**The Unitarian Church of Montreal**

**Sunday Service**: **The World We Imagine Creating**

**May 31, 2020**

**Chalice Lighting**

Rev. Diane Rollert

My name is Reverend Diane Rollert, and I serve the Unitarian Church of Montreal. I'm very pleased to welcome you to our service today, which we are sharing with the Lakeshore Unitarian Universalist Congregation. It's not often that we get together on a Sunday, so this is quite a poignant time for us to share as we try to imagine the world we hope to create together.

The words for our chalice lighting come from *Embers: One Ojibway’s Meditations* by Richard Wagamese.

This is Creator’s fire, this match that flares. This is Creator’s medicine that curls, plumes, and rises with the touch of flame. This is Creator’s morning, the light spreading outward, easing shadow to rest. This is Creator’s world, this pure and perfect Creation. And as the smoke rises, my mind empties, my heart opens, my spirit soars, and the prayer I offer allows this morning energy to enter me. I am become it—and it becomes me. I am alive.

These days I'm feeling that it may be too soon to set down any concrete plans. There's a lot that I'm putting on hold, yet I'm really grateful for this technology that enables us to connect. This time we're living through is truly a test of faith. Can we believe in tomorrow? I do—I do, but I know that we still have to make it through today. So perhaps this is an ideal moment to do some sharing about what we imagined for the future. What would the future look like if we could make changes that we've long felt we've needed? Are there things that we've never noticed before that we now realize need changing?

So come, let us worship together.

**Music for Gathering**

“The Oneness of Everything” by Jim Scott

Sandra Hunt (piano)

with Eleuthera Diconca-Lippert and Kerry-Anne Kutz (vocals)

**Time for All Ages**

Katherine Childs

Our story this morning takes place in a magical kingdom, which is not so very far away. It takes place not very long ago at all. This was a magical kingdom in which strange things were known to happen. But people—more or less—were used to dealing with them.

After a rash of apple-poisonings, the orchard was quickly decontaminated. When houses made of sticks were widely identified as being vulnerable to blowing down, the community rallied to rebuild stone houses for the residents. Yes, this kingdom was very good at “getting back to normal” whenever anything went wrong.

That is, until the magic bean crisis.

One spring, you see, instead of the usual one enormous beanstalk that more than provided enough nutritious veggies for the kingdom—well, no one knows exactly what happened, but one morning, the kingdom woke up to find that they had been completely overrun with beanstalks. Beanstalks had taken over the royal gardens, the town square, and the charming organic meadow. They were growing up through the floor of the spinning-wheel factory and the huntsmen's axe-sharpening kiosk.

The queen and her royal advisors pondered the issue. There was no way to remove that many beanstalks; they would just have to wait until the stalks receded. The people would have enough to eat. There was, after all, a nutritious food source surrounding their homes. But they would just have to stay put for a while. And they did.

They waited, and waited, and waited—and eventually the stalks did recede. But I don't know if you know what happens to a building when a vine attaches itself to the outside for a long time. You might think that rocks are a pretty solid building material. Third Pig Construction has staked their reputation on it. But it turns out that there are two things that are very good at breaking down rocks—and it’s water and beanstalks. So, when everyone emerged from their homes, the queen realized that there wasn't going to be the easy “going back to normal” that the kingdom had always been so good at. There would need to be rebuilding of homes and gardens, but also of wishing wells, not to mention the spinning-wheel factory and the knights’ armoury, which were both in shambles. So the queen called a great conference with all the beings in the kingdom: witches, wizards, fairy godmothers, and all manner of talking frogs, plus cats with impressive wardrobes. She asked each of them to imagine how they might rebuild the kingdom and make everything be exactly the way it was before.

There was silence, until one of the fairy godmothers said, “But what if we didn't?”

The queen looked shocked. “Whatever do you mean?” she asked.

“What if we don’t put everything back to exactly the way it was? What if we made it—better?” the fairy godmother replied.

The crowd gasped. There was a pause before the excited shouting started from the kingdom’s populace. What if the spinning-wheel factory could run on a windmill instead of burning coal? What if we built a fence around the sheep-grazing hill so that Bo Peep wouldn't have to spend so much time chasing after them? What if the bicycle trail went through the town square instead of out past the houses so we could bicycle into town to do our shopping?

“What if the morning bells weren't quite so loud?” suggested one particularly bleary-eyed monk named Jacques.

Sir Bluster, the Bravest Knight in the Kingdom—he’d trademarked that himself—stood up in front of the assembly and spoke: “Well, these ideas all sound very nice, but obviously the most important thing to do is rebuild the knights’ armoury. How else are we going to defend the kingdom?” He sat down, feeling that no other argument was necessary. Obviously, he and his fellow knights had the most important job in the kingdom.

Then there came a very small voice from somewhere in the crowd. “From what?”

No one knew where the voice was coming from. No one knew what to say. Everyone was silent.

The voice came again: “Defend us from what?”

Sir Bluster—well—blustered. No one else had ever dared to challenge him before. “Why, from dragons, of course!” he muttered, not leaving his seat.

A great buzzing took over the room. If there was one thing that everyone in the kingdom was afraid of, it was dragons. Seeing everyone getting so anxious, the queen called for quiet, peering between her citizens to see if she could see where the small voice was coming from.

The voice came again. “Have you ever seen a dragon?”

This time, the buzzing that filled the room wasn't quite so anxious. A few people realized that, no, they had never actually seen a dragon.

Sir Bluster shifted uncomfortably in his seat. “Of course, none of them have seen a dragon. My knights keep the kingdom well protected,” he asserted.

Now another voice spoke up. “But if none of us have seen a dragon, how do we know they’re actually a threat to the kingdom?”

Sir Bluster was looking very uncomfortable indeed. “My knights and I go to the dragon lands all the time. We keep you safe by keeping those dragons out.”

This conversation was really getting out of hand. The queen raised her hand for calm again. “Perhaps you could tell us a little bit about these dragons, Sir Bluster,” she asked.

Sir Bluster mumbled before standing up to address the crowd, gathering his words. “Dragons—yes—very scary. Very big—huge, even. They fly and breathe fire—very scary. You should all be very glad that the knights and I keep you all so safe.”

A loud rumble moved through the crowd. Yes, dragons were scary. Sir Bluster must be correct. And then, one by one, the crowd fell silent again as the owner of that small voice rose out of the crowd. On shiny, delicate, pink-and-golden wings, a dragon no bigger than the cat with the fabulous wardrobe flew up to perch on the back of the queen's chair. This time, the voice was not so small and shy, but loud. And as the dragon roared the word “No!” a streak of flame shot from her mouth. She settled back down and spoke, loudly now.

“Every time there is a crisis in this kingdom, you all work your very hardest to ‘get back to normal’ as quickly as you can, rebuilding homes and rooting out poison apples. But have you ever spared one moment, one load of rebuilding materials, one squad of gnomes to help the dragons? No. Instead, you send in Sir Bluster and his men to terrorize us. We have homes just like you. We have families and children just like you, but while your homes and gardens were destroyed by the beanstalk vines, it was our eggs—our babies—who were destroyed. We came here today to ask—to plead—for your help. But instead, Sir Bluster here wants you to rebuild his armoury so that he can come and throw spears at us while we're trying to rebuild our homes and our barbecue restaurants. We mean you no harm. We're just different than you, yet instead of coming and sharing a meal with us, you would rather feel safe, just because Sir Bluster tells you we're dangerous, and he's taken care of it.”

The witches looked especially embarrassed. They certainly knew what the dragons were talking about. It wasn't too long ago that people in the kingdom had been convinced that the witches were scary, and the knights wanted them to be pushed out into the forest. They nodded to one another.

“The witches stand by the dragons!” one shouted.

“So do the gnomes!” came a chorus of squeaky voices.

“Third Pig Construction will help rebuild the dragon lands,” came a snortling voice from the back of the room.

The queen nodded and held up her hand for silence. “The rebuilding of our new and improved fairy-tale kingdom will begin at once with the rebuilding of the dragons’ barbeque restaurant, even though I'm not really sure what that is. It will proceed with the conversion of the spinning-wheel factory to a sustainable-energy model. The last thing to be rebuilt will be the knights’ armoury—maybe. For as long as the rebuilding efforts are underway, all spears will be recrafted into pruning tools for the orchard, and all swords will be remade into farming equipment.”

She turned to Sir Bluster and the knights. “My brave knights, now that I have met these dragons, I am not certain that you have been living up to your knightly vows. A knight’s job is first to serve, then to defend. I believe you will all learn very much by getting out of that armour and helping your fellow citizens rebuild.”

And that is the story of how barbecue became the most popular takeout food in all of the kingdom, and how Sir Bluster discovered that he really did actually very much enjoy farming—and how everyone else lived happily ever after.

**Song**

“Our World Is One World”

Eleuthera Diconca-Lippert

**Share the Plate**

Shoshanna Green

Hi, bonjour. My name is Shoshanna Green. My pronouns are *she* and *her*, and I’m a member of the congregation at the Unitarian Church of Montreal.

In May, for our Share the Plate program, we’re donating to Communitas. Communitas helps people who are returning from prison to successfully reintegrate into the community in and around Montreal. They offer both services and support to ease each step of the process. At the heart of all their programming is the joint participation of volunteers with former and current prisoners. Together they use the principles of Restorative Justice to create a safer community by building relationships that help people face the challenges of reintegration. They operate on a small budget; their fundraising goal for 2019 was only 18 thousand dollars, which they reached on the very last day of the year.

Our contributions this month can make a significant difference. If you can make a financial donation this month, please visit their website: communitasmontreal.org —C-O- M-M-U-N-I-T-A-S-M-O-N-T-R-E-A-L (all one word), dot, O-R-G. And if you aren’t in a position to give money right now, know that you make a difference in all the other ways you support and strengthen our church community, our city, and our world.

Thank you for sharing your gifts.

**Song**

“Watch, Learn, Listen” by Kerry-Anne Kutz

Kerry-Anne Kutz (piano and vocals)

with Eleuthera Diconca-Lippert

**Video**

by TOM probably FOOLERY

“The Great Realisation”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1XtWIpNjts>

**Meditation**

The Mourning After

Rev. Diane Rollert

The sun rises through the mist

after a night of rain.

Fresh air will wash us clean.

The temperature drops,

easing the burden

for everyone shut in

who needs more air in tight quarters.

Has calm come to the world

or only to me?

Many times a day,

I open my phone

and glance at a picture

of my grandchildren:

The baby’s face turned toward her brother,

smiling a newly realized smile,

while he smiles directly at the camera.

A moment of joy

that is a constant reminder

of the primal power of love

and kinship,

and the reason why

I have to keep fighting for justice.

Because these children —

all children —

deserve better.

Tonight in the city of my birth,

in the cities where I grew up,

went to school,

and gave birth to my children,

protesters are calling out,

“No justice, no peace!”

and “I can’t breathe!”

Here in Canada,

I’m far from the fray,

wanting to be there,

to bear witness,

to be counted.

Here we join together

trying to imagine

the world we could create,

trying to find faith in tomorrow.

I want to believe

that change is coming,

that this pandemic

has ripped back the cover of disguise.

That the injustices

of systemic racism,

of economic imbalance

that leave the powerful comfortable

and the most vulnerable to die,

that all this has cleaned the air

enough for us to breathe

and to finally hear the cries:

“I can’t breathe!”

Here in a land of quiet comfort

we cannot afford to be smug;

there are lessons to be learned

and justice to be served.

Our own fortresses and prisons

of racism and privilege

must be dismantled brick by brick.

Let us breathe deeply.

Let us remember that this breath

is a right and gift:

The very core of our faith,

that every person

deserves due process;

that every life

has inherent worth

and dignity.

Amen.

**Music for Meditation**

Waldesruhe (Tranquil Woods) by Antonin Dvorak

Sandra Hunt (piano) and Gary Russell (cello)



**Closing Words**

“The Grout” by Rev. Marcus Hartlief

read by youth and young adults from the Lakeshore UU Congregation

and the Unitarian Church of Montreal

The Unitarian Universalist congregation where I served as an intern made a mosaic Tree of Life the summer before I arrived. Congregants of all ages came together to craft the tree’s leaves, using bits and pieces of broken ceramics, jewelry, glass, and stone. There are many precious personal items in the tree, including fragments of the Berlin Wall, a father’s watch face, pieces of great grandmother’s china, and a key to the front door of a loved home. Like the members of the community that brought them together, each part is imbued with memories and meaning; each fragment holds a piece of truth.

Unitarian Universalists are mosaic makers. We are a people who bring together the broken pieces of our histories and the shining pieces of our seeking and, piece by piece, create a mosaic religion. Our Tree of Life is found in the stories of our living tradition. The bead from a transformational moment of worship at a youth conference. The bit of paper stamped with the blazing emblem of the Unitarian Service Committee that saved lives during World War II. The button or patch on a backpack that proudly proclaims the first justice issue that lit our souls on fire. But our mosaic making tells another story too, one that is often more difficult to see. One that is essential to the purpose of religious community. One that lies not in the beautiful and broken bits and pieces but in the grout.

Grout. The chalky, gritty stuff that is squeezed between the cracks of tiles. In a mosaic, the grout holds the image together, unifying disparate pieces into a whole. The grout of a community takes years to lay and settle. Grout happens in board meetings and committee meetings and endless emails and slow-moving institutions. It is in weekly potlucks shared by neighbors, a ride to church, and coffee in the social hall after worship. While the folks who show up for church only on Christmas and Easter will hopefully enjoy the beauty of the mosaic they find, they may never know the power of the grout that holds us through all the seasons of life.

We help to make the grout when we learn each other’s names and when we reach out across generational divides. We help to make the grout when we show up on Sunday morning without having checked first to see if we’re interested in the sermon topic. When a newborn arrives to be blessed by the community, it is the grout that enables us to welcome them. And it is in the grout that we rest when we gather to grieve and memorialize a beloved one who has died.

Hold us, O Grout.

Gather us in, through time and space, and make all our broken pieces whole in community. In our multiplicity, make us one. From each of our jagged edges, give us the shape of a communal beauty.