org>

Radio Diaries tells the extraordinary stories of ordinary life. Since 1996, we've been giving people tape recorders and working with them to report on their own lives and histories. We've collaborated with teenagers and octogenarians, prisoners and prison guards, gospel preachers and bra saleswomen, the famous and the unknown...and along the way we've helped pioneer a new form of citizen journalism

Website: Peer Spirit

<http://peerspirit.com>

This is web site of Christina Baldwin, author of Storycatcher. This site has resources to use in a story circle. One resource makes use of a Story Spiral that explains how telling a story heals us.

Book: The Power of Stories: A Guide for Leading Multi-Racial and Multi-Cultural Congregations by Jacqueline J. Lewis

https://www.amazon.com/Power-Stories-Multi-Racial-Multi-Cultural-Congregations/dp/0687650690/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1472665660&sr=8-2&keywords=the+power+of+story+lewis

Most congregational leaders find it difficult to resist the dominant cultural expectation that different cultural and ethnic groups should stick to themselves—especially when it comes to church. But some congregational leaders have learned the secrets of breaking out of these expectations to bring together communities of faith that model God's radical inclusiveness. What makes the difference? Jacqui Lewis explains that it resides in the stories these leaders tell: stories about who they themselves are, and what the communities they lead are about. These leaders are able to embrace the multiple, complex stories within these diverse communities...

Book: Empathy, Justice and the Science of Story by David Zahl

<http://www.mbird.com/2012/05/empathy-justice-and-the-science-of-story/>

Surveys some recent studies looking at the role fiction plays in society, most of which seek to determine why/how stories are 'good' for us. The studies ... tell us... storytelling appears to have two primary 'benefits': it instills empathy for others and can act as "social glue" by promoting shared values.

Book: Living Our Story: Narrative Leadership and Congregational Culture

(Narrative Leadership Collection) by Larry A. Golemon

<https://www.amazon.com/Living-Our-Story-Leadership-Congregational/dp/1566993784>

Living Our Story explores how good narrative work—the retrieval, construction, and performance of valued stories—takes place in ministry. Authors Larry A. Golemon, Lee

Ramsey, N. Graham Standish, Tim Shapiro, Carol Johnson, Mike Mather, Niles Elliot Goldstein, and Diana Butler Bass examine this question from a variety of perspectives, including the role of the pastor or rabbi as narrative leader, the sacred and mundane stories that shape congregational life and identity, storytelling as a means of community building, and story sharing as a practice of hospitality.

Website: Narrative Approaches

http://www.narrativeapproaches.com/?page_id=2

Narrative Approaches is an online community, resource and an archive of Narrative Therapy conversations, ideas, inspiration, papers, art-work, poetry, stories, scholarship, and solidarity. It is also home to the Archive of Resistance, a lifesaving armory of words – fired at anorexia, bulimia, and negative body image in the battle for the sovereignty of mind, body and spirit.

Video: The Story of Race by Dr. Heather Hackman

<http://www.hackmanconsultinggroup.org/resources/video-audio/page/2/>

In this excerpt from a 90-minute training on Race, Racism and Whiteness with First Universalist Church of Minneapolis, Dr. Heather Hackman takes us back in time to understand how and why “race” was assigned meaning and how that narrative of race, told over centuries, continues to mislead us. 21:41 minutes.

Movie Review: Mockingbird at the Movies: Reflections on Life of Pi by Will McDavid

<http://www.mbird.com/2013/03/mockingbird-at-the-movies-reflections-on-life-of-pi/>

...it's among the profound reflections on faith I've seen on the big screen, offering a plausible account of a kid stranded on a lifeboat and a fantastical one, and the two accounts' tensions bring to light many of the inner tensions of faith and belief. Which story do you prefer? For those who have seen Life of Pi (and if not, major spoiler alert), this question reinterprets the entire film.

Article: Deconstructing the Story of Your Life by Ethan Richardson

<http://www.mbird.com/2015/09/deconstructing-the-story-of-your-life/>

“A very interesting article on Aeon this week about “The Dangerous Idea that Your Life Is a Story.” Written by Galen Strawson, the article questions the assumption that humans do (or even should) frame their lives in the trajectory of a plot line. Strawson surveys the very popular history of this idea in psychology, called Narrativism, and then lines up an Anti-Narrative argument against it. For Strawson, the allure of assigning a story arc to our lives simply does not jive with the reality of our lives, and encouraging people to do so is drastically more harmful than helpful. I had always thought that the whole fitting your life in a narrative was a supremely Christian/religious thing to do. Apparently not...

Blog: The Stories We Choose to Tell Matter: Highlights from Unitarian Universalist History January 28, 2013 by Carl Gregg

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/carlgregg/2013/01/the-stories-we-choose-to-tell-matter-highlights-from-unitarian-universalist-history/>

“We draw from many different sources, but at our best, Unitarian Universalism is more than the sum of its parts. And I’m even more convinced after this past week that it really matters what stories we choose to tell from our history...

Film: Defying the Nazis: The Sharps' War. A new film directed by Ken Burns and Artemis Joukowsky Airing September 20th @ 9/8C on PBS #SharpsWarPBS

<http://www.defyingthenazis.org>

Defying the Nazis: The Sharps' War is an account of a daring rescue mission that occurred on the precipice of World War II. It tells the story of Waitstill and Martha Sharp, a Unitarian minister and his wife from Wellesley, Massachusetts, who left their children behind in the care of their parish and boldly committed to multiple life-threatening missions in Europe. Over two dangerous years they helped to save hundreds of imperiled political dissidents and Jewish refugees fleeing the Nazi occupation across Europe.

Reading: A History of Church, Including Yours by Sean Neil-Barron

<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/history-church-including-yours>

One day, your church was born.

Maybe it was a gathering of saints, called together for the common worship of a wrathful god, ceaselessly praying between bought of decrying the evil of christmas or dancing.

Or maybe a few brave souls answered a notice in the newspaper, curiosity piqued by the announcement of a religion where free-thinking and tolerance were bedrocks.

No matter how it happened, your church was born. A gathering of people—humble, caring, anxious and quirky all at the same time—who covenanted, to be with one another on the journey of life, death and everything in-between—

and so it began. A faithful few. Beautifully imperfect, called to that central task— that human task—of connecting, loving, and serving.

It was just a baby, and yet it was thrust deep into the human condition. Tasked to hold minds and souls, bodies and hearts along the roller derby of disease and birth, infighting and joy, and christmas pageants. Sometimes all of those at the same time.

They gathered to hear the world broken open, for insightful sermons, rejuvenating music, and a community whose fierce devotion to each other's well-being rivaled a mama bear's for her cubs.

But it wasn't always like that of course. There were the trying times—and I don't just mean Phylis or Jack, those stubborn but loveably souls who inhabit the netherworld of committee meetings—no, I mean the trying times:

when the church almost split in half over the war or integration,
or when the mill left the town vacant,
or when the minister crossed that line, and the people couldn't speak about it for decades.

But somehow you were still here.
still on the town common,
still the church that everyone recognizes,
still the ones that shows up every time you were called on,
still using the communion silver (until you voted to sell it).

New people came, and they changed things. Small things, big things. Things that nobody noticed as it happened, until suddenly it was hard to even recognize anything anymore. That was a hard moment, a tearful moment.

And other things changed too.
The proclamations about God, once heard loud from the pulpit softened:
Wrathful became loving.
Distant became intimate.
Mandatory became optional.

After the war, the nursery and RE classrooms were overflowing. Each baby dedicated reminded the church of the incredible beauty of life and the gift this community, all huddled around baby, would bestow upon this child.

The history of your church is more a story of the determination of love to break forth than it is about of tie-dye, or chalices, sermon discussions or social justice committee meetings.

The history of the church is the history of human enterprise, evolving in its sights and sounds, yet revolving always around its core.

The history of your church is the gift of potential and momentum, of baggage and personality. The history of your church is the launch pad from which you spring—into action or disarray.

Each day your church is born.

Election

Article: We Can't Just Hope: Commitment to Democracy Spurs Some UUs to Seek Elected Office By Hans P. Johnson July/August 1999

<http://archive.uuworld.org/1999/0799feat1.html>

Speaking History By Gail Forsyth-Vail

Full text can be found here:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1xzcuZY7DsSeDmQ46cuyPZte18KIEHSACtgbAe00WWX4/edit#heading=h.ske60s9sncg8>

This reading requires seventeen people who are able to come forward and represent the generations of African Americans in the British colonies and in the United States. As you name the first generation, indicate to a person that they should stand. Each time you call a new generation, you indicate silently that another person should stand next to the previous person. The line of people will get longer and longer. When you say, "you represent..." address that person directly. When you do the "children's children's children's..." part, move along the line, indicating each person in turn. You may want to pre-arrange with the first person; the rest will follow easily.

LEADER :

1) You represent the first generation of West African people who came to this world in slavery, coming in the year 1619 to Jamestown.

2) You represent the children of those people, born between 1625 and 1650, and you remain enslaved.

3) You represent the children's children of those Jamestown slaves, born between 1650 and 1675, and you remain enslaved.

4) You represent the children's children's children of those Jamestown slaves, born between 1675 and 1700, and many of your generation remain enslaved.

Let the seventeen people stand quietly for a minute or so. Then ask them to be seated.

Thanksgiving

Proposed Business Resolution for General Assembly 2016. Thanksgiving Day Reconsidered.

<https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/16proposedbusres1.pdf>

“...BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that we encourage Unitarian Universalists to work with all of the religious groups that trace their religious roots to the Pilgrims and the Puritans. When we confront the past that we share with others, we ask for wisdom with charity as we try to better understand the people and the environment of the 1600s. To prepare for the future, we must make peace with our past. “

UUWorld Article: Lydia Maria Child: More than a Thanksgiving Song 11/23/2015

<http://www.uuworld.org/articles/child-more-thanksgiving-song>

The Unitarian famous for writing ‘Over the River and Through the Wood’ was also an ardent anti-slavery activist. With the popcorn, toast, and jelly beans eaten, Charlie Brown and his friends pile into the back of a station wagon headed for Thanksgiving with Charlie Brown’s grandmother. As the car gains speed, the Peanuts gang breaks into cacophonous song: “Over the river and through the wood, to Grandmother’s house we go . . .” By the time the Peanuts characters first sang “Over the River and Through the Wood,” the song had conjured Thanksgiving images of crisp autumn days and pumpkin pie for generations. Originally titled “The New-England Boy’s Song about Thanksgiving Day,” the piece appeared in the 1844 book *Flowers for Children*, Volume 2. Its author was writer, editor, and activist Lydia Maria Child, whose cozy holiday verses give no hint of the radical social justice ideals at the core of her work, most notably *An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans*, published in 1833.

VIII. Sample Sermons

Story

[Sermon: New Year's Platform 2010 by Rev. Amanda Poppei](#)

[Sermon: Saving Universalism by Rev. Lisa Freidman \(given after the Philando Castile shooting\)](#)

[Sermon: The State of the Fellowship by Rev. Julie Stoneberg](#)

Sermon: New Year's Platform 2010 by Rev. Amanda Poppei

Delivered in January, 2010 at the Washington Ethical Society

Sermon Summary

Truth is funny, isn't it? We in the liberal religious community know better than anyone that stories can have many kinds of truth: literal truth, and metaphorical truth. Stories, and even words themselves, can hold pieces of truth, but never all of it. And so we have some freedom to choose our stories, to decide which ones we will hold up as our truth.

Of course our stories, the stories of our lives, can't be just fiction. And so I will never stand here and tell you that you can think away everything bad in your life, that you can just believe a story of prosperity and success and perfection and look around to find that it is true. True stories have many chapters, times of loneliness and sorrow, of tragedy and heartbreak. We can't, and shouldn't, pretend our stories don't have those chapters. But the thing to remember is that we are always a character in our stories. What are the stories we tell about our character, about who we are in the midst of the novel of life? Are we stuck, like pout-pout, cast as a tragic figure without control over how we act in the world? Or do we tell a story that speaks to our power of agency, that casts us as the hero—facing difficulties sometimes, but meeting them, meeting the world, with resilience, with compassion, with love?

New Year's Platform 2010

Inspiration, as we all know, can come in many forms. We are lucky, in a liberal religious community like ours, to be able to draw from texts held sacred in different traditions; from poetry; from music; from current events; from life itself. This morning, inspiration appears to me from a text: specifically, from "The Pout-Pout Fish," by Deborah Diesen and illustrated, in all its fishy glory, by Dan Hanna.

You are perhaps not familiar with "The Pout-Pout Fish," an oversight which can be forgiven since the book has not quite yet made it into the canon of spiritual and ethical tomes. My

daughter received it as a gift this Christmas, and it was an instant hit with her...mostly because the title character (that's pout-pout fish) makes a recurring sound throughout the story: blub, bluuuub, bluuuuuuuuuuuuub.

I'm sure you can see why this instantly struck me as the perfect way to open the New Year with you. Blub, bluuuub, everybody.

Actually, it was not the sound effects but the plot of this book that got me thinking. It's about a fish who is convinced that his unique mouth shape (as another character describes it, a "crosstown frown") has consigned him to life as, to quote him directly, "a pout-pout fish, with a pout-pout face, so I spread the dreary-wearies all over the place."

Pout-pout fish has learned a story about himself. We'll never know, of course, whether it was taught to him as a tiny fish egg by his overbearing mother, or by a bully in the school. That's between pout-pout and his therapist. What I'm interested in talking about today is that idea of story—of how we think about, and listen to, and create, stories about ourselves.

I think at this time of year every newspaper and magazine, every blog and website, has some article about resolutions. Gym memberships are at a steep discount, for everyone who's planning to start that workout regime on Monday—this year there are a lot of articles about resolving to have better financial health, although it seems to me that it's Congress who should be making some resolutions about market regulation.

But I digress. My favorite tidbit about resolutions this season came from the advice columnist Carolyn Hax, who sponsored an online chat about what she called one of the most common resolutions: to accept ourselves for who we are. Self-acceptance, and acceptance of others, is a theme in Carolyn's columns—she's forever telling couples that they can't change their partner, and that instead they need to figure out how to be together just as they are. As a spouse, I think this is both sensible advice, and as a clergy person I think it is also theologically sound philosophy. In *Ethical Culture* we talk about the inherent worth of each person, the deep preciousness we all possess, just as we are. It's a value we try to teach our children—that they matter to the world, and to us, simply because of who they are, without changing a thing. So the idea of self-acceptance, and acceptance of each other, is one that makes sense to me.

But *Ethical Culture* also tells us that we are never done changing, that part of our work in this world is to help others to grow into their potential and to make sure that we are growing, too. We are called to bring out the best in others and therefore in ourselves, to be growing toward the good. And that, I think, is where resolutions come in.

In truth, resolutions can be made, and maybe should be made, all the time—not just at the first of the year. There's a Patsy Cline song I love about making resolutions in a religious community, especially. "I go to church on a Sunday," she sings, "the vows that I make, I break them on Monday." Now, I might hope to make it a little farther than Monday, but there's something to be said for making and remaking our vows all the time, for the kind of constant attention to our highest ideals and values that being in a religious community helps to create. A. Powell Davies, the minister of All Souls, Unitarian in the 1950s, put it this way: "QUOTE ABOUT WHY I GO TO CHURCH

Now, you may be wondering what this all has to do with our friend pout-pout fish, whom I'm sure you haven't forgotten. Pout-pout fish, as you remember, believed a story about himself that made him think he could never change, never be anything but dour and dreary. And the truth is, many

of us are like pout-pout, believing stories about ourselves that keep us from making changes, keep us from growing. When that's the case, we barely make it to even Monday with those Sunday morning vows. We can make resolution after resolution, and none of them will stick...because none of them fit with the story that we think is true.

I've been interested in this idea of story, of the stories we tell ourselves, since a class in pastoral care in seminary. We talked about a kind of counseling often called narrative therapy, which is really helping people to identify the stories they tell themselves—or the stories others tell them and they believe—and begin to explore alternative stories, stories that might be healthier or more helpful in their lives. Here's an example from my life: I used to believe a story that I was a bad driver. I don't like driving on highways, I once hit a parking post in a garage, I needed the examiner to explain a three-point turn during my driver's test. All those things are true, and so the story must be true, too. But over time, I've worked on hearing a different story. This story is the one about how I drive all through DC, handling traffic circles like a pro. It's about good parallel parking skills, and always wearing my seatbelt and using my blinker. It's about passing my driver's test the first time, since I did, after all, know how to do a three-point turn. Those things are all true, too, so the story must be true.

Truth is funny, isn't it? We in the liberal religious community know better than anyone that stories can have many kinds of truth: literal truth, and metaphorical truth. Stories, and even words themselves, can hold pieces of truth, but never all of it. And so we have some freedom to choose our stories, to decide which ones we will hold up as our truth.

Of course our stories, the stories of our lives, can't be just fiction. And so I will never stand here and tell you that you can think away everything bad in your life, that you can just believe a story of prosperity and success and perfection and look around to find that it is true. True stories have many chapters, times of loneliness and sorrow, of tragedy and heartbreak. We can't, and shouldn't, pretend our stories don't have those chapters. But the thing to remember is that we are always a character in our stories. What are the stories we tell about our character, about who we are in the midst of the novel of life? Are we stuck, like pout-pout, cast as a tragic figure without control over how we act in the world? Or do we tell a story that speaks to our power of agency, that casts us as the hero—facing difficulties sometimes, but meeting them, meeting the world, with resilience, with compassion, with love?

We are all storytellers in this way, all creators—if we choose to be—of the stories we live. We are creators, too, of the story we live together, the story of our religious community. We tell stories of who we have been over the years, and we begin to believe them. I visited a congregation once that told a story about itself as a place that could never have evening activities because everyone lived so far away. I asked how far was far—knowing that sometimes people do drive 40 or 50 minutes to get to a community they love. They told me most people were at least 15 minutes away, some as far as 20. Was the story they told a true one? It was for them, because they believed it.

We tell stories here at WES, of course, stories that tell who we are in a beautiful way and stories that cast us in a less favorable light. All of them have truth to them, but they all carry a power that goes beyond the truth, too—because they create a kind of reality of their own, as they are told and retold. Part of a religious leader's job, a wise person once told me, is to tell the story as I see

it, the hard, real facts before me. But part of the job, this wise man went on, is to tell the story as I wish I could see it, the story that I believe could be true if we made it so. And really, that is all of our job, our work together as a community: facing reality, and creating new one at the same time. Making our way in the liminal space, the border between the story we know and the story we are telling with hope and with faith.

Because the beautiful thing about life, about the human heart, is that we can learn new stories, we can believe new stories. Perhaps it is also true about the fish heart, because our friend pout-pout, you will be glad to know, learned a new story about himself too. He was helped by a friend, another fish who saw his pouty mouth—and saw the possibility of another story there. What would a pout be good for other than frowning? For kissing, of course! Pout-pout was so transformed by that kiss that his world changed in an instant...and as the story closes, we see him kissing everything in sight and calling out his newfound sense of self: “I’m a kiss-kiss fish with a kiss-kiss face, for spreading cheery-cheeries all over the place!”

This New Year’s, I want to take a page from pout-pout’s book and invite us all to think about the stories we tell ourselves, the stories that keep us from making changes in our lives. First, though, we’ll spend some time thinking about those changes—about the resolutions, the vows, that we hope to make in our own lives, or in the context of the religious community we share.

In the meditation, Mary asked you to do a kind of review of the last year. I want to invite you now to think about the year ahead, to begin the dreaming about what you might want to accomplish, to change, to recommit to in the year ahead. As one or more ideas bubble to the surface, write them down on one side of the card you have with you. Look at them, as they appear on the page: are these the things you want to commit to in the year ahead? It’s in pencil—you can erase! Consider the words until you have it right, until you have down what you want to promise to yourself in the year ahead.

PAUSE

Now I want to invite you to turn over your card, and to turn your mind from resolutions to stories. What are the stories that you tell yourself, or that you believe, that might prevent you from fulfilling the promises you just wrote down, from keeping the resolutions you made? Do you believe a story that is in conflict with one of your resolutions? And if so, what is the new story you want to tell yourself? What is the new story—rooted still in reality, but drawing on the most noble, the most heroic, the most beautiful in life—what is the new story that you want to tell this year? What is the story about yourself that will help you to keep your promises and your resolutions? What truth do you want to remember, and create, this year? On this side of your card, write down the new stories, the true stories, that you will tell this year.

PAUSE

The stories we tell, about ourselves and about each other, really do have the power to change our lives. One of my favorite musicals is Stephen Sondheim’s “Into the Woods,” is a combination of all the fairy stories you know. Cinderella meets Little Red Riding Hood, and they almost get trampled by the giants that came down Jack’s beanstalk. The characters begin with the stories we know, and find themselves in new stories...and eventually throw out the narrator to write their story themselves. At the very end, the witch—who, like many witches, has a complicated story herself—sings her blessing and her warning to them all. “Careful the tale you tell, that is the spell...”

This year, as you think about the resolutions and the changes and the projects you hope to accomplish, think too about the tales you will tell, the stories you will believe about yourself, about your family, about your community. Choose, perhaps, to tell a beautiful story...a story of kindness and strength, of love and resilience. And then believe it...and watch the story come true.

Sermon: Saving Universalism by Rev. Lisa Freidman (given after the Philando Castile shooting)

Delivered July, 10 2016 at Unity Unitarian Church in St. Paul

Sermon Summary

Rev. Freidman tells the story of 18th century farmer Thomas Potter who built a meeting house on his farm to wait for a preacher who shared his religious view to preach there. She explains that it may seem odd to you for me to evoke a three hundred year old story, rooted in an era that we see much differently through 21st century eyes, at the end of a week that has brought such profound heartbreak and outrage to our community and our nation. The violence of the senseless murders, the magnitude of the entrenched racism of our society, the discouraging echoes of our history – we have been shaken to the core. It’s tangible in our eyes and our faces, in every community I’ve touched this week. We long to know - will this be the moment of turning, of lasting change? Will we finally say “enough is enough” and make it reality? We yearn for something concrete to do – for some way to put our sorrow and grief into effective action. And yet, it is never so easy or so simple to know how to make a difference.

At times such as these, I turn to my faith for strength and inspiration. I reach out to my faith community for support, comfort and solidarity – and I need to say how important it feels to be here together today. Thank you. These are times which challenge our faith and it is important for us to talk openly with one another about our struggles and despair, and to bear witness to those core values that will not let us go, even in the most troubling hours.

As someone who was raised by two bonafide Universalist preachers and teachers, I believe it would be both a tragic and dangerous mistake to allow our Universalist roots to fade in this hour. Something foundational and important to our everyday lives is at stake, something that is captured in the astute words of the agnostic Robert Ingersoll close to a century ago when he observed: “The Unitarian Church has done more than any other church – and maybe more than all other churches – to substitute character for creed. I want to thank the Unitarian Church for what it has done. [But] I want to thank the Universalist Church too. They at least believe in a God who will leave the latch string out until the last child gets home.”

Sermon

When the 18th century farmer Thomas Potter built a meeting house on his farm to wait for a preacher who shared his religious views, his neighbors thought he had gone mad. With no

children of his own to inherit his wealth, Potter decided to share his gratitude for his good fortune by establishing a house of worship for the residents of New Jersey's Cape of Good Luck. Shortly after the meeting house was finished, the Baptists applied for its use. Potter challenged them, "If you can prove to me that God Almighty is a Baptist, you may have it." A few weeks later, the Quakers applied and then the Presbyterians, but the solitary farmer issued the same challenge to each of them, declaring that unless they could prove to him that God was a partisan, "all should be equally welcome" in the religious house which he had built. So he waited, alone in his empty worship hall, believing that if he was patient enough, God would send a preacher who shared his inclusive message and who would help him to bring it to the world.

It may seem odd to you for me to evoke a three hundred year old story, rooted in an era that we see much differently through 21st century eyes, at the end of a week that has brought such profound heartbreak and outrage to our community and our nation. The violence of the senseless murders, the magnitude of the entrenched racism of our society, the discouraging echoes of our history – we have been shaken to the core. It's tangible in our eyes and our faces, in every community I've touched this week. We long to know - will this be the moment of turning, of lasting change? Will we finally say "enough is enough" and make it reality? We yearn for something concrete to do – for some way to put our sorrow and grief into effective action. And yet, it is never so easy or so simple to know how to make a difference.

At times such as these, I turn to my faith for strength and inspiration. I reach out to my faith community for support, comfort and solidarity – and I need to say how important it feels to be here together today. Thank you. These are times which challenge our faith and it is important for us to talk openly with one another about our struggles and despair, and to bear witness to those core values that will not let us go, even in the most troubling hours. In my own soul-searching this week, I have come back again and again to the message of Universalism, to the call for an inclusive welcome and universal solidarity, to the unwavering message that every human being is a child of God, deserving of love, justice, and dignity. It was radical 300 years ago, when most houses of worship preached hellfire, division, and damnation, and it is still radical today when we dare to proclaim that there are no other people's children, no other people's fate. Our lives are more deeply interconnected and intertwined than we may ever fully know. And so, we still have need of the lonely farmer's dream and courage. We still have need of sacred spaces, where we can come together to share our honest pain and to reach for a larger hope and vision.

For those of you who don't know how the story ends, one foggy September morning, Potter's preacher did come, in the person of John Murray who had landed on the Cape of Good Luck by sheer accident. With Murray's first sermon delivered in Potter's overflowing meeting house, American Universalism was born. The controversy spread like wildfire. Universalist preachers traveled the countryside, braving death threats and stones thrown at their heads through church windows, in order to bring the glad message of God's love for all people. Opponents warned that the belief in universal salvation and redemption would quickly destroy the moral soul of our nation – that without the knowledge and threat of hell, no one would strive to be good.

But the Universalists came back with the argument that it is love and hope which propels the human spirit toward the just, the fair, and the good, not fear or dismissal. The story of American Universalism, as it is told, continues with Murray. But in the wake of this week, I think we need to reclaim the faith and vision and power of that is Thomas Potter's legacy to us now. For this moment is not about the failure or success of our leaders alone - it is about all of us, ordinary people of faith and committed citizens, and the nature of the houses we are willing to build. In this past week, this house, our house, has stood with its doors wide open, along with others in our community. We have held space for protesters and activists to rest and restore from time at the Governor's mansion. We have offered childcare for those who held vigil at J.J. Hill Montessori. We have provided gathering space and food for grieving families. We did not hesitate - it was the least we could do. It is why we are here.

But this house has been standing for over a century, and if there is one thing we have learned in the last decades, it is that no house is big enough, no welcome is wide enough, to effect all the change we seek. Thomas Potter built a building, created sacred space, and waited for the moment when the people would come. Eventually, they did. Today, in this hour, it seems to me that we need to take ourselves out of our individual houses and into the streets to build sacred space there. Sacred space where we meet in our difference to stand in non-violent solidarity to address the systems of inequity and racism that oppress and kill. Sacred space in which those of us with privilege are willing to give some of it up to make reparations for the sins of our past. Sacred space in which we are willing to show up as ordinary human beings in our grief and pain and doubt to struggle through the questions and the challenges together. For if we truly believe in our essential equality and the universality of our humanity in the eyes of the Holy, then our home, our people, is wherever we meet one another in love and truth. In the 21st century, we need a larger house than any brick or steel can build. We need a larger house, whose foundation is grounded in the human heart.

After he build his chapel, Potter waited over ten years for his preacher to arrive, and he was reconciled to the fact that one might never come in his lifetime. Somehow, through the seasons and the years, he was able to stay present to his hope and faith, even in the midst of uncertainty and in the face of the ridicule and indifference of his neighbors. But it can't have been easy. And I wonder about the role of the other few scattered universalists in the region in reaching out to him through the years. History does not record their names, but we know they were there.

I am deeply aware of the power of presence this week to the sustaining power of hope and faith, as we have received outreach from other Unitarian Universalist congregations, from the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, and others who simply want to say we're here. We're grieving with you. Let us know what you need. And in the early hours of Friday morning, as I awoke to the news of the police killings in Dallas, I sent an email to our colleagues at First Unitarian Church of Dallas, letting them know that Unity Church was sending love and strength to them in their hour of need. Later that day I stood on the corner of Penn and Lowry in Minneapolis and cried with the crowd gathered there to mourn the tragic death of a two-year-old boy. Sometimes, there are no words. Only tears.

Christopher Buice puts it best, when he reminds us that how we relate to each other can be a matter of heaven or hell. And the salvation that we find often comes from how we show up to the present moment. In the midst of our longing to act, to solve the problems that have been so graphically laid before us this week, I hope that we will not forget the power of faithful presence, even amid our doubts and fears. In that spirit, I share this excerpt from “A Litany for Those Who Aren’t Ready For Healing” by Rev. Dr. Yolanda Pierce. (If you have not read the whole piece, I commend it to you): “Let us not rush to the language of healing, before understanding the fullness of the injury and the depth of the wound. Let us not rush to offer a band-aid, when the gaping wound requires surgery and complete reconstruction....Let us not be afraid to sit with the ugliness, the messiness, and the pain that is life in community together... Instead, let us be silent when we don’t know what to say. Let us be humble and listen to the pain, rage, and grief pouring from the lips of our neighbors and friends... Let us pray with our eyes open and our feet firmly planted on the ground.”

If I could go back in time (every historian’s dream), there is one question that I would ask of Potter. In all those years of the pulpit standing empty, why didn’t he claim his own voice and preach? Why didn’t he begin with his story, his own vision and journey of faith? Each of us has the right and responsibility to speak up for what matters most to us. To consider the nature of the faith we would proclaim to our community. At a meeting this spring with white allies of Black Lives Matter, Lena Gardner charged those present to consider the responses that they could create in their own communities. Each of us has the right and responsibility to find our voice in this moment.

I can feel that presence and that voice rising in us. As this week unfolded, more of you reached out to volunteer for Freedom School, to join the Racial and Restorative Justice Committee, to sign up for Beloved Conversations this Fall. You called. You emailed. You checked in. You stood at the ready for whatever call might come, and you found ways to show up for one another. Ours is a shared pulpit and a free faith, and it is my prayer that we will help one another to find our voices and to live into this moment of history together.

As someone who was raised by two bonafide Universalist preachers and teachers, I believe it would be both a tragic and dangerous mistake to allow our Universalist roots to fade in this hour. Something foundational and important to our everyday lives is at stake, something that is captured in the astute words of the agnostic Robert Ingersoll close to a century ago when he observed: “The Unitarian Church has done more than any other church – and maybe more than all other churches – to substitute character for creed. I want to thank the Unitarian Church for what it has done. [But] I want to thank the Universalist Church too. They at least believe in a God who will leave the latch string out until the last child gets home.”

The pure fact of the matter is that it remains a radical – and radically important - statement of faith to affirm that each and every human being on this earth is born with equal access to all that is holy and to all that saves and redeems us, time and time again, from our own moral lapses and abject human failures. Without this affirmation, our first principle of the inherent worth and dignity of every person becomes mere hypocrisy. Without this faith, it would have been

impossible for us to have achieved our long history of social change – or to be ready for the work of change that still lies before us. Where do you stand? Who will be our people, in the eyes of a loving God and in the judgment of history? Our Universalism matters, for it is that faith that continues to open our hearts to one another until we find a way to save us all.

I live about 10 blocks from the St. Anthony Village police station. Last night, as I was driving home after a full day of board meetings, emails, and a memorial service, on my way to revising a sermon, I drove by a lemonade stand on the street next to mine. The whole family was out waving a sign – lemonade 25 cents! On a spur of the moment, even though I felt pressed for time, I dug through my car for a quarter and walked down the street to purchase a cup. A small child solemnly took my payment and proudly announced “We’re raising money for Black Lives Matter!” They had been sitting out all afternoon, greeting neighbors and strangers alike, having important and wide-ranging conversations. It was something we could do, the dad said. Something we could explain to the kids. As I walked home, I thought that Thomas Potter would have understood.

Sermon: The State of the Fellowship by Rev. Julie Stoneberg

Delivered January, 17 2010 at The Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough

Sermon Summary

Rev. Stoneberg explains to her congregation that we’re going to be looking at ourselves through the lens of ‘story’...what is the story of this congregation? Each of us brings our own particular story planted in childhood and nurtured throughout our lives. Our stories as they relate to being members and friends of this congregation are shaded by our previous experiences with other groups or communities, and also by whether we’ve been attending the fellowship for years or we’ve just stepped inside the doors for the first time today. So what can we, collectively, say about who we are, and how does that story help or impede our journey together?

Service

♪ Opening Music Saints and Sinners -David Francey/Arr. M Parnis

Opening Words #437 - Kenneth L. Patton

We gather this morning with heavy hearts and deep concern for the people of Haiti and the many who are still trying to locate loved ones. We also gather this morning to affirm the amazing value of community and to give thanks for the great privilege of being here together. These are the words of Ken Patton:

Let us worship with our eyes and ears and fingertips;

Let us love the world through heart and mind and body.

We feed our eyes upon the mystery and revelation in the faces of our brothers and sisters.

We seek to know the wistfulness of the very young and the very old, the wistfulness of people in all times of life.

We seek to understand the shyness behind arrogance, the fear behind pride, the tenderness behind clumsy strength, the anguish behind cruelty.

All life flows into a great common life, if we will only open our eyes to our companions.

Let us worship, not in bowing down, not with closed eyes and stopped ears.

Let us worship with the opening of all the windows of our beings, with the full outstretching of our spirits.

Life comes with singing and laughter, with tears and confiding, with a rising wave too great to be held in the mind and heart and body, to those who have fallen in love with life.

Let us worship, and let us learn to love.

Chalice Lighting

One of the ways we tell the story of who we are is through our actions and rituals. The most consistent ritual we have is the lighting of a chalice each time we gather. Its flame reminds us of the long story of our faith...of those who have been persecuted for their beliefs. Its cup reminds us that partaking in this community is open to all. In lighting it, we shine a light on who we are and who we hope to be. As _____ lights our chalice today, please speak with me our chalice lighting words:

May the light we now kindle

Inspire us to use our powers

To heal and not to harm

To help and not to hinder

To bless and not to curse

To serve the spirit of freedom.

Unison Affirmation

Another way we tell the tale of this Fellowship is in the words we speak. Each Sunday we affirm our intent and purpose by speaking words in unison. I invite you to think on what these words tell us about who we are as we say them together:

We gather in the spirit of love.

We welcome all who enter in friendship.

In freedom and in peace

we make our covenant

with this beloved community:

To care for our home, the Earth,

to serve the family of humanity, and

to cherish each other as friends.

The Spirit of life unites us.

* Spirit of Life - #123

STORY FOR ALL AGES I am Too Absolutely Small for School - Lauren Child

Do you ever tell anyone the story of you? It might start, "Once upon a time there was a boy who was an older brother....or Once upon a time there was a girl who could really sing..."

How you tell a story says something about who we are, and the way we begin even sometimes says something about what's going to happen in the story. Today's story is about a big brother and his little sister, a sister who thought she was too absolutely small for school.

Go now in peace, go now in peace. May the spirit of love surround you, Everywhere, everywhere, you may go. (Repeat)

* SINGING TOGETHER Here We Have Gathered #360

Let's continue in song. I invite you to rise in body and/or spirit as we sing #360, Here We Have Gathered. Again, I encourage you to think about what these words might say about who we are. #360.

CANDLES OF JOY AND CONCERN (#501, adapted)

Kindness can heal us, as we give we gain.

Whether or not this is your favourite part of our weekly services, 'Candles of Joy and Concern' is a time when we give to one another...either by sharing of our personal joys and sorrows, by offering our gratitude for life, or by receiving that sharing through our listening and open hearts. And so we turn now to one another, seeking to bring into our circle all those who need our love and support.

I invite you to come to share of your life, or to light a candle in silence.

May we be reminded that we are part of a web of life that makes us one with all, and may we be grateful for the miracle of our sharing, which gives us the power to remember, to love, and to care.

And ever grateful for those who bring music to us, we turn to a time of meditation, to think on all that has been shared here, a meditation accompanied by the music of the Occasional Singers.

♪ MUSICAL MEDITATION Da Pacem Domine - Mechior Franck/ar M Goetze

* RESPONSIVE READING I Call That Church Free #591

We often turn to our great leaders and liberal theologians to help us express who we are and who we hope to be. One such person was James Luther Adams. The responsive reading found at #591 expresses his idea of what a truly free faith would be. As we read this responsively, I again ask you to think about whether these words tell any part of the story of this community. Please stand as you are able. I will read the regular text, and ask that you respond with the indented, italicized text.

(Wait for people to be ready.) I Call That Church Free.

MESSAGE The State of the Fellowship

Have you ever had one of those experiences when it seems that around every corner there is something calling you to pay attention to one particular thing? I've seen this used in movies... when the main character needs to, say, make a difficult phone call, and everywhere they turn there is a larger-than-life telephone nearly ringing off the hook.

Well, this morning's service, or at least the call we're answering today, the call of 'story', comes out of such an experience. I think it all started about a year ago when I attended a meeting of the Peterborough Storytellers at the library, and I found that about half of the people participating were Unitarians. Story matters to us.

It continued when a few folks here at the Fellowship expressed a desire for more 'story' in the context of worship...more storytelling...more story as analogy.

It continued further when I attended the UU Ministers' Convo in November where the theme was "Tell a tell, touch a life, transform the world."

And still it continued, when I picked up the book that the daytime book club is reading, "A Fair Country" by John Ralston Sauls, and found that the introduction was titled, "The Power of Story." Then last week, I opened my weekly email from the Alban Institute, a congregational resource center, and found that the topic was "Pastor as Narrative Leader."

Alright. Alright, I said. I'll pay attention to story. And sure enough, I found it to be a very helpful way to think about this "State of the Fellowship" address. What is the story of this congregation? How does it reinforce what we do well, or keep us stuck in patterns that are not so helpful? How might we re-author this story to better serve our mission?

So, let me tell you a little bit about story, or narrative therapy, and its premises (and I don't mean to imply that you need therapy!) The theory is that the stories we tell, and the stories we believe...about ourselves, our communities, our nation...are self-fulfilling prophecies. We create these stories out of our experiences and what we've been told, but to use them to our advantage, we need to stay cognizant of the stories we tell, and be willing to re-author them when necessary.

For children, their personal stories are highly influenced by what they're told. This is something I think about almost every time I'm in the locker room at the Y, because there I overhear an incredible variety of interactions between mothers and their children. Just Thursday, I heard a mother telling her daughter that she 'forgets everything'...and no matter what the daughter's excuse or explanation, the mother's reply was, "that's because you forget everything." And so she will continue. On another day, I was in awe of a mother who was obviously under a great deal of time pressure, but didn't allow that to stop her from giving her two little ones repeated positive affirmations about how much they were helping, and how good they were at getting ready for swimming class.

This also applies to what we tell ourselves. We tell ourselves we are stupid, or fat, or smart, or lucky, or the one who never wins, and likely this is the story we continue to create. Because we're drawn to reinforcing our stories, we tend to devalue and even ignore the events, voices and experiences that don't fit into that dominant narrative. This is true whether the story we tell is empowering or disempowering, positive or negative. We reinforce the stories we believe.

Therapy or counselling can employ the narrative approach particularly well when we have 'problem-saturated' stories... stories that reinforce being stuck, or being wrong. Then the goal of narrative therapy is to shift to a new perspective, allowing us to see an alternative story or

outcome. One effective way to do this is to separate the identified problem from the person. The saying goes, “The person is not the problem. The problem is the problem.” To give an example from our particular context, our story contains a ‘not enough resources’ problem. We could even give it a name like, oh, I don’t know, Shorty Fall, or Nary Nuff. We can better engage in discussion about how to deal with Shorty and Nary if we know they are not ‘us’. In this way, we can look at the problem without blaming ourselves or anyone else. Shorty and Nary are the problem that we together can solve.

In his book, “The Power of Story”, Jim Loehr asks, in what areas of our life is it clear that we cannot achieve our goals with the story we’ve got? If our congregational story says we don’t have enough, then there’s no point in moving toward any goals that require more of us. If our story says that we are white and intellectual, then it becomes difficult for our circle to include anyone who identifies as anything other than that. If our story says we know everyone here and that we are like family, then newcomers feel like outsiders. I love the piece of history that Ben Taylor has been known to tell, about Rev. Orfald arriving on the scene to find a group of people who couldn’t sing Spirit of Life if their lives depended on it. But Anne started telling a different story. She believed that this congregation could sing, and now, fifteen years later, we can, and we have a vibrant music program.

So what is the story of this congregation? I have been blessed over the last few years in hearing Ann Jex tell our story maybe about ten times. Ann is one of the founding members of this congregation. She has graciously taken part in new member classes by sharing the history of this Fellowship. Here is a short version of the story I’ve heard:

Once upon a time there was a conservative community called Peterborough. Hardly a liberal was in sight. But a minister from Toronto knew better, and he called a meeting, bringing a few religious free-thinkers together to talk about starting a Unitarian fellowship. They agreed to try, and in about six months, had found enough interested people to be granted a charter from the American Unitarian Association. (Well, actually, they were one person short of the 15 required, but they got special dispensation.)

Over the next thirty years or so, they grew to about thirty members, with about as many children. They met in each others homes and then in different public settings. The tasks were many and the people few, so they rotated jobs. It was hard work and they often felt like quitting. One member in particular, Mary Young, wouldn’t hear of giving up, and encouraged them to keep going. Still, they couldn’t seem to get beyond about thirty members.

But the group had vision. They saved their money in hopes of buying a building some day. They adopted the ‘yew’ as their symbol, because it is evergreen, hardy, thrives in adversity and is long living.

Several members were active in the greater community and under their own power, pulled other members of the Fellowship into service. Still, they didn’t grow.

They had a visioning workshop and decided they wanted to call a part time minister.

Providentially, Anne Orfald was just graduating from seminary and looking for a part time settlement. Shortly after they called Anne, they also bought a building and the congregation

began to grow. Little by little, more people came; they bought hymnals and began to sing together; the Fellowship embraced a larger sense of community and pride. And then the ground shifted. They outgrew the little church. Rev. Anne retired. They had to look for a new minister, and also a new place to meet. A building committee searched high and low for a new space. A ministerial search committee searched high and low for a new minister. Eventually they found both...and...and they lived happily ever after??

Now, if this is truly the story we have ingested...the story we believe about this community...the story that we know and tell...then we would think of ourselves as indeed evergreen and hardy...we would know that the actions of determined individuals have made a huge difference in the continuing presence of this community...we would know that we are survivors and thrivers.

I was moved to tears, as I'm sure many of you were, when watching the news this week. One story from Haiti showed the people there marching through the streets and singing. The news report said they were singing for those who had died, and singing in gratitude to be alive. They were singing the story of who they are and who they want to be....people who are able to face hardship by working together and helping one another...people who imagine a brighter future.

I mean to take nothing away from the magnitude of the tragedy in Haiti, but this 'singing in the streets' might describe what I experienced when I first arrived here. You were in the throes of survivor fatigue. You were exhausted from three years of chaos and upheaval...the earth of certainty and normalcy had moved beneath your feet, the changes had required a great deal of you, yet you were singing a song of survival, gratitude and celebration. That passion for the life of this community was part of the reason I came to Peterborough. Your passion for and commitment to the Unitarian Fellowship continues to be germane to our story.

But there is another story too....one that is both spoken and felt...one that can be heard in the subtext of our history. This is our 'problem-saturated' story, the place in our narrative where we are stuck. It tells of how we are always a few people short. It tells of too much work for too few people, of how the same folks repeatedly show up to do the work and eventually burn out. The story says that it is difficult to find people to serve on the Board and that some committees struggle to be effective. It tells of a community that has dreams bigger than its wallets and other resources. Frankly, I think this is a true story.

But we live in a postmodernist age, in a time when we know that multiple stories are true, and that our realities are multi-layered. All of these stories are true. Ours is a story of struggle and exhaustion. Ours is also a story of survival and success. Ours is a story of some tensions and disagreements. Ours is also a story of a joyful community that is open and warm and that loves to laugh. Ours is a story of individual social justice activists who have not succeeded at garnering the support of the whole congregation. Ours is also a story of a gathering of people who are passionate about social change and who believe that this community can make a difference. So, which of these stories are we going to swallow? Which ones are we going to tell?

A review of “A Fair Country”, the book I mentioned earlier, suggests that Sauls is engaged in conscious myth-building...that is, that he is working to create a foundational national story that Canada will ingest and operate out of. Sauls insists that the ‘myth’ he is building is based in fact, but facts that we have forgotten, so that what he is doing is more like re-claiming or re-authoring the story. This is, I believe, what James Luther Adams was trying to achieve in the reading we did together earlier. He wrote a story of the church he not only believes we are, but also of the church that we can be....a free church that is on a great adventure of the spirit.

I’m not suggesting that we be dishonest or that we manufacture a community story that is not based in reality. Rather, I am suggesting that along with facing our challenges, we allow ourselves to see the myriad resources and possibilities that exist, because it is out of these possibilities that we can build the future of this Fellowship. As I was working on this message, I went back and reviewed the large packet you prepared to tell your story to a potential new minister. You wanted to present the congregation in a positive light, so it identifies challenges but then turns and focuses on the many strengths of the congregation. It says, we’ve had our problems but we know how to survive because we are committed. This is our story.

Step back, or get on the balcony, and take a broader view. Get a different perspective. For example, rather than seeing that we are over-extended, see that we are a congregation that understands that depending too heavily on a few volunteers is neither just nor sustainable. So now, we have instituted a ‘pod’ system to spread out some of the tasks more broadly, and we are willing to let positions sit vacant when no one is inspired to fill them.

Or, another example. Yes, we are a congregation that experiences a gap between dreams and resources. So, one of the questions we asked (and will ask again today) in the community conversations was about how to shrink that gap. One wise response was that whatever the action taken, we shouldn’t ever shrink our dreams. The new perspective gained is that we are a congregation who dreams big, and that is learning to recognize a gap as simply an indication of how much we want to achieve. Having Shorty and Nary around can remind us of the size of our dreams and goals.

So, what is the State of this Fellowship? I believe that we are poised on the edge of great change. We are identifying those parts of our story that keep us stuck in problems. We are re-authoring our story to be one of a community unafraid to face challenges together, and willing to dream big together. We know how to sing a story of love and inclusivity, of a free church that bursts into newness with joy. We are a community on a great adventure together, and I, for one, look forward to what’s going to happen in the next chapter, because I’ve come to love all the characters here.

Blessed be each of you.

Amen.

♪ OFFERING In the Name of All of Our Children - Sally Rogers/arr. M Parnis

As Rev. Julie has said, one of the stories we tell about ourselves is that we don't have enough, that our resources are too limited to do everything we'd like to be, to be what we would like to be, or even to pay the bills. Our weekly offering is a time to tell a new and different story.

This morning's collection, as you heard from Ruth Schumaker, will be going to Seeds of Hope for their work in Haiti. You can also put something in the collection for the Fellowship...your pledge or another gift...but please mark it clearly if that's your intention. I'll ask the ushers to wait a few minutes to begin passing the baskets so that you have time to prepare.

The morning offering will now be taken.

* SINGING TOGETHER We Are Dancing Sarah's Circle #212

Thank you for the gift of story, of song, and of money that you each bring to this community, and for your generosity toward a country in great need.

This hymn is considered to be the feminist version of We are Climbing Jacob's Ladder...and expresses a view of community that would be an ever-widening circle. Please rise in body and/or spirit as we sing together #212, We are Dancing Sarah's Circle.

* CLOSING WORDS

- Marianne Williamson

Please remain standing for our closing words. I ask that you join your heart with the hearts of others in the room, as well as hands if you're comfortable doing so. As some of you have heard before, this poem by Marianne Williamson (apparently based on the words of Nelson Mandela) was a turning point in the story of my life. It offered me a vision of what I could be. (Jovanna, please extinguish the candles here.)

Our greatest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our greatest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?

Actually, who are you not to be?

You are a child of god. Your playing small doesn't serve the world.

There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that others wouldn't feel insecure around you.

We were born to make manifest the glory of god that's within us. It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone.

And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.

As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

May we have the courage to let our light shine and to play our vision out, large and beautiful, into the world.

Amen.

♪ CLOSING MUSIC Siyahamba - South African trad.

EXTINGUISHING THE FLAME

Election

Sermon from 8-28-16: What I am learning from Donald Trump. By Rev. Justin Schroeder

<http://firstuniv.podbean.com/e/august-28-2016-sermon-by-rev-justin-schroeder-what-im-learning-from-donald-trump/>

Sermon laments the fact that Trump talks about the world in terms of winners and losers.

Thanksgiving

Sermon: The Myth of Thanksgiving by Rev. Peter Connolly

A Sermon offered at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Bowling Green, KY, on Thanksgiving Day, November 26, 2009

Sermon Summary

Rev. Connolly describes the story of how the Pilgrims came from England and became the first Americans - except they didn't. He references a book called A Great and Godly Adventy by Godfrey Hodgson who describes the historical context of the Thanksgiving story.

Sermon

This is the story of how the Pilgrims came from England in 1620, celebrated the first Thanksgiving and become the first Americans—except they didn't. This is the story of how the people in England who became known as the Pilgrims got themselves into the situation they did—which was to become religious "puritans"; then, unwanted persons; then self-exiles; then reluctant voyagers; then scared newcomers; then villagers; then townsmen and always English subjects.

This is the story of how the Pilgrims planted the seeds of our present-day celebration of the Thanksgiving holiday, except they didn't, so it cannot be that story. But it's another story. Perhaps it's a better story.

In his book A Great and Godly Adventure, Godfrey Hodgson names two "convulsive, irreversible changes" that occurred in Europe in the early years of the 16th century—a hundred years before the voyage of those religious puritans we've come to call the "Pilgrims," that had a direct influence on their "adventure." Those changes were embedded in the historical developments we call the "Reformation" and the "expansion of Europe into Africa, Asia and the Americas that has been called 'the great frontier.'"

Events were brewing in the Holy Roman Church in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, occasioned by what the "brewers" would call corruption of the teachings and traditions of Christ. October 31, 1517, is generally taken as the date that began the great Reformation of the church. On that date, the monk Martin Luther saw fit to publicly post his objections to these abuses in a very public and a very apt place—the door of the cathedral of the town where he lived—the Church of All Souls in the town of Wittenberg in Germany. Ninety-five objections— "theses" or

"propositions"— he nailed to the door— or so tradition tells us. Some sources say that he merely circulated them.

What was important about these propositions? Theologically, they aimed for a deeper Christian faith through greater fidelity to God's word as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. Ecclesiastically, they aimed at decentralizing the role of the hierarchy of the church in its interpretation of Scripture and levying of penalty and absolution. Politically, these theses were bound to provoke, they were intended to destabilize,

they meant to rattle the cages where salvation was kept hostage. Morally, Luther's was, by any measure, a heroic stance. Ethically, it was, in his judgment, the only stance possible. "Here, I stand," he cries "I can do no other."

Luther, patently, took his religion seriously. In John Bowker's text, *God: A Brief History*, Bowker quotes from one of Luther's sermons as he looked back on his early life.

For more than 20 years in my cloister...I sought God with great toil and severe mortification of the body, fasting, watching, singing and praying. In this way I shamefully wasted my time and found not the Lord. The more I sought and the nearer I thought I was to him, the farther away I got. No, God does not permit us to find him so. He must first come and seek us where we are. We may not pursue and overtake him. That is not his will.

Luther found through personal experience that he could not reach God through effort and finally reached the conclusion that we can know nothing of what he calls "God's incomprehensible and unsearchable will." In his great phrase, "We look with the blind eyes of moles on the majesty of God," he states his case most succinctly and falls back on whatever substance we do have for revelation. He identifies this as Scripture, *sola scriptura*, only the Bible. Believing that salvation lies in the will of God and that the will of God is perfectly revealed in the Bible and that the institution of the church had co-opted God's word through perversion of doctrine, Luther saw as his great task to translate the Bible from the Latin accessible only to trained clergy to the daily language of his people, the German language. In this way, revelation is made available to all—the "priesthood of every believer," in his memorable phrase.

Calvin, the Swiss theologian and contemporary of Luther, saw things a mite differently, but also advocated a search for revelation that relied on the centrality of Scripture. In Bowker's account, Calvin believes that the "effects of God can be seen in Creation, but it is impossible to understand what has been revealed of God without the 'spectacles' that scripture provides." We are "inherently sinful people, lost in the labyrinth of iniquity" and we can only be delivered by the Bible's message "which leads us out into a totally undeserved salvation."

It was this purity in the viewpoints of serious Christian theologians in the early 16th century which challenged the cynical exploitation of the poor and credulous by the institution of the church which impelled Luther and Calvin and Zwingli and the rest to take the risks they did. And it was to this "pure" vision of what Christ's kingdom on Earth could be that attracted various pious Christians across Europe, some "purer" than others, none, it can be argued, "purer" than the Separatists that later became known as Pilgrims.

"Separatists" they were called by others, usually. Sometimes they were called "Brownists" "after Robert Browne, a Cambridge Presbyterian who formed a Separatist congregation" (Hodgson). Sometimes they were called "Anabaptists," which was a pejorative. They gave themselves various

names. Most commonly, they called themselves "the godly." We could certainly call them "Puritans," for the purity of their beliefs, but that term was reserved for a group of similar-thinking folks "who chose to remain inside the Church of England." That institution, itself, was a product of the Reformation, as well, though it would be more precise, I think, to say that it was a product of the growing dissatisfaction with the institutionalized church that formed the fertile ground for the reformists' movement. It is hard to argue that King Henry VIII had true theological differences with the church the way Luther and Calvin did. In Henry's mind, as evinced by his actions, the institution of the church was a secular inconvenience to the hugeness of his ego and ambition.

So, our heroes can be called "Puritans" in an informal way that acknowledges the seriousness of their theological stance, but historically, that term has already been claimed. No one called them Pilgrims till generations later, but the term is generally used, even by those who dispute it because, after all, we have to call them something and who's going to go around calling them "the godly" in a secular world and "Separatists" reeks too much of the academic, don't you think? The other "convulsive, irreversible change" that Hodgson speaks of is the "great frontier," that expansion of Europe by maritime development into Africa, Asia and the Americas. The religious impulse gave rise to the search of the Pilgrims for a religious home, tolerant of their theology. The expansion of European sea power gave them the means to seek that home.

Separatists believed that each congregation should seek its own salvation and "not be bound by the rules and the regulations of the Church of England in matters of doctrine and discipline" (Ibid.). As is often is the case, at this time in England, the academy provided an institutional home for Protestantism in its challenge to the secular power wielded by the church in the name of religion. The university town of Cambridge, in this case, housed the anti-institutionalists. There were educated William Brewster and John Robinson who were to be Pilgrim leaders. Brewster became a mentor of sorts in theological matters to William Bradford, who was twenty years younger than him and would walk to his home for discussion. These three formed the core of Pilgrim leadership.

The Pilgrims' fondest hope was to be allowed to practice their pure and separatist brand of religious observance in their hometowns, but religious intolerance made it impossible. Their migration was first to what Godfrey Hodgson calls an "unpromising cluster of villages in the English Midlands." By the fall of 1607, it was clear that the archbishop of York was determined to destroy their church and that the Separatists would have to move. Their beliefs would allow neither assimilation nor accommodation with the institutional church: they believed that God ordained that their highest purpose was to "worship God in their own way."

The desperate search of this band of Separatists to find a religious home qualifies them for the title "Pilgrim," though not in the way that term is usually used, for religious folk following a prescribed path toward an agreed-upon goal. The pilgrimage that these folks embarked upon was for an unknown place, a refuge and a fortress. The obvious refuge outside of England was in Holland, "which had been a refuge for such victims of religious persecution in England since the middle of the previous century" (Ibid.). The trip includes sacrifice, betrayal, capture, loss of most of their possessions to robbery, and imprisonment for a month for the party of fifty to sixty men, women and children.

What next? To try again. A forty-mile march by the men to Killingholme while the women and children traveled by boat, a boat which got washed up on a sand bar, stranding them. The men were persuaded to board a ship while waiting for the tide to lift the boat of their families. From that ship they watched, horrified, as their wives and families were arrested by "a great company, both horse and foot, coming with bills [woodmen's blades used as battle-axes] and guns and other weapons" (Ibid.)

What next? A fierce storm blew up. The ship was driven nearly 400 miles across the North Sea almost to the coast of Norway. They had to sail south again to Amsterdam, which they did, successfully. Amsterdam, then as now, was a bastion of liberalism. The magistrates were embarrassed at having to decide what to do with these women and children whose only crime was their passion for their beliefs. Hodgson says that "the women and children were passed from one jurisdiction to another. In the end, the authorities had the sense to let them go." Amsterdam. Amsterdam then is described as "the New York of the 17th century... commercial, cosmopolitan, busy, and rich." It appears that in the early years of the 17th century, "five hundred ships left its harbor every week, trading to the Baltic, the Mediterranean, the Hudson, the Spice Islands, South Africa and Japan." It was too much for the pious Pilgrims. After less than a year, they moved on to another Dutch town called Leiden. The religious band found the town more to their liking, but did not have the skills to compete for the jobs held by artisans. They were left to take less skilled jobs in the textile industry, becoming carders, twine makers, wood combers, glovers and hatters. Some made clay pipes.

They had two services every Sunday. The first began early in the morning and lasted about four hours. The congregation stood for the whole time. They sang their songs without accompaniment as music was considered sinful—"or at least, Catholic." The sermon would sometimes last two hours. The second service was devoted to debating and discussing passages from Scripture, the whole congregation being encouraged to participate. This service, also, could last three or four hours.

William Brewster took to publishing books. Is it any surprise that the kind of books he printed were just the kind destined to get him in trouble in England? By now is it any surprise that copies of these books made it back to England? One was an attack on James I and his bishops for "trying to impose episcopacy on the Presbyterian Scots church. The unbound books were smuggled in the false bottoms of French wine barrels." Those were the days. The book was "denounced as an 'atrocious and seditious libel,' and the king ordered his ambassador in Holland...to find Brewster and bring him to justice" (Ibid.). The king's hirelings searched for Brewster for months in Holland but did not find him because he had made his way back to London.

"By 1617, the Leiden congregation, led by John Robinson and William Brewster, had come to the conclusion that they must leave Holland and emigrate to the New World that was opening up" (Ibid.) at that time in history. They were influenced in coming "to that conclusion by... Thomas Weston, a wealthy London ironmonger and... investor, whose business took him to Holland" (Ibid.) Weston was eager to find a way to break into the trade emerging from the vast resources of the North American continent. "He was willing and able to advance to the Pilgrims the substantial capital they would need to establish themselves in America" (Ibid.)

So, from their beginning, the Pilgrims had two aims in their goal of settling across the Atlantic. Their primary aim was religious— to find a place and a way "to practice their own... Protestant

version of Christianity" free from interference from king or bishops. But it had to be a business venture, too, because if it were not, the Pilgrims could in no way afford to bear the expense of the trip. They had to earn enough to repay the loans they had secured from Weston and the other backers. The plan was to trade for furs with the native population. Weston, meanwhile, strove to alter the terms to his advantage after the agreement had been struck and the Pilgrim leaders had to muster the fortitude to refuse to yield to this pressure. Meanwhile, political events across the European continent added pressures to the religious folk to find another place. "The Hapsburgs were the archenemies of Protestant religion," says Hodgson, and "their victory would mean a Calvary for Protestant Holland." The dangers from "wild men and wild animals" on this new continent might have looked less scary with this as a prospect.

It was August 22, 1620, when the pilgrims were finally ready to sail on two ships, the Speedwell and the Mayflower. The Speedwell was a small ship, a sixty-ton vessel. The Mayflower could hold 180 tons of cargo. The Speedwell never made it. William

Bradford said that it was "as leaky as a sieve." As it turns out, the ship was sabotaged by her master. "He was afraid the expedition would run out of food, and that the Mayflower would make sure it kept all the supplies."

It may be surprising for you to learn, as it was for me, that hundreds of ships, some much smaller than the Mayflower, had been crossing the Atlantic every year for more than a century, since John Cabot had first landed in Newfoundland in 1497. By 1620, thousands of European sailors were spending their summers fishing on the Grand Banks and on the shores of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and Maine. They almost always sailed in the summer, though.

The Mayflower was on the North Atlantic hundreds of miles from shore when the autumn storms were most fierce. For days at a time, they reefed the sails as short as they could because the winds were so strong and the seas so high. It's remarkable that only one man died during the voyage. And there was one birth as well. They started out a hundred strong and landed on the North American shore at 99 and an infant.

The Mayflower was at sea for two months and three days. She landed at 8 in the morning on November 9, but did not find a safe place to disembark for another day. They landed, not at Plymouth, but at Provincetown at the tip of Cape Cod. The water was so shallow for such a long stretch that they had to wade several hundred yards in near-freezing water.

Only 57 or 58 of the passengers could be called "Pilgrims," even by the looseness of the term we are using. The rest were sailors and adventurers, in service to the backers of the voyage and in no sympathy with what must have seemed to them to be religious zealots.

The Pilgrim leaders feared a mutiny by those who did not share their religious beliefs. In addition, they were not sure if their landing place, as far north as it was, would still be considered part of the Virginia Territory and thus under British jurisdiction. For these two reasons, they drew up a document that was designed to keep order and state their covenant. It became known as the Mayflower Compact.

John Quincy Adams and others, looking back, saw this as one of the founding texts of American democracy. Godfrey Hodgson thinks otherwise. He says that to see "the compact as a forerunner of the Declaration of Independence, is anachronistic, unhistorical nonsense. The compact was not a state paper. It was written, hurriedly...It cannot have been written as a founding document for an American nation, because there was at that time no such nation, nor any intention or even

conception of creating one." Clearly, the Mayflower Compact pledges loyalty to the king. Clearly, the Pilgrim fathers thought of themselves as transplanted Englishmen, living elsewhere, but still loyal to the crown.

The church form that the Puritan Pilgrims fought for is called congregationalism. A central tenant is that each congregation is entitled to design for itself its own polity, its own system of governance, its own rules for worship. It is perhaps ironic that these separatists founded a version of Protestant Christianity that became state-sponsored, that the church and the state became fused in the process known as "the standing order." This was an institution that held to the Trinitarian formula it had inherited, but as the centuries progressed, the standing order began to crumble due to the inevitable introduction of alternative pieties expressed in denominationalism.

And in the course of time, came those progressive ideas best reflected in the theology of William Ellery Channing, that claimed no Biblical justification for Trinitarian belief — the God of Christian scripture is one. The theology was known as Unitarianism, so perhaps today is, for us, a day to give thanks for the dedication, the courage, the fortitude, the strength of faith of the Puritan separatists whose understanding of God and humanity's relationship to God is so far from our own, but whose determination made possible the flowering of a source of our religious heritage and possible, indeed the existence of this church which we now inhabit and so love, the Unitarian Universalist Church of Bowling Green.

From Matthew, Ch. 18, verse 13: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Well, when I came upon two of our church members yesterday in Kroger as we shopped for our Thanksgiving meal, it was not in the name of Jesus that we met, but, as always, I think, in the spirit of this church. As discussion touched on this sermon I had to prepare, one good churchwoman said "You're not going to diss on my Pilgrims, are you?"

Well, no, I don't think I'm doing anything but paying them homage. We are deeply indebted, as I've tried to demonstrate today to the lives of courage and integrity lived by our Pilgrims. It's important that we tell their story, but it's important, too, to separate our history from our myth. The myth of Thanksgiving has been built up over time, but it originates in the eyewitness of one of the Pilgrim fathers called Edward Winslow who lists the crops that did well and the ones that failed. The gathering of crops is the harvest. The end of the harvest comes when the last sheaf of wheat, the last ear of corn has been harvested. The harvest is then "home," hence the English celebration called "Harvest Home." In all likelihood, this was the celebration held in Plymouth in 1621 a year or so after the Pilgrims landed. It is true that the Pilgrims used the occasion to give thanks, but when did they not give thanks? Hodgson cites a number of instances in the previous year when the group gathered to give thanks.

"Our harvest being got in, our governor sent four men on fowling, that so we might after a special manner rejoice together after we had gathered the fruit of our labors," chronicles Edward Winslow. Whatever fowl that they killed, it is almost certain that turkey was not included because their weapons were much better suited to shooting ducks and geese on the water than birds on the wing, but also because after ten years of excavations at Plymouth, only one turkey bone has been found.

The Native Americans and the newcomers ate pumpkin, but not in pies as they had no butter or flour for pie crust nor ovens for baking; they sliced and fried their pumpkin. Sweet potatoes were

unknown in New England at the time; pecan pie was eaten in the southern part of the country, but much later.

The centerpiece of the feast celebrating harvest home was made up of the five deer brought by the Wampanoag Indians. The deer was usually prepared in a stew added in to the boiling maize or Indian corn, kidney beans and a variety of other meats. One description of Indian stew written in 1674 says that "they (the Indians) boil in this fermenty all sorts of flesh that they take in hunting, such as venison, beaver, bear's flesh, moose, otters, raccoons...several sorts of roots, as Jerusalem artichokes, and ground nuts...and squashes." And there was no cranberry sauce because there was no sugar with which to make the bitter berries palatable.

Hodgson describes the gathering of Pilgrims and Indians on that November day as "a kind of backwoods diplomatic encounter." He says that "both the Pilgrims and the Indians were nervous of one another in 1621, but they met because they needed one another." This feast was one of a series of meetings in which both sides tried to establish good relations. The leader of the Wampanoag Indians at the feast was called "Massasoit" by the Pilgrims and that name has come down to us today, but that was not his name, but his title; in their dialect, "Massasoit" means "the king." And the Pilgrims did not wear funny hats or buckles on their shoes. These were touches made by 19th century artists, as they dressed up Santa Claus, as well—touches that were meant to denote quaintness.

No, there was no first Thanksgiving in Plymouth in 1621, no turkey, no pumpkin pie, no funny hats, no buckled shoes, no start of a tradition. But we need traditions and we need to stop and give thanks. Layer upon layer has been added to create tradition and what is wrong with that? We stop and give thanks for the bounty in our lives, the food that awaits us and this community we share are high among those gifts. Hodgson quotes an Italian proverb: "If it is not true, it is well invented."

A closing reading comes from yesterday's Boston Globe, the newspaper of record in my hometown. The author is columnist Yvonne Abraham. The title is "Redemption, and Gratitude." The neighborhoods mentioned are Roxbury where the population is largely black and poor and Jamaica Plain where I lived for fourteen years. It captures, I think, the real meaning today of Thanksgiving in the United States of America.

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