

ALL SOULS CHURCH,UNITARIAN

Covenant Group Theme Guide, September 2017

Beloved Community

1 We have become terribly vulnerable, not because we suffer but because we have separated ourselves from each other. **Rachel Naomi Remen**, *Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories That Heal*

2 Do you think there is anything that is not attached by unbreakable cord to everything else?
Mary Oliver, Upstream

3 Martin Luther King Jr. envisioned a Beloved Community of love and justice, where the races would be reconciled, and the deep and terrible wounds of racism finally healed. “Our ultimate goal,” King said, “is genuine intergroup and interpersonal living—*integration*.” Physical desegregation is not enough, King insisted, for it leaves us “spiritually segregated, where elbows are together and hearts apart.”

In 1966, after the March to Montgomery, King was among several thousand people delayed at the airport. “As I stood with them,” he marveled, “and saw white and Negro, nuns and priests, ministers and rabbis, labor organizers, lawyers, doctors, housemaids, and shopworkers brimming with vitality and enjoying a rare comradeship, I knew I was seeing a microcosm of the mankind of the future in this moment of luminous and genuine brotherhood.”

Fred Small, sermon, “Building the Beloved Community”

4 O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. – **Prayer for the Human Family (Book of Common Prayer)**

FROM THE POETS, 1922-2009

5 Dreams, 1922

Langston Hughes

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.
Hold fast to dreams

For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.

6 Riot: A Poem in Three Parts (excerpt), 1968

Gwendolyn Brooks

There is a moment in Camaraderie
when interruption is not to be understood.
I cannot bear an interruption.

This is the shining joy;
the time of not-to-end.

7 Shafro, 1971 (excerpt)

Terrance Hayes

I'm sure you won't believe this,
but if a policeman walks behind me, I tremble:
What would Shaft do? What would Shaft do?

Bits of my courage flake away like dandruff.
I'm sweating even as I tell you this,
I'm not cool,

I keep the real me tucked beneath a wig,
I'm a small American frog.
I grow beautiful as the theatre dims.

8 One Day, 2009 (excerpt)

Richard Blanco, for the inauguration of Barack Obama

My face, your face, millions of faces in morning's mirrors,
each one yawning to life, crescendoing into our day:
pencil-yellow school buses, the rhythm of traffic lights,
fruit stands: apples, limes, and oranges arrayed like rainbows
begging our praise. Silver trucks heavy with oil or paper -
bricks or milk, teeming over highways alongside us,
on our way to clean tables, read ledgers, or save lives -

to teach geometry, or ring up groceries as my mother did for twenty years, so I could write this poem for all of us today.

All of us as vital as the one light we move through,
the same light on blackboards with lessons for the day:
equations to solve, history to question, or atoms imagined,
the 'I have a dream' we all keep dreaming,
or the impossible vocabulary of sorrow that won't explain
the empty desks of twenty children marked absent
today, and forever. Many prayers, but one light
breathing color into stained glass windows,
life into the faces of bronze statues, warmth
onto the steps of our museums and park benches
as mothers watch children slide into the day.

THE TIMES WE'RE IN

9 . . . any opposition that is serious about taking on Trump, or other far-right forces like him around the world, must embrace the task of telling a new history of how we ended up here, in this perilous moment. A history that compellingly shows the role played by the politics of division and separation. Racial divisions. Class divisions. Gender divisions. Citizenship divisions. And a false division between humans and the natural world. Only then will it become possible to truly come together to win the world we need."

Naomi Klein, excerpt from her 2017 book, *No Is Not Enough: Resisting Trump's Shock Politics and Winning the World We Need*

10 The question is, are we the same nation that turned a blind eye as statues of Confederate soldiers were erected, and prisons were built to incarcerate African Americans at five times the rate of whites — or are we different? Are you different?

Shanelle Matthews, What Black Lives Matter Organizers Are Doing to Fight White Supremacy at Every Level

11 A PRAYER FROM THE STREETS OF CHARLOTTESVILLE

Fuller Theological Seminarian Lauren Grubaugh was in Charlottesville, VA, as a counter-protester and shared her perspective on the website of All Saints Church in Pasadena, California.

. . . I am exhausted by the hate and the fear and the violence and the death. So the first thing I wrote when I returned home from Charlottesville was a prayer, because I needed to remember God after what I saw today.

I have struggled to pray today. The image of God to which I so often default — an image that has been instilled and reinforced by white supremacy and patriarchy — is a white, male god. Over the years, incorporating inclusive language into my prayer has helped me reimagine God in color and warmth and light. But today's events (and the events of the last year), were a somber reminder that the racist, patriarchal god is still deeply embedded in my psyche, and all the more so in that of our nation.

This is a prayer to the God whom we have forgotten, and whom we had best remember.

To the God whom we have forgotten;

To the God who is not male and is not white;

To the God who takes no pleasure in violence;

To the God who is Love;

To the God who is tender-hearted and warm embrace;

To the God who is not deaf to Her children's cries and is moved to tears by their suffering;

To the God whose law is love of neighbor, hospitality for the stranger, care for the weak;

To the God whose touch is healing, whose gaze is compassion; whose way is lovingkindness;

To the God who is Justice;

To the God who tramples fear and hatred under Her feet;

To the God who convicts our hearts, stirs our spirits, transforms our minds;

To the God who revels in the joyful dance of community and invites us to do the same;

To the God whose own child's lynched body hung limp on a tree,

not by Her own hand,

but because of the fear and hatred of those human beings

who feared the kind of world they were promised would be ushered in

and hated the changes they would have to undergo to get there;
Our memory is so short:
Our failure to remember the sins of our parents,
Our aversion to repentance,
Our refusal to make reparations,
Is killing us.
Our souls are wasting away.
And black, brown, female, queer, trans, Muslim, differently abled bodies
Are dying.
Every day, so many.
O God whom we have forgotten,
We do not even know how to call on your name.
We have not seen you in the faces of our sisters and brothers.
We have not felt you in the pain of our neighbors, strangers, friends and enemies;
O God whom we have forgotten,
Do not let our imaginations be infiltrated by war-mongering forces of violence.
Do not let our spirits be colonized by the depressing fear of our oppressors.
Transform our minds that do not know how to think of you
Existing without these heavy chains we have placed on ourselves
and on each other.
Amen.

FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

A What does Beloved Community mean to you?

B How are you doing in your own efforts to build and grow Beloved Community in your personal, family and public lives? How would you describe your vision, your commitment, your efforts?

C How does All Souls support you in visualizing and building Beloved Community?

D How do you support All Souls in building the Beloved Community? Are there changes you would like to make or see made with respect to building Beloved Community in any of your personal and public communities?

--Mary Beth Hatem, for All Souls Covenant Groups