**Unitarian Church of Montreal**

**Sunday Service: Reasons to Be Cheerful**

May 10, 2020

**Chalice Lighting**

Rev. Diane Rollert

At night sometimes, I can't sleep, and I'm worrying about the world, and thoughts come into my head. And one night, this song came into my head: “Reasons to Be Cheerful, Part 3,” a song from the 1970s by a band called Ian Dury and the Blockheads from the UK. It's one of those songs that's really silly. It was kind of a novelty piece, but it actually has a story—a backstory: that’s what I found out in the middle of the night when I was looking for something to get over my anxiety.

So, they had a technician who was almost electrocuted by a microphone, and then they had a fight that broke out at a concert and they had to cancel, and so they were feeling pretty freaked out, so Ian Dury writes this song, thinking, “Well, you know, things have been bad, but there've got to be things to be cheerful about.” I've got the words right here.

Why don’t you get back into bed?

Why don’t you get back into bed?

Why don’t you get back into bed?

So they say, I wanna get back in bed. Now, I feel these days like I just want to get back into bed and throw the covers over my head and forget about the world.

They go on.

Reasons to be cheerful

Reasons to be cheerful

Summer, Buddy Holly, the working folly
“Good Golly, Miss Molly,” and boats.

Hammersmith Palais, the Bolshoi Ballet
Jump back in the alley, and nanny goats.

A bit of grin and bear it; a bit of come and share it.

You're welcome. We can spare it.

“Reasons to Be Cheerful, Part 3.” You get the idea. What I love is that there's a spot there where it says, “Take your mom to Paris; lighting up a chalice.” Lighting up a chalice—1979. I don't know if he was a Unitarian Universalist or what. And that’s so great! “Lighting up a chalice,” and that's what we're going to do right now. We're going to light a chalice to begin this service.

Reasons to be cheerful . . . Reasons to be cheerful?

Reasons to be cheerful!

**Gathering Music**

Beethoven, Ecossaises in Eb, WoO 86, arranged by Ferruccio Busoni

Sandra Hunt

**Time for All Ages**

Katherine Childs

Hi everyone. For our Time for All Ages today, I wanted to tell you a little bit about the history of Mother's Day.

Mother's Day has been celebrated in North America on the second Sunday in May since 1908. But where did it come from? Who started it? Well, I'm here to tell you a little bit about Julia Ward Howe, who was a Unitarian, an abolitionist—so, someone who believed in ending slavery—and a women's-suffrage advocate—so, somebody who was working towards getting women the right to vote. And in 1870, she wrote a piece of writing called “Appeal to Womanhood throughout the World,” which was a call for a Mother's Day of Peace. Now, later on in her life, she would take this piece of writing and do international speaking tours, calling for this day to be established.

So that got me thinking. She was a Unitarian in the second half of the 1800s. Our church here in Montreal was founded in 1842, which means there were active Unitarians thinking and writing here at the same time as Julia Ward Howe was thinking and writing from her home in Boston, Massachusetts. So I did a little bit of digging—and by digging, I mean writing. And I “found” a piece of correspondence between our Reverend William Barnes and Julia Ward Howe about her Mother's Day of Peace. Let's take a look.

[*Reads a pretend letter*]

to

*Reverend William S. Barnes*

*Church of the Messiah*

*Beaver Hall Hill*

*Montreal, Quebec, Canada*

from

*Mrs. Julia Ward Howe*

*241 Beacon Street*

*Boston, Massachusetts*

*United States of America*

*August 30, 1893*

*Dear Reverend Barnes,*

*Good greetings from fair Boston. I was gratified to hear from you after your predecessor in Montreal, Reverend Cordner, now living here in Boston with his family, introduced us.*

*Unfortunately, I must decline your kind invitation to come and speak to your congregation on the matter of our campaign. I wish I were able to come to plead our case for the Mother's Day of Peace. Indeed, I have not been to your fair country since I attended the eighteenth Congress of the Association for the Advancement of Women held in Toronto, now more than ten years ago, and I fervently wish to return. However, on the dates you have proposed, I will be delivering an address at the first Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago.*

*If I may, I will lay out for you our case for the establishment of the Mother's Day of Peace, that you may impart it to the good people of your church.*

*First, that mothers have for generations, since time immemorial, been made party against our gentle natures to the bloody conflicts which men have substituted for the true call to justice. We say, no more!*

*Second, that we call on all women of Christian faith to renounce the doctrine of war, and instead to proclaim the doctrine of love. That we, women of one country, will declare our love for women of another country, that our sons will not be taken from us and trained in the ways of war, to kill their sons!*

*Third, that a congress of women be held to grieve and mourn the dead killed by generations of war, which we even recall within our lifetime, and that from it will come a new great era of peace.*

*You will undoubtedly recall some of these words from my “Appeal to Womanhood throughout the World” of 1870. As we now campaign for the establishment of a Mother's Day of Peace to be celebrated in all countries on the second day of June, we ask that you now refer to this text as the Mother's Day Proclamation.*

*Again, please accept my humble apologies that I cannot be with you, and my humble thanks that you may bring this important work to your congregation.*

*In faith,*

*Mrs. Julia Ward Howe*

Well, I guess that explains why our congregational records never showed that Julia Ward Howe came and spoke to us.

So what became of Mrs. Howe’s campaign for a Mother's Day of Peace? Well, it was never accepted.

More than thirty years later, a woman by the name of Anna Jarvis—whose mother, Anna Maria Reeves Jarvis, had been a contemporary of Julia Ward Howe’s—Anna Jarvis made an appeal to the American federal government for the establishment of a national Mother's Day on the second Sunday in May—today—so, Happy Mother's Day if you celebrate!

Two years after Anna Jarvis's work, in 1910, Father's Day was established on the third Sunday in June. And now, as of 2019, you can celebrate Nonbinary Parent’s Day on the fourth Sunday in April.

Thank you for joining me for this historical tour of Mother's Day. I hope you've had a chance to learn a little bit about our Unitarian history.

**Opening Song**

“For the Beauty of the Earth”

Eleuthera Diconca-Lippert with Sandra Hunt

**Reflection**

The Price of Love

Camellia Jahanshahi



Hello, my name is Camellia Jahanshahi, and on this Mother's Day Sunday, I would like to offer a short reflection about my maternal grandmother, Becky Milner, and one of the lessons that she instilled in me about how to move through grief and to be able to find cheerfulness and love again in difficult situations.

My grandmother, first of all, was an amazing woman. She was creative and intellectual and welcoming, and she was an amazing cook, and she always had the best ice cream, and she would let me roll around in the mud, and she would get out on the floor and play cats with me, and she just was absolutely the best—I have to say it—hands down. But she was also very, very realistic, and the subject of death was something that she brought up frequently, starting from when I was a very young girl. I have early memories of her showing me things from a jewelry box that I would one day inherit, and thinking that that was very weird and confusing and morbid, but she was also the type of woman who would freeze the bodies of birds when they crashed into a window so that me and my big brother could look at them and study them. So, on the scale of weird—who knows?

But, all that said, the one very, very important thing that I keep thinking about, no matter what, is something she told me one afternoon when I was asking her about her seemingly never-ending stream of cats. You see, my grandparents lived in the Adirondacks, and so they would frequently have pets around, and those pets would frequently be kind of indoor-outdoor, wishy-washy, and especially the cats. And a cat in the woods is a dangerous thing, because there are coyotes and bears and lynxes and bigger cats, and all sorts of things that come out and get them—and frequently did. And I remember at one point, after maybe the fourth or fifth cat that I could remember, I looked at her, and I was like, “Grandma, why do you keep doing this? Why do you keep getting these cats when you know they're going to run out into the woods and probably die, and it just makes you sad?” I just couldn't understand, much as I love cats. I was just, like, why don't you just keep them inside? And—granted—eventually they did. But she looked at me, and she just said, “You know, Camellia, death is just the price you pay for love sometimes.”

And that just stuck with me my whole life—her soft Southern twang and gentle way of speaking, sometimes; it was very calm. She seemed, you know, at peace with the idea that sometimes that's the price you have to pay when you love something. And as absolutely depressing as it was to lose her, the amount of pain that I felt was just a reminder of the amount of love that I had, and still have, from her.

So that's just what I would like to offer you today—the idea that to be cheerful does not mean to not feel upset or sad, but it means to actively look for the reminder of why you feel sad, which is often a reason to feel cheerful.

**Reasons to Be Cheerful**

Daniel and Caite

Caite: So, Diane was thinking about reasons to be cheerful this week, and I was wondering: There’s something that's keeping us really cheerful right now. What is it?

Daniel: Yeah. We're working on a—well, it was a theater piece, but now it's a something story piece. We think perhaps maybe a digital story but we're still working on that. And it's keeping me really cheerful. It's a story about two birds; it’s called “Feather Tails.” And basically it's keeping me cheerful because Caite and I keep talking about what is this story, and how are we going to bring these characters to life? Where are we going to do it, and what does the bush look like, and how do the birds fly, and everything that comes with storytelling. Yeah, that's keeping me really cheerful.

Caite: And I think one of the reasons why it's keeping us both very cheerful, which I've written about . . . There's a huge push in our industry right now—the theatre industry—to continue innovating and creating work to go digital, and some people are getting really into it, and some people aren't, because theatre is built on live gatherings, much like church. What's also really important and keeping us cheerful is that we are two very creative people who enjoy spending time together. We enjoy teaching the children in RE together. And one of the things I've realized is that it's not always this opportunity to be creative, but it's actually to spend quality time with a friend when we can't physically be together.

Daniel: Absolutely, absolutely! I agree. A huge part of why I enjoy doing theatre work is because, literally, doing that activity with other people who I enjoy being with is a really awesome way to spend time. It's a really bonding experience, and so—yeah—I’ve really enjoyed doing that with you, Caite.

Caite: I’ve enjoyed doing it with you! And we get to make puppets.

Daniel: It’s true. It hasn’t happened—well, it has happened: we've made, like, little . . . I’ve been calling them prototype puppets. I think that's what they are. Yeah, little puppety-like things.

And also I was just thinking, as well, while you were talking, about how we're not able to gather at the moment. Sometimes I think about what happens in theater, and probably in spiritual work too, is: to be able to do, like, interesting gatherings, first you have to go away with your close-to-you special people and talk about what you're going to do. And then you come back to everyone and gather everybody together and share with them. And I feel like what we're in right now is the bit where we go away and talk about what we're going to do, and get really excited to hopefully bring it back.

Caite: Yeah. Well, thanks for staying creative with me, Daniel, and I'm definitely really looking forward to the day where we're able to share our story about these two wonderful birds with our church community, and I think that's really exciting. But for now, you just get to see Daniel and I work over these videos and blogs that we're sharing—

Daniel: —over the Internet.

Caite: —over the Internet! Reasons to be cheerful. Daniel, we have quite a few of them.

Daniel: Nice! I agree. You know what else—just to add a last little one? We both turned up to this call in what I would call “theatre blacks.”

Caite: [*laughing*] This is very true!



**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.

**Reflection on the Pressure to Have Children**

Eleuthera Diconca-Lippert

When we were discussing doing a service on Mother's Day and reasons to be cheerful, I felt like it was really important to speak to those of us who don't have children—and maybe don't want children—just to make sure that that side of the story is told and that they felt included in the dialogue around motherhood.

Obviously, things have improved by, like, a millionfold in the last few generations, and there's way less pressure. But it's happened to me a lot recently. Like, I'm 38, and so people tend to assume that my biological clock is ticking, and that any day now, I'm going to find the love of my life and want to pop out a baby. And I don't know if that's the case, and I'm okay with that. I have a really wonderful life, and a lot to be cheerful about. And I don't think that my life would be any less wonderful if I never end up having children.

I have a great community, the best friends I could ever ask for, an absolute dream job, a roof over my head, food in my belly. You know, I have a sense of purpose. I have gifts to offer up in the form of my creative process, through music and dance and photography and writing. And I'm part of a community that encourages me to share these gifts and really enjoys them when I do; I'm able to offer up joy and consolation throughout hardship.

Anyway, there's so much to be grateful for, so much to be cheerful about, and not having kids isn't [*a reason not to be*] for me.

I just wanted to speak to that a little.

**Musical Response**

“Love Will Guide Us”

Eleuthera Diconca-Lippert

**Reflection**

Reasons to Be Cheerful

Rev. Diane Rollert

The other members of the worship team were apprehensive when I announced that I wanted to use the song “Reasons to Be Cheerful, Part 3” as the focus of the service. “It's Mother's Day in the middle of a pandemic,” they reminded me. “A lot of people are probably not feeling so great about their parenting, or just about anything else. How can you possibly walk that thin line without it being hard to handle?”

I promised I'd do my best to make this thing work, and I know from very personal experience how unhelpful it is when you're sick, you're grieving, or you're feeling broke and depressed, and someone tells you to cheer up and look on the bright side.

Over the years, I keep coming back to journalist Barbara Ehrenreich and her book *Bright-Sided*. When she was diagnosed with cancer, she received nothing but positive affirmations from her family and friends, and everyone said, “Think positively; embrace your illness as a gift”—and she wondered why it wasn't okay to be negative.

The more she looked into it, the more she decided that Western culture had put too much of a premium on the positive—much to our detriment. Everyone had to be a “team player.” No one could pose questions. And back then, Ehrenreich said, everyone was supposed to buy into happiness, until it all blew up in our faces in a worldwide financial crisis. But wow, I mean, ten years later—ten years plus—we’re facing a worldwide pandemic and a potential worldwide depression, the likes of which we have never seen. Reasons to be cheerful? Hmm . . . not so many.

On top of it all, this is Mother's Day—a day that's not a happy, greeting-card celebration for many people. There are beautiful relationships to celebrate, and I do want to hold that up, and I do witness that, in this community all the time. But I also witness that not everyone has a cheerful story to tell about motherhood. There's a lot of pain out there, and we're still, oh, so far away from the Mother's Day rallying cry for international peace that Julia Ward Howe dreamed of in 1870 with her Mother's Day Proclamation.

If I look back on my own experience of motherhood, I often felt that I'd failed. I wasn't good at staying home, and then I got obsessed—much too obsessed—with my work. And at work, I was always the calm eye in the centre of the hurricane, but at home, I could be anything but calm. And really, I’m most thankful for the ups and downs of my life, for the path I have traveled, but if I have any regrets, it's the times when I have failed—really failed—to find balance between career and parenthood. Things that seemed so important then pale in comparison to the time I wish I'd focused more on being present to my kids.

Of course, then there were times when I focused *way* too much on them and what I wanted them to be or to do. I worried so much about their outcomes, when what I really needed to do was to focus on growing up myself. It took me a lot of years to accept—after my children were already on their way to becoming adults—that I couldn't control their destinies. After all, I couldn't control everything that happened in my ownlife; how could I possibly control what happened in theirs? And when it comes to loss and disappointment, all I can really manage is my own response.

These days, in these times of heightened anxiety about the whole world's future, I can find myself tripping over old baggage. Is it any surprise? I mean, anxiety has a way of bringing out the worst in us. I wonder now what it would be like to live through this pandemic with children at home. The mother I was when my children were small would probably have found it hard to stay calm and not get frustrated. I would have worried and fought about how much time my kids spent in front of screens. I would have worried that I was less together than all the other mothers. I would have craved my own quiet space. And if it had happened when my children were teens, I mean—really, I shudder to think of the level of anxiety that might have multiplied in our household about what to monitor, and the battles that could have broken out over so many things.

But I wonder if there would have been moments when I would have been very grateful if the world around us had shut down. If the pressure to be the perfect parent had faded away and we had relaxed about what had to be done, and just enjoyed each other's company. I wonder if that's what we would have done, and I don't know.

On this Mother's Day, my hat really goes off—*chapeau!*—to all those parents out there who are raising children through a pandemic: who are worrying about whether it's wise to send their kids back to school or not, who might be feeling as though there aren't many reasons to be cheerful right now. And I am sure that you are inundated with all kinds of unsolicited advice about how to make the best of the lockdown—set up routines, come up with fun projects to do, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Well, I'll just offer what I wish I had learned so many years ago: Breathe deeply, and keep your sense of humour.

Like I said earlier, the worship team was apprehensive about focusing on reasons to be cheerful, so I shared the rough cut of my chalice lighting video that you saw at the beginning of this service—showed them me dancing like a fool—and I asked them, “Well? Would you be willing to dance with me on Zoom,and let me record?” And they said yes, and so I turned away from my screen for a moment to cue up the music, and when I turned back, everyone was wearing hats! And we danced, and we had a really good laugh. Really, we just roared with laughter. And, of course—Murphy's Law—my recording failed, except for a few shots of Katherine and Eleuthera. And thankfully—I'm so grateful!—the RE team came to the rescue the next day, adding in a baby and a dog to the merrymaking.

Yup, life can be pretty rough right now, but it does help me to remember the many big and small things I still appreciate—the boats, nanny goats, and porridge oats of my life—and it feels different to do that than telling myself to look on the bright side of a challenging time. It just gives me a little sustenance as I continue in the struggle. And I have to say that I'm definitely adding dancing on Zoom to my list of reasons to be cheerful—that, and the fact that the members of the worship team have crazy hats ready to wear at a moment's notice. Go figure.

Amen. Blessed be. Namaste.



**Music for Meditation on Mother’s Day**

Edward Elgar, *Salut d'Amour*

Sandra Hunt (piano) and Gary Russell (cello)

**Video of Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Choir**

“Up above My Head”

**Closing Words**

Reasons to Be Cheerful

Rev. Diane Rollert

Our closing words come from a poem by the poet Gabriella Mistral (1889–1957). She was a poet from Chile, and this is from a collection called *Women in Praise of the Sacred*, edited by Jane Hirshfield. This is slightly adapted.

A girl who couldn't walk asked, “How do I dance?”

We told her, “Let your heart dance.”

Then the girl asked, “How do I sing?”

We told her, “Let your heart sing.”

A poor dead thistle asked, “How do I dance?”

We told it, “Let your heart fly in the wind.”

God asked from on high, “How do I come down from this blueness?”

And we told God, “Come dance with us in the light.”

The entire valley is dancing in a chorus under the sun.

The hearts of those absent return to ashes.

So may it be.

And now, let us dance!

