Sunday, October 20, 2019

Centering Thought: "You can safely assume you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do." — Anne Lamott

Prelude *Morning Song* from *Magyar Music* Michael Short

Welcome and Announcements Susan Sennott

Introit *Sawabona (I See You)* Jason Shelton
Intergenerational Choir

Opening Words "My Mother's God" by Geoff Page

My mother's God
has written the best
of the protestant proverbs:
you make the bed
you lie in it;
God helps him
who helps himself.
He tends to shy away from churches,
is more to be found in
phone calls to daughters
or rain clouds over rusty grass.
The Catholics
have got him wrong entirely:
too much waving the arms about,
the incense and caftan, that rainbow light.
He's leaner than that,
lean as a pair of
grocer's scales,

hard as a hammer at cattle sales
the third and final
time of asking.
His face is most clear
in a scrubbed wooden table
or deep in the shine of a
laminex bench.
He's also observed at weddings and funerals
by strict invitation, not knowing quite
which side to sit on.
His second book, my mother says,
is often now too well received;
the first is where the centre is,
tooth for claw and eye for tooth
whoever tried the other cheek?
Well, Christ maybe,
but that's another story.
God, like her, by dint of coursework
has a further degree in predestination.
Immortal, omniscient, no doubt of that,
he nevertheless keeps regular hours
and wipes his feet clean on the mat,
is not to be seen at three in the morning.
His portrait done in a vigorous charcoal
is fixed on the inner
curve of her forehead.
Omnipotent there
in broad black strokes
he does not move.

It is not easy, she'd confess,
to be my mother's God.

Lighting the Chalice and Green Sanctuary Candle

Hymn #11 (Gray) *O God of Stars and Sunlight*

Unison Affirmation

Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law
To dwell together in peace,
To seek the truth in freedom
To serve humanity in love,
Is our covenant with each other and with God.

Offertory *Voluntary in D Minor* John Stanley

Centering time Rev. Rali Weaver

Intergenerational Message

The Story of Our Lady of Guadalupe retold

Singing the children to class

May your mind be open to new learning.
May your lips bring truth into the world.
May your heart know love,
And your hands do the work of justice
As you go your way in peace.

Meditation and Prayer

Reading <u>**Our Lady of Guadalupe: Mother of the Civilization of Love**</u>

By Carl Anderson, Eduardo Chavez

On the morning of November 14, 1921, Luciano Perez Carpio, an employee of the private ministry of the presidency, entered the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe with soldiers disguised as civilians protecting him on either side. Leaning down, he placed an arrangement of flowers at the base of the Virgin's image. Moments later, a bomb hidden inside the flowers detonated. The explosion was of such a magnitude that it ruined the basilica's altar, the candelabra, and the bronze crucifix set atop the altar, and it even shattered windows of neighboring homes within a one-kilometer radius. But just inches away, Juan Diego's tilma and its glass covering remained perfectly intact. While persecution of Catholics was prevalent in Mexico during the anticlerical regimes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this attack reached a new level; yet even such an orchestrated effort as this could not undo the miracle, but rather only further underscored its supernatural origins. More than a century earlier, in 1785, the tilma had already proven resistant to ordinarily devastating occurrences when nitric acid was spilled on it during a routine cleaning of the frame. As one eyewitness of the accident testified:

> The spilling of a great deal of acid occurred while the side of the frame was being cleaned ..., enough to destroy the whole of the surface being cleaned ... I have personally seen, on those occasions when the glass case has been open ... that the [nitric acid] left a somewhat dull mark where it was spilled, though the painting is without any damage.

Remarkably, Juan Diego's tilma (a rough cloth made of cactus with the image of Guadalupe) was barely damaged, having nothing to show from the incident except a dull mark where the acid was

spilled, visible on the right side when looking at the image. But as for the unfortunate silversmith, the eyewitness testimony explained, "I also know that the silversmith responsible for the accident was so upset that it was believed he would become seriously ill ... for everyone knows that nitric acid is so strong that it will destroy iron if it comes in contact with it."

Anthem *Song of Kabir* Elizabeth Alexander

Reading

The Color of Christ: The Son of God & the Saga of Race in America
by Edward J. Blum, Paul Harvey

Liberation theologies were never strictly academic affairs. Their concepts influenced and were influenced by novelists, songwriters, and artists who struggled with their creative might to render Jesus as a sacred image tied to the experiences and encounters of themselves and their communities. When depicting Jesus on stained-glass windows, canvases, or movie screens, artists could not depict a universal Jesus who sided with all the suffering. When made into an object, Jesus necessitated a particular face and race. With each new liberation theology, a new racialized Jesus was born. In Detroit, only a few years before the international "theologies in America" conference, a black Jesus with short curly hair was painted on the dome of St. Cecilia Church. He came after the city had erupted in street riots, during which blacks and whites had gone back and forth, painting and repainting statues of Jesus black and then white. The new Jesus in St. Cecelia's was twenty-four-feet-long and had a black face. The sacred canopy surrounding him was racially redefined with black, white, Native American, and Chinese American angels. According to the church, the unveiling of this Jesus was "the biggest and most joyful event ever to take place" at the church.

Black Christ figures appeared frequently in the 1970s and 1980s but were different from those of the Harlem Renaissance and Great Depression, when Jesus was a lynched black southerner. In the 1970s, he was made more African (or at least how Americans thought native Africans looked) with large, bushy Afros and dressed in dashikis. From Philadelphia to Los Angeles, from Washington, D.C., to Houston, Texas, new Jesus figures started to replace the white Christs of African American churches. When Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham replaced its white Jesus, which had been dynamited to destruction, its new Christ was a black man. Philadelphia's Wall of Consciousness (1972) had a black Jesus sitting with Malcolm X and Jesse Jackson, and in 1993 a Los Angeles church had its white stained-glass Christ figures blackened. By the 1990s, it was common for exhibits of black art to include black Jesus paintings and sculptures.

Hymn #86 (Gray) *Blessed Spirit of My Life*

Sermon "Making God Our Own" The Rev. Rali M. Weaver

I chose our subject today to coincide with one of the largest yearly processions in the world. Though it is not well known outside of South America, the October 18th procession of Catholics through the city of Lima in Peru celebrates the Lord of Miracles or *Señor de los Milagros.* The story goes that an African Slave painted the image of Jesus on the cross, with the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene on a wall of his own volition. While if true the Slave's name is lost to history, his motivation has been told and retold. The beautiful painting soon became a pilgrimage site.

Pilgrimages were to antiquity what tourism is to us today with one exception. When ancient people went on a pilgrimage to see a religious artifact they were leaving their homes and all that was comfortable to them to set out on a spiritual journey to renew or deepen their faith. These days our travel is more about pleasure and relaxation, our mecca's are usually cities where we can sightsee, or mountains where we can hike and ski or oceans, lakes and pools where we can swim or boat or gambling locations where we can play games like craps or poker or pull the arms of slot machines.

While visiting Europe we might see a church but we rarely plan a visit to see just one church, just one icon. In fact iconography in our UU tradition is something many of us shy away from. It would be difficult to paint the face of a UU god if not impossible because each of you are free to make sense of your own divinity, or not. And while we have ultimate freedom to design our god in the same way our opening poem suggests, we have a history and tradition that can serve as a guide when we strive to make sense of god as our own.

2019 is the 200th anniversary since William Ellery Channing a founding father of Unitarianism, preached his famous Baltimore Sermon titled "Unitarian Christianity." Friday and Saturday I attended a convention in Baltimore that celebrated this as well as the 250th anniversary of a father of Universalism Hosea Ballou's landing on American Shores. We heard lectures and received graduate papers seeking to address patriarchy and white supremacy in our Universalist and Unitarian history. While this wasn't a pilgrimage it felt a bit like one to me because I had so many hiccups in traveling. I started out with a Spirit Airlines flight leaving Boston at 8 am on Thursday, only to realize I had a meeting I couldn't miss on Thursday, and so unable to rebook my flight I made a one way reservation for Thursday evening. The wind had other ideas and slowed down transportation getting me to the conference after midnight on thursday. I attended all day on Friday. Then Saturday I attended the morning session only

to have the afternoon cancelled. I then decided to get to the airport early to catch my 7:51 flight, only to realize at 2 pm that the flight was for 7:51 am not pm. There were no flights from Baltimore to Boston leaving the airport until Sunday. So I pulled out my trusty google maps and searched how to get to the Parsonage in the fastest time without a car and took a lyft to the amtrak to a lyft home from the train station, getting home just after midnight.

This was my pilgrimage. Not so much a spiritual quest, although I did go to a church, but more lengthy travel to a dawning place of ideas.

What makes something a pilgrimage? The dictionary describes it as "A journey, often into an unknown or foreign place, where a person goes in search of new or expanded meaning about the self, others, nature, or a higher good, through the experience. It can lead to a personal transformation, after which the pilgrim returns to their daily life."

I was in Baltimore for less than 48 hours, traveling more than 64 hours and two busses, three trains, a plane and a taxi to get there and a shuttle, a taxi a train and a lyft back. The fast paced- jet setting world we live in can get where we are going and when there is a roadblock there is always a way around it. Not exactly a pilgrimage but all that travel time gave me plenty of time to reflect, to read to rest, and to explore intellectually a place I had never been.

What I reflected upon at the conference was the nature of the divine that our Unitarian and Universalist forebearers believed in. It was clear it was not an icon we could follow through the streets or a physical object that was tested by circumstances and time. To our Unitarian and Universalist forebearers god was more a presence than a supreme being. God had less of a human body than benign compassionate qualities. It would have been difficult for them to

follow an icon because they did not see the divine in a physical form. To Channing and Ballou and their contemporaries our actions were far more important than prostrations.

People need to rework icons to look like themselves, when an Icon holds up a system of oppression. Putting an afro on a black Jesus can make Jesus more human, more accessible to those who have been disenfranchised. Every culture tries to humanize god in their own time and own way, because it usurps the power of the oppressor. What makes my skeptical mind doubt that a slave painted by his own volition the painting that is paraded through the streets on the day of the Lord of Miracles, is that Jesus and the two Mary's are European looking.

Even our Lady of Guadalupe with her more mexican face later morphed into a mexification of the icon of Mary brought to the Mexican people by the Catholic interlopers is almost too convenient a prop for converting a people from one faith to another. I sometimes think early Catholicism was little more than a giant marketing scheme to make the masses behave. That is until the protestant reformation created all the splintering belief systems and new dividing lines.

If god is in everyone and everywhere in everything can you believe in the superiority of any race or creed or class? If god is LOVE can you go to war? All the human measurements and conflicts seem to disappear when you measure it against an immovable and infinite divine goodness. The only thing that separates us from the love of god is when we begin to hoard that divine love is just for our own.

This unconditionally amorphus god in all things is a hard sell when you are confronted with slavery, when you are , confronted with poverty, when you are confronted illness. In times of crisis you are

either going to hold tightly to faith in a God who will deliver you or begin to question everything.

It is easy to see how religion has for centuries been the center of many conflicts. Even our Puritain founders could not hold the god of love in their hearts when confronted with the native people to this new world they wanted to inhabit. In 1676 our own Dedham Selectmen wrote a letter to the general court of Massachusetts complaining that the indigenous people refused to conform to their traditions, for example the Wampanoag and Neponset people didn't smile when passing their new white neighbors on the street and they would sometimes walk into their homes unannounced. The urge to force conformity to one way of being is an ancient and time honored tradition. The interesting thing is that the Dedham Selectman of 1676, all of whom were likely pew owners in this church and would have ascribed to a monotheistic God, did not ask the court for permission to proselytize and educate the natives, only that they should live in separate camps and not interact- meaning that the early english settlers to the Massasoit and Wampanoag lands ascribed to hethonism instead of monotheism. In other words, despite all their unflinching piety that made them leave pluralistic England- they did not feel any responsibility or love for their native neighbors.

To convert the natives in 1676, the Puritain Dedham Selectman would have done better to take a page out of the Catholic's book of conquest through Central America at that time, and that is give a native face to Jesus and Mary. Instead our founders chose separate lives, unintegrated lives, that we still see mirrored in our church going today.

Flash forward to our quest to be more inclusive and loving integrated society. If we in all our scrutiny stamp out all sight of

Jesus and Mary, if we erase any understanding of Trump or more conservative sometimes offensive to our sensibilities -ideologies, are we too drawing lines that can never be crossed? And lines in the sand- saying one way is right for everyone, or that your way is ok for you but not for me and neither the twain shall meet- is not only the origin of all conflict, it is also the direct opposite of inclusivity.

Let me try to explain this another way, if you like peanut butter and pickle sandwiches on rye bread, and I like fluffernutter sandwiches on wonder bread, and I can't even bear to eat near you because as I see it my fluffernutter sandwiches on wonder bread is the only **one right way** to eat a sandwich. If I can't even bear to talk to you because you can't even abide to have sandwiches without pickles and peanut butter and rye bread-- unless we find a third way a third sandwich we can both agree upon - we will find all kinds of ways to avoid each other.

What we need to do is is to as Channing suggested in his Baltimore sermon 200 years ago and that is not just to have tolerance for other faiths and gods and people and believe they have a piece of the truth, but also to partner with them walk with them to create the kindom of god on earth. We need to not throw the baby Jesus out with the bathwater- but listen more deeply to the truths of ancient faiths and what meaning they might have in our world today. No matter how humanist or atheist you might consider yourself to be isn't there room for you to humble yourself before a collective vision that is different than your own? Perhaps let go and trust that there is something larger at work in the world than any of us can see or completely understand? Could you love every living being as you love yourself? Could you see every face as the face of god?

This is a tall order for our iconoclast tradition and yet I think to grow, to be a unifyer instead of divider we as UU religion are going

to have to make the face of a lowercase g -god our own completely loving and forgiving immortal invisible god if we are ever going to love this world into unity amidst all its fractures.

Hymn #273 (Gray) *Immortal, Invisible*

Benediction The Rev Rali M. Weaver

Benediction Response

Let Me Find Some Quiet Place Doris Clevenger

Postlude *Postlude in F Major* J.S. Bach