

Service from UU Montclair
January 3, 2021
“I Am Going To Make It Through This Year”

Introduction to Hymn

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 ...

We'll Build a Land, #121

Bring Many Names, #23

Welcome and Chalice Lighting - Rev. Anya and Rev. Scott

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 titled "I'm Going to Make it Through This Year" is a service that I imagine most of us can relate to - a service that invites us into a space of resilience as well as transformation. This is a service that welcomes the new year as it invites us to release with gratitude and grace, the past.

And we will be graced today by the vision and wisdom of two of our own members, Laura Anthony, the head of our Worship Team, and Charles Loflin, currently a seminarian at Meadville Lombard Theological School. Both offer worship from a deep embodied place of calling. We are blessed to have them hold us with their words and lead us with their understanding.

If you are joining us at 10am, please continue with us for a virtual "Connection Cafe" beginning at 11am. Check your email and Realm announcements for the Zoom link.

It's time to light our chalice, a beacon to guide us through these times together. And today we begin by sharing our amended Chalice Lighting Words. These new words, proposed by member Ann Sailor... and today, sung by the same... reviewed by you, dear congregation, and embraced by our ministry team offer a more inclusive message. The second two lines remain, but the first has been amended to invite us to not only open our eyes, but to engage all our senses. This message speaks to all of us, and reaches to champion the experience of those among us who do not have use of their sense of sight.

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.

Chalice Lighting sung by Anne Sailer

Invocation and Remembrance Intro - Laura Anthony

Our invocation was written by Ashley Horan, and it invites us to imagine that other world - that other world that *is* possible. Ashley shares:

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 you will hear sharing these candles is our member and seminarian, Charles Loflin.

Candle Lighting - Words: Charles Loflin; Candles: Rev. Scott

We light this candle of mourning for Alfonso LaFalce, Jackie Lahey's father, who died on Wednesday morning. Please hold the LaFalce and the Lahey family in your prayers. This ache is compounded as Jackie's mother died in April.

We light this candle of healing for Jesse, niece to our Office and Communications Manager Jaclyn Puleo, who was just diagnosed with COVID-19.

We light this candle for Catherine Rew, Judith Rew's mother-in-law, who is providing care to her husband, Bob Rew, at home. He is recovering from a stroke and was not faring well in a nursing home.

We light this candle for the Pipkins Family that is still recovering from Covid-19. Shantale is up and back to work but still feeling fatigued.

We light this candle for the city of Nashville, for those injured in the blast, and for those who worked tirelessly to ensure the safety of those in the blast site. We also light this candle in recognition of the pain that fuels terror, adding our prayer for all who ache and feel they have no witness. May healing come.

We light this candle for the children of 2020. Honor is often bestowed on the first babies born in a new year. With this candle we recognize all of the children born in the year that has just passed. With all we are moved to say about 2020, we light this candle to remember all the blessings the year brought - including many, many new and beautiful lives.

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 - Charles Loflin

I invite you to join me in a spirit of prayer and meditation:

Spirit of Life, Spirit of the Days and Years that Have Been as well as What Yet May Be, Spirit of that Which is Always Continuously Becoming, we pause for the possibility of experience.

The change of a calendar year is a threshold—an invitation to reflect on where we have been, to imagine where we can go and most importantly to fully inhabit the present moment.

Like every other day we arrive bearing both our joys and sorrows in carefully crafted bundles. Perhaps, we can—if even for a moment—lay them down here for a short rest. We can rest assured that they will be there still should we choose to bring them along for the continuing journey.

For some, the weight of both the joys and sorrows may catch us by surprise. There are so many things that we surely thought we would need to get here—to survive. Maybe this is a time as good as any to take a quick inventory. Some have journeyed with us for a very long time and some we've accumulated along the way.

Some we name. Loss. Weariness. Fear. Love. Hope. Faith, perhaps. We may feel them again as we name them. They are a part of us.

Some we may not be ready to name. And that's ok. Those can wait for another day.

We may choose right now to let some of them go. On the threshold of what tomorrow might bring, we can decide today—like every day—how to continue this journey. Maybe, this time in a spirit of particular humility recognizing how incorrect so many of our expectations from the last year proved to be.

But at the threshold, the Spirit that Continuously Becomes, invites us to re-imagine, to re-invent, and to re-create. In that there is beauty—a divine mystery, awe, and wonder.

And one last thing we may want to do before continuing the journey is pause to look around and acknowledge our fellow travelers. Although we may sometimes forget, we do not journey alone. Thresholds are also opportunities to regather with our companions, maybe even to redistribute some of those joys and sorrows. And when we are ready, we can continue together with the Spirit of What May Yet Be.

May It Be So.

Prayer Response: There Is More Love Somewhere, #95

Offering - Myrna Brome

There is more love. There is.

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 - Myrna Brome

We move now to our reading. This piece by the American poet Aracelis Girmay titled "You Are Who I Love" has been adapted for our worship.

Anthem: "This is the New Year" by Ian Axel, Chad Vaccarino

Homily

You're over 2020, right?

You're over and past it. It is January 3rd of 2021. We are, collectively, done. I submit as evidence: If you ask my roommate what she got for Christmas this year, she'll reach down, tug up her pant leg, and show you a pair of bright green socks that say -- well. We're in church. They say something to the effect of "Forget 2020."

Searching that phrase -- or something close to it -- yields dividends: you can get mugs. And Christmas tree ornaments! And tee shirts. And cake toppers, and candles, and more Christmas tree ornaments. And masks and headbands and those new year's eve party eyeglasses that I believe are usually just in the shape of the coming year, but this time, they're a goodbye to this past year that we all just lived through.

Imagine that. How suffused we are. How tired.

And like, there's a shelf life on all that merch, right? But that's not the point.

The point is that you're done with it. Goodbye.

And this is the perfect time for a fire communion, right? Fire Communion is a Unitarian Universalist tradition -- its origins are unclear but feel vaguely pagan: under the flaming chalice, you write down what you need to release in the New Year, and set it aflame. You name your intentions to change, but moreover, you decide what needs to be destroyed. Or at the very least, left behind.

So here we are. Perhaps you have been waiting for this moment, right? Forget 2020! There is so much that we need to release.

I would like to propose something to you, though. That in this fire communion, where now more than ever we would like to cast a whole year onto the fire, there is so much that we need from it, as we move on into 2021.

There's small things. Getting in the car after picking up a few things from the grocery store, a friend fished in his center console, squirted his hands with a tiny bottle of alcohol, and then, without thinking, held the little container up to me. At the same time, I've already pulled a little vial from a deep pocket of my coat, washed up, and held it up to him. While the alcohol cooled on our skin, we laughed at the dance, and he said, "That's one thing that will last, after all this." And what he meant was that he won't go to a grocery store without hand sanitizer anymore, but I hear it with something else, with the knowledge that there is a unity here. A new one. We defend each other.

There are bigger things to take than hand sanitizer, though. There is a spark. There is a knowledge, a power, from somewhere. A hope. I am going to make it through this year.

Do you feel that? I am going to make it through this year.

Say it with me, because you are too: I am going to make it through this year.

How do I know? Well. We made it through the last one.

In spite of everything! And I do mean everything! Look, we went through it. In January of 2020, we almost tipped into a third world war. Remember that? It happened! Not just in the twitter, offhanded-comment-from-a-delinquent-president way, we were actually at a fairly considerable risk of it! This time last year. But you might've forgotten about it, given that since then, there has been a plague, nationwide protesting, and what future historians will surely call a blatant and unsophisticated attempt at a coup by parties who have no interest in giving up power, even when we have called them down.

The place at which my family annually purchases a smoked turkey sent us a postcard on the day we were meant to receive one, saying that the entire smoked turkey warehouse caught fire, and the entire year's worth of product had gone up in, well,

smoke. My mom handed me the postcard, laughing and shrugging, and saying '...well. 2020!'

We have been separated from each other, lost the ability to hug and to put hands on hands. Dinner parties and vacations and weddings.

There has been pain in the extreme. And what we've lost has been great. Friends. Family. I do not know how to give shape to those losses, make them make sense, they don't. And for your pain... for the grief that this year has brought you -- I am sorry. I am so, so sorry.

We've lost innocences, of a certain kind. We've seen from the chasms of the web the moments of unmasked grocery store stand-offs. We have seen video after video of people in power using that power to crush. We have been heartbroken by it. We still are.

But.

Poet Lucille Clifton wrote
come celebrate
with me that everyday
something has tried to kill me
and has failed.

And this past year, I've found myself thinking it about us. When I think of the caliber of disaster this last year has been, the apocalypses that we as people seem to just keep on sliding out of the way of. I do not believe there is a benevolent God who is keeping us safe. I do not believe there is a cosmic conspiracy to keep us on our collective feet.

But we are going to make it through this year, because we made it through the last one. Because there is a divine and protective force in the world that on the darkest days and coldest nights we can pray to: it is you.

You have, in this past year, learned to sew and distribute masks at such a rate that there's bowls of them by the front door. You give them away.
And for every video of violence that shakes the foundations of what we have been taught, there's videos of teachers learning how to teach our young by conference call. My sister's doing it while raising two toddlers.

For though there was an astounding number of people who would be complicit in an authoritarian take-over if it meant some vague sensation of safety, we have proved definitely and to the numbers that there are way, way more of you.

And here you've raised money and stayed home and argued with people on the internet. In the middle of one of the scariest moments in recent history, when injustice

was done, you put on your mask and took to the street anyway. Because you had to. In the heat of summer. Handing out water bottles. Singing.

We heard some of Aracelia Girmay's poem, you are who I love, you are who I love, she says "You are who I love, writing letters, calling the senators. You are who I love. You who, with the seconds of your body, with your *time* here, arrive in the January streets, against the cool and brutal offices, saying: YOUR CRUELTY DOES NOT SPEAK FOR ME."

I am going to make it through this year. We are going to make it through this year. Because of you. Because you have proven that hate will be drowned out. You have proven that when we can't hold one another, we'll still smile at each other. You have proven that when we can't be together, we will still be together. I am grateful for you. Gratitude does not capture the scope of what I am feeling.

So yes: forget 2020. Forget it! It was awful. It was almost unbelievably bad. Except in this fire communion, when we are indeed longing to give all of our pain to the fire— I want you to hold back how you have become bright, and brave, and beautiful. How in 2020 you met this world for all her fury, and reached protective arms around her. How could we forget? On this fire communion, let us remember that there is more to it than a need for release— after all, were we not forged in fire? We cannot go back to how it was before.

There is another thing that I think we should keep from 2020.

Introduction to the Fire Communion

We formed a new ritual. A ritual of taking our old rituals, our traditions, and mulling them over, rolling them around and looking at them from all sides. Are they safe for everyone? Do they make sense, given where we are now? Do they make us feel better?

And in that spirit, let us take our fire communion. Let us evolve it for this particular moment.

Take the slip of paper you readied. Tear it in half. On one half, take what you need from this past year. You could take resilience. Or serenity. Or the kindness of strangers. Or pragmatism. Or innovation. Hold this slip with you today. Keep it safe, if you are moved. Let it touch your January. And maybe, slowly, trail into the new year that we will build together.

On the other, write what you are ready to release. What in the flame you will say goodbye to in 2021. And if you can safely burn that slip with us, feel free to do so, but there are all kinds of way to let go, and all kinds of good times to do so. So when today you find time for letting go, by fire, or water, or wind -- let it leave you.

You will have a moment of music to reflect and write. And then together, we will sing our closing hymn, The Fire Of Commitment. Please join us in our fire communion.

(Pause 60 seconds)

Hymn - “The Fire of Commitment” #1028

Benediction

May you find blessings this year, and like last year, may they be more powerful than hurt.

We are going to make it through this year. You and I, the way we made it through the last one. Together.

Song: “Our Worship Has Ended, Let our Service Begin”

Join us right after this for Connection Cafe
And register your children for our innovative Religious Education programs, and...
Until we meet again,
Virtually or otherwise,
You are in our hearts.