

Service from UU Montclair
January 17, 2021
“Love and Power”

Introduction to Hymn - Markus

Welcome! My name is Markus Grae-Hauck, I am the Director of Music Ministries here at our congregation. My pronouns are he, him, and his. We are about to sing our gathering hymn, joining virtually, together in song. And in a moment we will join together for our chalice lighting, where we will invite everyone to light your own flame, at home. To prepare for this, perhaps you will want to find a chalice or a candle, as we sing. Our hymn leader is ...

Lift Every Voice and Sing, #149
We'll Build a Land, #121

Welcome and Chalice Lighting - Nina Cooke John

Grounded in faith, we come together to nurture the soul, inspire hope, and bring into being a more just and loving world.

Today's service is titled “Love and Power” and it is our 2021 Martin Luther King Sunday service - a chance for us to commit again to his prophetic imperative.

We often contrast Love with Power, imagining that one cancels the other. This service knits them as one, in our “single garment of destiny.”

If you have school aged children, please register for our innovative Children's Religious Education program.

If you are joining us at 10am, please continue with us for a virtual “Connection Cafe” beginning at 11am.

Now we take a moment to hear from our Social Justice Coalition.

Johanna: Good morning, my name is Johanna Foster

Teresa: and I am Teresa DeSousa. Our pronouns are she/her/hers and we are the co-chairs of the Social Justice Coalition here at the UUCM.

Johanna: In these days of national reckoning with the brutal white supremacist attacks on the heart of our democracy, those both overt and violent, and those much more subtle and pernicious, we are called by Dr. King's prophetic words to exercise love in the service of justice.

Teresa: However shocking to many, we know that last week's attack on the Capitol was not the first, and it won't be the last if we forego our opportunities today to build the kind

of power that Dr. King spoke of when he taught us that "[p]ower at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love."

Johanna: In this spirit, the SJC invites you to express that love in the service of justice by joining us in our current and upcoming justice actions:

We continue our demands for justice for LGBTQIA people living and working in the town of Montclair, which recently scored a 78 out of 100 on the Human Rights Campaign's scorecard on municipal equality. As was the case last year, several towns in NJ, including Princeton and [xxx], for example, scored 100, yet Montclair continues to fail short in serious ways. In the weeks ahead, we will be hosting gatherings where you can learn more about where Montclair still lags behind our neighbors, and we invite you to join us in our efforts to hold the town accountable. Please watch for a link to Montclair's poor report card on the UUCM FB community page and on Realm.

Teresa: Secondly, the SJC, with our leadership from the Undoing Racism team, continues to advance our efforts to partner with our community and congregational allies to bring forth racial justice in policing.

Just last week, in partnership with Salvation and Social Justice, and the Essex County Prophetic Assembly, we held an action to welcome our state legislators back to session by urging them to support legislation to regulate police use of force (insert bill number here), and legislation to ensure greater police accountability in reporting (insert bill number here). We continue to track these bills through the legislature, and we encourage you to contact your legislators today. Please watch for links to the bills on the UUCM FB community page and on Realm.

Johanna: Additionally, the SJC continues to support the critical work of MESH by providing weekly bags of ready-to-eat snacks to supplement the weekly hot meals for our guests.

Teresa: Finally, Dr. King also reminds us that "[p]ower without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic." We hear that call and are pleased to announce that the SJC is hosting a set of workshops in late January for UUs to gather and learn how to build our congregational power in the service of justice. The workshop will be facilitated by organizers from New Jersey Together, an affiliate of the Industrial Areas Foundation, the nation's oldest and largest interfaith community organizing network. We are especially encouraging folks who are new to the SJC, or who would like to learn more about our vision and mission to join us for these workshops! Please look for more announcements in the next few days.

Johanna: We cannot think of a time in our history when it was more necessary to show our collective love and power as UUs. Please reach out to us at socialjustice@UUmontclair.org and let us know how we can make room for you to join us.

Rev Anya and Rev Scott

It's time to light our chalice, a beacon to guide us through these times together. Perhaps you have a chalice or candle at home... anything that you can illumine.

Let's light our collective chalices as we share our chalice lighting affirmation.

Invocation and Remembrance Info - Rev. Anya and Rev. Scott

RS: Our invocation comes from the deep wells of wisdom of Thomas Merton, 20th Century Trappist monk:

RS: Called, now, by this invocation into worship, we turn to seek a soft meditation, a deep reflection, an ardent prayer. ...Each as we are called, yet all together.

And we enter into this space by hearing the lamentations, the requests, and the remembrances of our community -

Let us hear one another to heal one another.

The voice sharing our remembrances will be Intern Minister Ali, who will then follow with a prayer.

Candle Lighting - (Intern Ali)

We light this candle for Charles Loflin's grandmother, Frances McBride who died on Tuesday morning. Charles shares that he would not be the person he is without her presence, and continues, "I have never known a more resilient human being." We hold Charles, his wife Malinda, and their family in the light of our prayers.

We light this candle in remembrance for Vince Lo Curcia. Vince, the owner of the Shoprite in Nutley, donated for many years, \$2500 annually in gift cards to our MESH (Montclair Emergency Services for the Homeless) Cafe. His generosity helped many in need. He passed away this week from cancer.

We light this candle for Adanna Hylton who has undergone jaw surgery. May she find moments of peace and may healing come.

We light this candle for Jaclyn Puleo, our office and communications manager, who is isolating at home with Covid-19. May she find rest. May healing come.

We light this candle of joy celebrating Sammie Girl's 17th Birthday on Sunday, January 17th. Dana Moore and O'Neil Natto say - We are so proud of the young lady she has become!

We light this final candle for the joys and sorrows that have not been spoken aloud. In the silence that follows, you are encouraged to speak the names of those you are holding in

your prayers or meditations, or to write them into the chat. May we hold this silence as this silence holds us.

(Silence: 10-20 seconds)

May our listening bring forth acts of love.

Prayer - Intern Ali

God known by many names, lately we have witnessed things that we may have only imagined could happen in other countries. Once again, we have witnessed what unfettered hate can issue forth on to a nation. We have sometimes shielded our eyes and turned our faces from the glare of the injustices that have befallen the most in need of love, care, understanding for much too long. For these moments where we have forgotten that we are caught up in this web together weaving and together woven we pray.

Our community is hurting. There is death, injury and disease crowding our minds and there is an unholy spirit of hate and destruction traveling across our nation. To state it plainly, we are hurting, we are afraid, we are enraged, we are uncertain and we need relief.

In this time, Spirit of life, help us to hold on to the faith that we have. Whether it be faith in people known and unknown to us, who are joining us in holding our nation accountable for the atrocities that it visits upon its own citizens, and in people who are making our nation stronger by working to heal and reconcile the original sin of this nation, white supremacy. Whether it is in the belief in something greater than all of us, Love, God, Spirit. Whether it is in the natural world which shows us the way toward balance or in the march of time that shows us that everything must be accounted for. We pray with an unceasing faith.

Let us remember that together we rise and in our rising we bring all of our people with us, and they bring theirs, and so on until we are a mighty nation emboldened by the love that keeps us connected and inspired by a justice that knows the true measure of each of us is in our innate worthiness.

We pray these prayers with an audacious hope and a deep commitment to make them so. Amen

Prayer Response: Precious Lord, Take my Hand, #199

Offering - Nina Cooke John

Lead us on. Help us stand.

When you give to our offering, 80 percent of your gift will care for the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Montclair, and 20 percent will support our justice recipient.

Our January Sharing our Riches recipient is RIP Medical Debt, Essex County - a campaign developed by the Montclair Interfaith Clergy Association. Together, we have the opportunity to eliminate the medical debt for hundreds of families and individuals in Essex County. We will be helping families who earn less than 2X the federal poverty level, have debts that are 5% or more of their annual income and those whose debts are greater than

their assets. Through this campaign, every dollar that we give will abolish \$100 of medical debt.

You can text to give, mail us a check or go to our home page and click on the donate button. This is a time of need.

All of your gifts are worthy and they are all received with love.

Reading - Nina Cooke John

Our first reading is from Rev. Rosemary Bray McNatt's essay, "Our Faith." McNatt is the president of the Starr King School for the Ministry, and served as lead minister at Fourth Universalist in New York City.

Our second reading is from Chris Crass a feminist, anti-racist trainer, organizer, and author.

What follows is our anthem "King for a Day," a song by the Unitarian Universalist composer Jason Shelton, arranged and produced by Sarah Jebian for the Association of Unitarian Universalist Music Ministries. Our own Rev. Scott, Markus Grae-Hauck, and Stearns Matthews are all a part of this project.

Anthem: King for a Day - Jason Shelton

Homily

A church, a congregation is not a place to hide, says Rev. Rosemary Brae-McNatt.

Rev. Rosemary grew into her ministry here. Perhaps she deepened her conviction in relationship to this congregation.

In relationship with you.

This needs to be a place - she says - a place where we stand with one another and look the world in the eye to see all of its horror and grace.

It's not a place where we hide, says a minister shaped by *this* congregation's ministry... it's where we gather our strength to act with courage...

and as Chris Crass adds - a congregation is where we destroy white supremacy.

These are strong words.

No anemia in these words.

They intone the need for power.

These are words that recall the vision of the King - Martin Luther King `who said to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1967:

"Power ... power properly understood is nothing but the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political, and economic change." Power is the capacity to act.

Wait a second here... aren't we tired? Isn't this all a bit too much. Power talk? Maybe we need to hide - to hole off. To shelter in place - justice wise.

Maybe we need a faith that consoles us with a vision of a promised land we can enter with prayer and petition - a promised land for which we don't have to bleed to build.

Aren't we tired? Aren't we weak? Aren't we worn?

Hell is breaking loose around us. Shouldn't we hide?

The last time I sang "Precious Lord," the song we shared for our Prayer Response, I was officiating Carolyn Burr's memorial.

Precious Lord, take my hand
Lead me on, let me sta-and
I am tired, I'm weak, I am worn

It lifts the tears to my eyes every time.

But there, in Carolyn's grace, I was overcome with a deeper instinct.

Carolyn Burr ~ a paragon of resilience - who fought daily through the trial of a chronic and a painful illness -

a woman who broke the glass ceiling with humility and yes, power -

a human who stood with conviction for all of our rights, for environmental justice, for LGBTQIA rights, for women's rights, for Black Lives -

who stood tall... from the seat of her wheelchair... who stood tall, ever tall, from the inside as her body gave out...

When Precious Lord, which was Rev. Dr. King's favorite hymn, when Precious Lord fell from our lips in that memorial...

I was overcome with a deeper instinct.

How tired, how weak, how worn was she, was Carolyn?

How tired, how weak, how worn was he, was Dr. King?

Exhausted... But, taking the hand of the holy of their understanding ~ they fought on. And so shall we.

A congregation is not a place to hide.

It is meant to be, *the hand* of the holy acting in this world.

In King's time he worked to shape the church into that hand - into the active hand of the holy.

You see... A hand is a conveyor.

It takes the ideals that rest in our minds and the conviction that rises in our hearts and it molds them into truth, into reality.

A hand is the extension of our calling.
A hand is the shortest distance between two lives. (hold hand out)
And in a world where the call for liberation can be expressed as “hands up don’t shoot,”
these hands have a lot of work to do.

King shaped the church into the hand of the holy so that it had power to do the holy work
in the world.

(hold up hand...)
To heal.
To comfort.
To rise.
To prophetically insist on change.

On this Martin Luther King Day Sunday we are called to celebrate the incredible ways we
have shaped our congregation into the hand of the holy - healing, comforting, rising,
prophetically insisting on change.
And we are called to account for the ways we have not.

Describing our Social Justice Coalition, co-chairs Teresa and Johana often say:

“We” are the Social Justice Coalition.
They don’t mean that they... the two of them are it.
And they don’t mean the twenty folks who regularly participate.
When they say, “We” ~ they mean the whole congregation.
We - all of us are necessary - together, we are the hand of the holy.

Sometimes when I am called to speak for our values in the work of justice, I announce to
the politicians that I serve the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Montclair, a house
of worship whose programs serve over one thousand families in Essex County and
beyond.

Sounds like I am stretching - 1000 families - - but I’m not. Our programs, from Montclair
Emergency Services to the Homeless to our long standing, now paused tutoring, to our
religious education and the “Our Whole Lives” sexuality education class, to our worship,
to our religious education, to our many justice events and beyond - we serve over a
thousand families.

And I announce this to the politicians I am addressing.
Why?
To sound fancy?
No.
For power.
Numbers. Influence.
If politicians can do nothing else they can count votes.

We need power and we need numbers so that they know we are to be reckoned with.

Rev. Elizabeth Campbell, a justice bound black clergy member raised in Montclair was wearing a t-shirt the other day that said “The power against me is no match for the Power within and behind me.” May it be so. And may we be a part of that power that is behind her.

The most evocative pictures of this congregation are when members gathered en masse for portraits - once wearing the many colors of the rainbow flag in support of marriage equality; the other wearing black in support of Black Lives Matter.

The numbers are necessary - the mass of people showing up. It’s why I talk about the 1000 families that we serve.

It’s why our Social Justice Coalition tries, tries to help us understand that “We” are the Social Justice Coalition.

That we (all of us) are the hand of the holy in the world.

A hand that can:

Heal

Comfort

Rise

Prophetically insist on change...

That ideas, that convictions are not enough.

That now, especially now we need to mobilize our power for the ongoing work of liberation.

~ Can I get an amen!

And maybe here is the space for a little accountability.

This congregation has always done the good work, been the hand of the holy in the world...

but we haven’t always used our power collectively.

We have often splintered into small groups - each focused on our own unique justice calling - thereby diluting our power.

And ministers, myself included haven’t always used our power for collective momentum.

We have chosen our justice commitments irrespective of the congregation’s calling. And we have failed to be the organizational leaders that UUCM has needed us to be.

In light of these struggles, justice leaders have been burnt out - rendered tired, weak and worn.

And congregation members haven’t found meaningful ways to plug into powerful justice work.

You’ve likely heard of a “Come to Jesus” moment.

Well... This is a Come to Martin moment.

All of this justice work intersects, and the intersections hold the power.

Environmental justice serves black lives.

Gender justice fuels reproductive rights.

Economic justice parlays with police reform.

Disability and Mental Health justice catalyze racial justice.

Peace activism compels restorative justice.

Gun violence reform serves domestic violence protection.

Pastoral care supports prophetic action.

This is a Come to Martin moment.

We are all knit in a single garment of destiny.

What affects one affects all.

Dr. King built a movement around civil rights arm in arm with Bayard Rustin, a gay leader.

The intersections were there from the beginning.

When the sanitation workers marched yelling “I am a Man” they weren’t weighing economic vs. racial justice; they were just being the hand of the holy in the world - demanding that black men who collected garbage were men who should be treated as such.

And when Dr. King leaned more directly into the intersections of anti-war activism, economic justice, with racial justice that’s when he was deemed too dangerous, too powerful... that’s when this blessing of a man was shot.

What we need here at UUCM is a united justice operation - held together by robust and systemic organization. And our justice leaders have been moving us in that direction for nearly four years now. And we have been growing stronger and more powerful for their work.

But let me say it plainly because this is the time to speak bold truths.

This is still a come to Martin moment.

The Social Justice Coalition has laid the groundwork.

But to manifest the power latent in our organization we need to eschew two fallacies that threaten our momentum.

The first is the fallacy of our separateness, that we should support small groups that pursue specific justice aims. We need to get together and be all about collective liberation.

And the second, the second fallacy is that being tired, being weak, and being worn is the result of too much action.

It’s not. It’s the result of too much action with too little gain.

We are tired of striving without advancing.

Weakened by advocating without being heard.
Worn by marching without gaining ground.

And yes, sometimes the answer to exhaustion is rest...
Blessed rest. Don't forsake it.
But the cure for being tired, being weak and being worn - the cure is power - it is collective action making tangible change.

When "we" truly become the social justice coalition, when we realize that our work for religious education and pastoral care and governance, and everything we do for UUCM is supporting the hand of the holy in the world... and when we hear the call of the Social Justice Coalition as *our* people reaching out to *us*... to each of us... As the heart reaching out to the hands... we will *be* the power necessary for tangible change.

"What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive," says King, but... here is where he says it...listen: "that love without power is just sentimental and anemic."

May our love move with power.

Lead us on. Help us stand.

Amen.

Will you reflect with me:
How does or how could your commitment to our congregation fuel our work for justice in our world?

(Pause 15 seconds)

Hymn - People Get Ready - Curtis Mayfield

Benediction

RA: A congregation is no place to hide, says Rev. Rosemary Brae McNatt

RS: So people get ready
There's a train a comin'
You don't need no ticket,
You just get on board.

RA: "Let us remember" as Intern Ali shares "that together we rise and in our rising we bring all of our people with us."

RS: Amen

Song: "Our Worship Has Ended, Let our Service Begin"

Sign-Off - Intern Ali

Join us right after this for Connection Cafe

Listen for the opportunities to fuel our justice work
and...

Until we meet again,

Virtually or otherwise,

You are in our hearts.