

Who Are Our Neighbors?

First Universalist Church of Rochester, NY

October 20th, 2018 at 10:30am

Prelude *Stand by Me - Ben E. King (1938-2015) on piano*
[Brock]

Words of Welcome [Rev. Lane]

Welcome to the First Universalist Church of Rochester, where we are nurturing the spirit and serving the community. Whoever you are, we welcome you. Wherever you come from, we welcome you. Whomever you love, we welcome you. Whoever your neighbors are, we welcome you. We welcome all of you. It is good to be together this morning.

Announcements [Eric VanDusen]

“Good Morning!” (wait for response)

I am Eric VanDusen, a member of the Board of Trustees.

I extend a warm welcome to our visitors and guests. It is a special pleasure to welcome those visiting with us for the first time. If you have not done so already, we invite you to fill out the Visitor Response card found on the back of the Joys and Sorrows card inside of your Order of Service. This allows us to connect with you if you are interested in learning more about our congregation and its programs. We also invite you to join us for refreshments following today's service in the Clara Barton Lounge. There you'll find some friendly people at our

welcome table who can answer any questions you might have.

Please see your insert for an outline of today's service, along with some information on our upcoming activities and events;

Join Project Team members Elizabeth Osta and Dave VanArsdale after the service today from 12:15 pm until 1:15 pm in the Chalice Room for the final discussion of the popular and riveting book, *When They Call You A Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir*, by Patrisse Khan-Cullors and Asha Bandele. The book has become a keystone in discussions of racism.

Fall Clean Up Day is Saturday, November 3 from 9am-noon. Please volunteer to help with the cleaning and winter preparation of the church. There are tasks for any level of ability. Let either Tom Ruganis or Ed Deller know if you can join us.

Out of respect for the worship service that we are about to share, please be sure that your cell phones are turned to worship mode. Thank you.

Welcoming Each Other [Eric VanDusen]

Whoever you are, we welcome you here this morning. Let us join in a sign of welcome by greeting our neighbor.

You are especially encouraged to reach out to folks you haven't yet met. Welcome!

Opening Hymn *#346 Come Sing a Song With Me*

1 Come, sing a song with me, come, sing a song with me,
come, sing a song with me, that I might know your mind.

And I'll bring you hope when hope is hard to find, and I'll
bring a song of love and a rose in the wintertime.

2 Come, dream a dream with me, come, dream a dream
with me, come, dream a dream with me, that I might
know your mind.

And I'll bring you hope when hope is hard to find, and I'll
bring a song of love and a rose in the wintertime.

3 Come, walk in rain with me, come, walk in rain with me,
come, walk in rain with me, that I might know your mind.

And I'll bring you hope when hope is hard to find, and I'll
bring a song of love and a rose in the wintertime.

4 Come, share a rose with me, come, share a rose with me,
come, share a rose with me, that I might know your mind.

And I'll bring you hope when hope is hard to find, and I'll
bring a song of love and a rose in the wintertime.

Call to Worship [Rev. Lane]

I will bring you hope,
We will bring you love,
They will bring you spirit,
We will move and walk together,
As neighbors, as friends, as strangers meeting for the first
time,
That I might know your mind.
That we might know each other.
That we would embody being neighbors to each other.
Come, let us worship together.

Chalice Lighting [Catherine Coates]

Our chalice lighting this morning will be sung rather than spoken. Would you join with us in singing “Won’t You Be My Neighbor?” Words are printed on an insert in your order of service.

Won’t You Be My Neighbor? By Fred Rogers

It's a beautiful day in this neighborhood
A beautiful day for a neighbor
Would you be mine?
Could you be mine?

It's a neighborly day in this beautywood
A neighborly day for a beauty
Would you be mine?
Could you be mine?

I have always wanted to have a neighbor just like you
I've always wanted to live in a neighborhood with you

So let's make the most of this beautiful day
Since we're together, we might as well say
Would you be mine?
Could you be mine?
Won't you be my neighbor?

Won't you please
Won't you please
Please won't you be my neighbor?

Testimony [**Catherine Coates**]

Over 20 years ago I began church shopping, because I didn't want my daughter raised in a traditional Presbyterian church, the church in which I grew up. I had already decided Christianity was not a good fit for me, and somehow I knew that a focus on spirituality would be welcomed at the First Universalist Society of Rochester. On my first Sunday, the summer minister was someone I knew, one of the banners was similar to something I had drawn, and then there were the principles. I found that the third and fourth principles particularly called to me.

3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
4. and a free and responsible search for truth and meaning.

These words told me I had found a place where I would be accepted as the born-again “heretic” I had become. “Born again,” because that had been part of my spiritual journey, and heretic, because I had traveled so far from that tradition.

So, I returned, and was welcomed, even as I was often plagued by depression. People here were accepting, understanding, and loving in their responses to me. I found a niche where I could serve, and was the Keeper of the Flame for many years. I would listen to my intuition/Spirit, and would prepare the centering table as I felt led. I had many favorable responses to my efforts, and my heart opened up a little more, feeling I had contributed to the worship experience.

Around the time my depression went into remission, this church went through many changes in pastoral

leadership. I was impressed by how the congregation was able to thrive in the midst of so much change. For me, I took some time to step back, taking a sabbatical so-to-speak. During that time I followed a dream from childhood, and started attending the One Spirit Learning Alliance Seminary, from which I graduated, and was ordained in 2017. I am now studying to become a spiritual counselor, also at One Spirit. My love of theology had finally found an outlet, which will eventually become a service.

Upon returning to regular attendance, I look forward to telling more stories, preaching more sermons on Lane's Sunday off, and serving as a Keeper of the Flame, again. I have been fed by my involvement in these opportunities to share of myself. I look forward to deeper sharing with this community of seekers.

Affirmation of Faith

[Catherine Coates]

Please in body or in spirit for our affirmation of faith and remain standing as we sing our doxology.

Love is the doctrine of this church;
The quest for truth is its sacrament,
and service is its prayer.
To dwell together in peace;
To seek knowledge in freedom;
To serve humanity in fellowship;
To the end that all souls shall grow into harmony
With the source and meaning of life:
Thus do we covenant with each other and with all.

Doxology

[Catherine Coates]

From all that dwell below the skies
Let songs of hope and faith arise.
Let peace, good will on earth be sung
Through every land, by every tongue.

Offering Words

[Catherine Coates]

Each of us are gifted. Your very presence here is a gift. At this time in our worship, we have the opportunity to offer ourselves and our gifts to this sacred community within and beyond these walls. One such gift, out of the myriads of possibilities, is financial support. Our offering this morning goes to 'The Flower City Pickers.' Every Saturday around 3PM farmers bring their unsold produce

to a gathering area at the Farmers Market and unsold food is sorted out and repackaged by volunteers who then distribute the food to various shelters around the city. This is a totally volunteer organization with a rickety old school bus and many people willing to help on a Saturday afternoon. What a beautiful way to truly embody being a neighbor. As the basket comes to you, offer what you can: your skills, love, kindness, openness, your monetary contribution, your very self. If you are a first-time visitor, please feel free to let the basket pass you by. Our offerings will now be collected, and received with gratitude.

Offertory *"Would You Harbor Me?" by Isaye Maria Barnwell- OOROC Choir, Brock Tjosvold, Music Director*

Message for All Ages *Animal Conversations*

[Shirley Malone]

Good morning everyone!

How many of you have heard animals talk? (...see if there is any response) Oh, they do not use words the way we do, but they do communicate with each other and with their humans.

One day I stopped at a nearby house to see a friend. Her 2 dogs came rushing to the door. CiCi was barking ferociously. Blue started to bark (“ar..ooo”), stopped and looked at her with a puzzled look that said “Why are you barking? We know her. She likes us.” Blue came over to be petted, and CiCi stopped, looked at me with that “Oh, it’s you” expression, and walked away.

They were put outside to play. They chased each other around the yard, and then suddenly both stopped at the same second and went in the opposite direction. Obviously they had communicated the rules of this game. Vito and Luigi from next door came to join in the chase. Soon other dogs joined—Buster, Jazz and Griffin. They would run around the yard in a circle, stopping at the same second to switch directions. This continued until they all decided to take naps on the grass.

They did not even get up when the cats arrived. The cats ruled the center of the yard from the picnic table. Kitty sat on the top of the table alone. Barnum and Bailey sat on the picnic bench together. The rule apparently known to them was that only one cat could be on top of the picnic

table. Some mornings if Barnum and Bailey got there first, Barnum would get on the top. When Kitty came, she would play on the grass with Bailey.

My cat's name was Midnight. Now he wanted to go to that yard and play but he wouldn't until he had his breakfast. For his breakfast he had moist food with a topping of Special Dinners. That was the name of a pebbled dry food. One morning I did not have any Special Dinners so I just put out the can of moist food. Midnight stared at me. "You expect me to eat THAT?" He stared and stared at me. Finally I went to Wegmans, and brought back a box of Special Dinners so he could eat his breakfast!

Finally he was able to join in the play. He rarely got to be on top of the picnic table but he sat on the bench or

played on the grass with Barnum and Bailey, Kitty of course on the top.

Now there was another cat who lived nearby named Precious. Precious wanted to play and she would come in through the gate, prancing and showing off her long blond brushed hair. She was beautiful and she wanted them to see her. Oh my! Kitty, Barnum and Bailey did not like her and (hissssed) at her. They chased her home. “You can’t play,” they said.

Most of the dogs ignored the cats but Vito and Luigi went back next door into their fenced yard. They were afraid of Midnight. Midnight, who had ignored Precious, also ignored Vito and Luigi, but he would decide to stretch out and take a nap in the sun beside the fence with those 2

dogs on the other side. Vito and Luigi did not like him being so close, and with the safety of the fence, barked madly at him. He just ignored them, enjoying the sun's warmth.

Now not all of the neighborhood pets lived outside. We had a lot of parakeets. One neighbor had a big cage with lots of birds. There was a pair named Para and Keet who had their own smaller cage because they were the parents of many of these birds. They didn't need the outdoors. They were happy and well-fed in their cages. After awhile there were so many birds that many of us in the neighborhood were asked to give them homes.

I took 2. Their names were Bennie and Joon. I already had another bird, Tweetie. After several weeks of having

Bennie and Joon in their own cage, I decided they could move in with Tweetie. The conversation then was amazing. There were lots of chirps, trills and peeps, different from any I had even heard. It went on for a long time.

In their own special language the birds had decided how they could share their cage. Benny and Joon had a larger perch they sat on together. Tweetie sat on a shorter perch on the other side of the cage. They liked having friends, but they had their rules.

The birds remained in their houses, but in the evening the dogs and cats ended up in the yard together. CiCi, Blue, Vito, Luigi, Jazz and Griffin played chase one more time around the edge of the backyard. Kitty, Barnum, Bailey,

and Midnight, with Precious standing a short distance away, were around and on top of the picnic table.

When the sky began to darken, CiCi and Blue went inside to check for supper in their bowls. Vito, Luigi, Buster, Jazz and Griffin went to their homes as did Barnum, Bailey and Precious. Kitty and Midnight lived outside and went to the porch to get fed. Midnight made sure he had Special Dinners on top of his food.

Inside the house Tweetie went to her perch. Bennie and Joon settled together on another perch and all was calm in the cage.

Lights started turning out. The neighborhood was quiet and peaceful.

Hymn of Affirmation *Sheltering Arms of Love*

Beneath our arms, we shelter you,
you warm our hearts as you pass through.
May our love guide you as you go,
to help you learn and help you grow.

Musical Interlude *Canzone - Ernest Grosjean (1844-1936) on organ*
[Brock]

Joys and Sorrows [Rev. Lane]

[Rev. Lane to read Joys and Sorrows Cards]

And we drop one final stone into the bowl to represent all the joys and sorrows left unspoken in the silent sanctuaries of our hearts. May all be held in the heart of love.

Pastoral Prayer

[Rev. Lane]

Let us take in a deep breath and drink in the very essence of life,
This breath, a gift,
A constant source of living and renewal,
Available to us at any time.

Source of our deepest joys,
Sustain us, be with us, keep our hearts open to receive your gifts,

We celebrate the many ways you move through our lives,
We embrace you,
With laughter, friendship, connection, and energy.

Source of our deepest heartbreaks,
To know you is to know living,
Help us to learn from you and to not shy away from fully
experiencing loss or disappointment,
Do not linger with us too long that we get overly used to
having you around.

We hold many in our hearts this morning- those who are
sick, those who are celebrating, those who have gone from
our days, those who we find it hard to let go of.

Let us take a moment to bring those names into this space. To speak aloud the names that are on our hearts.

[PAUSE for naming]

We bring these names here that our community can bear witness once again to the names on our hearts.

Let's take a deep breath together.

Yes to life,
Yes to truth,
Yes to love.

Amen. Blessed be. May it be so.

Let's join in some shared silence together.

[Rev. Lane to ring bell once.]

[SILENCE]

[Rev. Lane to ring bell a second time]

Hymn of Contemplation #6 *Just As Long As I Have
Breath*

1 Just as long as I have breath, I must answer, "Yes," to life; though with pain I made my way, still with hope I meet each day. If they ask what I did well, tell them I said, "Yes," to life.

2 Just as long as vision lasts, I must answer, "Yes," to truth; in my dream and in my dark, always that elusive spark. If they ask what I did well, tell them I said, "Yes," to truth.

3 Just as long as my heart beats, I must answer, "Yes," to love; disappointment pierced me through, still I kept on loving you. If they ask what I did best, tell them I said, "Yes," to love.

Reading *words from Brene Brown* [Catherine
Coates]

We're in a spiritual crisis, and the key to building a true belonging practice is maintaining our belief in inextricable human connection. That connections- the

spirit that flows between us and every other human in the world- is not something that can be broken; however, *our belief in the connection* is constantly tested and repeatedly severed. When our belief that there is something greater than us, something rooted in love and compassion, breaks, we are more likely to retreat to our bunkers, to hate from afar, to tolerate bullshit, to dehumanize others, and, ironically, to stay out of the wilderness.

It's counterintuitive, but our belief in inextricable human connection is one of our most renewable sources of courage in the wilderness. I can stand up for what I believe is right when I know that regardless of the pushback and criticism, I'm connected to myself and others in a way that can't be severed. When we don't believe in an unbreakable connection, the isolation of the

wilderness is too daunting so we stay in our factions and echo chambers.

Centering Music *Musette - Ernest Grosjean (1844-1936) on organ* [Brock]

Sermon *Who Are Our Neighbors?* [Rev. Lane]

Last fall, some new neighbors moved in next door to me. I had had a tense relationship with the previous neighbors who had lived in that house, so I began feeling closed off to any kind of neighborly relationship. Plus, they had a new dog that would just bark and bark. I introduced myself but kept things pretty surface-level.

Then the winter came. And we found ourselves with a bunch of snow. I shoveled out my walkway and when I

was done, my neighbor Tim came by to ask if he could borrow the shovel for his walkway. When he was done, he came back and salted our sidewalk too, which was great because a little snow had fallen and blown around since I shoveled. The next snowfall, he came by to borrow the shovel again and dug through both of our walkways. He brought the salt, I brought the shovel. The following week, I shoveled ours and theirs. He was so appreciative—especially as he lives with three kids and had to get them out for school. By the time the summer rolled around, we knew each other’s kids and pet names. We spent time with one another in a totally different way. A stranger became a neighbor. A relationship was built that lasts to this day. Still, I go back to that house and am greeted warmly by his kids.

We come together this morning to ask the very important question- Who Are Our Neighbors? And it is hard to determine who our neighbors are when this church draws from the many corners of Rochester. Folks live all over! I'd like to take a quick poll with you all with a brief raising of hands. I'm going to ask you which direction you live from here, so you might want to take a minute to consider this. Who lives East of the church? [PAUSE to notice] How about South? [PAUSE to notice] Who lives West of the church? [PAUSE to notice] Who lives North of First Universalist? [PAUSE to notice] We draw from so many parts of the greater Rochester community. And the one location that unites all of us (at least for this morning) is this church.

This church in downtown Rochester is where we all come on a Sunday morning and throughout the week for

worship, rites of passage, programs for people of all ages, music-making, social justice, and spiritual fulfillment. This place is so central to this city and to this community. So, when I speak of neighbors this morning, I am speaking of the neighbors right here in downtown Rochester- right next door to this church that brings us all together.

I have heard so many stories of how this neighborhood has shifted. At first, we were neighbors in a residential setting with houses all around us. Urban renewal brought a time of less housing downtown with more corporate neighbors- businesses, business people, folks who were mostly here during the day and occasionally at night. Now, we are seeing a new set of neighbors being anticipated and built for with new housing going up in this neighborhood- new opportunities being built.

This church always has had, in recent memory, neighbors who are homeless. People who live outside in tents, sleeping on cardboard boxes, covered by blankets and whatever else can keep them warm in the harsh Rochester cold. These too are our neighbors. There have been times when having houseless folks as our neighbors is a blessing and times when having homeless folks as our neighbors has been challenging to say the least.

You may hear me use the terms houseless and homeless interchangeably. As a young seminarian, I took a class with a woman who was called Tiny. Tiny is a houseless woman who grew up in San Francisco and who founded a wonderful movement called POOR Magazine, a magazine and printing organization that publishes the writings of the poor and houseless. They work towards housing for houseless mamas and families. She invited us

to use the term houseless as home is often more about the people we are with or a feeling that we have. A house is about a literal structure we do or do not occupy.

Neighbors here too are neighbors in the surrounding areas close to downtown. We see so many folks newly moving to this city and settling here, often young, hipster folks. These too are our neighbors.

As I name our many neighbors this morning, I wonder how we are in relationship with our surrounding area. With the new population moving downtown, with the people who have lived here for quite some time- the folks with housing and those without, the people living in the areas surrounding downtown, the business folks who come here during the day for work. How are we in relationship with our neighbors? What does it mean to be

a good neighbor to the people we pass on the street on our way into this building?

Brene Brown has so much to say to us about how to be in relationship with our neighbors. One of her newest books, “Braving the Wilderness” is all about what it means to truly belong somewhere- whether that somewhere is a community, a group, a place, or a neighborhood. In her chapter, “Hold Hands. With Strangers.”, she writes about our belief in inextricable human connection- how this relationship is constantly tested and repeatedly severed. In order to feel like we can take a stand or authentically express ourselves, we must feel a connection to others that cannot be broken. These connections are life-savers. They are often what we come to church for- to be seen and understood and accepted, just as we heard in Catherine’s powerful story this

morning. To truly belong anywhere, we must know first that we are loved and cared for.

She writes specifically about our current time period and the ways we need to know this connection while increasingly feeling isolated. This is why our own neighborliness- our reaching out and providing a friendly presence, our being in relationship with all sorts of folks- is so critical right now. To be a neighbor at its most basic level is to literally live adjacent to other people. But to embody being a neighbor- this takes relationship, showing up, and a bit of compassion.

In many religious traditions, we are asked to be in relationship with our neighbor. The Christian and Jewish traditions invite us to love our neighbors as ourselves. The Quran invites Muslims to be good to their neighbors, coupled with an Arabic proverb to choose your neighbor

before choosing your residence.¹ In all of these, we are invited to be kind and loving to our neighbors.

In my story earlier, I do not think that my relationship with my neighbor Tim would have grown at all if one of us had not reached out to the other.

This morning, I want to invite us to consider the open question- How do we in this room build relationships our neighbors?

We are called to be in kind and loving relationship with our neighbors. And it may test our belief in connection over and over again to build relationship. Relationships with neighbors are shifting. My relationship with Tim has felt like a rare one in my life. Living in many cities, it has been rare to get to know my neighbors. Sometimes, folks are closed off to relationship. We come over with the Fred

¹ <http://www.islamweb.net/en/article/170837/kindness-to-neighbors>

Rogers-type of invitation to be good neighbors and the invitation is not well received.

In these times, compassion can be hard to come by. I believe there is an unspoken assumption here that the help we offer darn well better be appreciated!! As our downtown neighbors shift- as we find ourselves in a neighborly relationship with folks living in condos as well as living on the streets, what I can say is it's complicated. Creating the connections Brene Brown outlines don't happen in a one-size fits all kind of way. What is important is that our shared values of the inherent worth and dignity of all peoples and our belief in the interdependent web of existence of which we are all a part have to stay at the center of building relationships with our neighbor. We are all connected. We are all worthy of love.

This church's urban location is our strength. Many, many years ago (before any of us were here), this congregation decided to build a church downtown. Much more recently, this congregation decided to stay in downtown Rochester. Our neighbors have always been a shifting population. Our neighbors in the present are folks to reach out to- to offer support or just to be neighborly, to continue to grow into this reputation of being a kind and loving place in the downtown area. We have such a deep calling and chance to nurture the spirit and serve the community right where we are. May we be present to the task and all it calls us to do.

Amen. Blessed be. May it be so.

Closing Hymn *#318 We Would Be One*

1 We would be one as now we join in singing our hymn of love, to pledge ourselves anew to that high cause of greater understanding of who we are, and what in us is true. We would be one in living for each other to show to all a new community.

2 We would be one in building for tomorrow a nobler world than we have known today. We would be one in searching for that meaning which bends our hearts and points us on our way. As one, we pledge ourselves to greater service, with love and justice, strive to make us free.

Benediction [Rev. Lane]

Postlude *You've Got a Friend in Me by Randy
Newman (b. 1943) on piano* [Brock]