

## **“For Such a Time as This”**

*“Change will come with the recognition that this fight is much larger than a policy or political battle; it is a spiritual fight for the moral center of our democracy.”*

*The Rev. Dr. William J. Barber, II*

## **The Unitarian Church of Lincoln**

**August 7, 2016**

### ***Gathering of the Community***

**Ringing of Bell**

**Welcome and Announcements**

**Prelude:** “Cool” from *West Side Story*  
by Bernstein & Sondheim

### ***Stating Intent***

**Chalice Lighting:** read with Gretchen Woods

We light this chalice to celebrate Unitarian Universalism

We are a church of open minds.

We are a church of loving hearts.

We are a church of helping hands.

Together we care for our earth

and work for justice and peace in our world.

**Opening words:** written by Sändra Washington  
read by Sändra Washington

**Hymn:** #1017 “We Are Building a New Way”

### ***Time for all ages***

**Shared Praxis:** “How Was Your Summer?”

**Children’s Song:** #1023 “Building Bridges”

### ***Deepening***

**Reading:** selections by Sändra Washington

**Musical Interlude:** “Here Comes the Hard Part”

from *Peace Becomes You*  
written and sung by Holly Near  
**Sermon:** “For Such a Time As This”  
**Offering and Offertory:** “One Heart, One Hand”  
by Bernstein and Sonheim

***Returning to Community: the work of the people***  
**Sharing of Joys and Sorrows**  
**Meditation**

***Integration and Release***

**Closing Hymn:** #1014 “Standing on the Side of Love”  
**Closing Words:** by Bernice Johnson Reagon  
**Postlude:** “Somewhere”  
by Bernstein & Sondheim

**Worship Leader:** the Rev. Dr. Gretchen Woods  
**Worship Associate:** by Sändra Washington  
**Pianist:** William Carpenter

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***Stating Intent***

**Chalice Lighting**

the Rev. Dr. Gretchen Woods

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***It is a blessing you were born. It matters what you do with your life.***

***Sometimes you are called to listen, at times you are called to teach. Sometimes you are called to give witness and act with moral conviction. Unitarian Universalists share a spirit and vision of radical inclusivity, individual agency and social justice, but in order to change the world for the better, you must first show up!***

-- Laila Ibrahim, Victoria Mitchell, Jane Ann Greeley

**Hymn: #1017 “We Are Building a New Way”**

***Time for all ages***

**Shared Praxis: “How Was Your Summer?”**

**Children’s Song: #1023 “Building Bridges”**

***Deepening***

**Reading: written by Sändra Washington**

***The news cycle that began with Ferguson, Missouri and Staten Island, New York continues to play out across the United States. It is old news. Reruns.***

***Regurgitation. The violence perpetuated on black lives and the persistent devaluing of social and economic justice is part of a repeated cycle of forward progress and reactionary backlash experienced by African Americans since the end of slavery.***

***Blacks have been in America for nearly 400 years, yet true citizenship was denied until the last 50 years. After the Emancipation Proclamation and the passage of constitutional amendments, it took 100 years for the country to pass laws – the Voting Rights Act and Civil Rights Act – to ensure basic rights of citizenship, and longer still to dismantle institutional practices and policies that perpetuate status quo racism. It seems at times that – to paraphrase Mark Twain – the report of our freedom has been greatly exaggerated. We are not yet in a post-racial America and, by the way, I do not want to live in one.***

***I don't want my country to ignore my race; I just don't want my race to be the only thing it sees. I am not ashamed, saddened or angry about the color of my skin. I am, however, angry the lives of black children, men and women are devalued. I am disgusted a false argument has been created that equates "Black Lives Matter" to "Blue Lives Do Not", as if you cannot be alarmed at violence to African Americans and simultaneously be a law-respectful and abiding citizen, and I am saddened and exhausted that so many white liberals remain silent and immobile.***

***Here in the United States, there is a desperate need for truth telling and reconciliation. As justice-seeking, loving Unitarian Universalists, we are being called...to***

***listen, to teach, to commit our hands and our bodies, to engage our hearts. Are we ready?***

**Musical Interlude:** “Here Comes the Hard Part”

From *Peace Becomes You*

written and sung by Holly Near

**Sermon:** “For Such a Time As This”

I first noticed the phrase, “For such a time as this,” when it was chosen as the title for the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the founding of Universalism on this continent in 1793 ACE. I helped lead the congregational singing with the Rev. Gene Navias and the Rev. Dr. David Johnson during the celebration at the General Assembly in 1993. I even have a t-shirt with the logo. I never checked on the source of the quote: lazy, I guess.

So, this week, I checked out its source – Hebrew scripture, specifically Esther 4:14. Here is the story as told by the Rev. Fred Hammond:

Born of lowly birth to a Jewish family, there was not much promise for her status in life. She did have one thing in her favor. She was

beautiful. The king becomes enamored by her and marries her. But the king also has an adviser who hates the Jews so much that he convinces the king to have them killed. Esther feels distressed and also helpless in this situation since she is not the esteemed first wife of the king. But her uncle, Mordecai says to her, “Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?” . . . (from a blog, *A Unitarian Universalist Minister in the South* by Rev. Fred L Hammond, MS, MDiv. Minister of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Tuscaloosa, with this remark: *the sermon I gave on September 12, 2015, at the installation service of Rev. Lynn Hopkins, minister of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Montgomery in Alabama.*

Wow! That is truly a call to action at a time of genocide: a demand to use who you are and what gifts you have to transform the ills of society where and when you are.

So, let’s look at our own times. The Yazidi are experiencing genocide at the hands of ISIS; young,

unarmed black men are being shot while unarmed in our own country's streets; police are afraid for their lives every time they leave home for work; a candidate for the presidency of this country has encouraged violence to deal with those who protest him. How do we respond to that call "for such a time as this" as Unitarian Universalists? The Rev. Hammond asks that same question:

And have we come to our royal position for such a time as this? Our faith as Unitarian Universalists for nearly 300 years has enjoyed the royal position of privilege—white privilege, white supremacy, class privilege. Our spiritual ancestors not only helped create this nation of white supremacy and privilege but some even held the highest office in the land. Some have been seen as prophets—William Ellery Channing, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Theodore Parker; even as these individuals whose legacies revolutionized Unitarian faith they did so from the framework of white supremacy and white privilege of their day. . . .

Yes, we have not been the largest denomination in this nation, but we have consistently held positions of power

and privilege, often resisting the call our values made upon us. We often feel powerless, not knowing what to do.

The Rev. Hammond plays this out:

We have hid behind our principles without living the spirit of our principles. When Black Lives Matter banners are displayed, the cry from some of our Unitarian Universalist members point to our principle of inherent worth and dignity of every person, therefore, the logic goes: all lives matter. This is a deflection because All Lives Matter is the idealized dream but Black Lives Matter is the living reality that they should, yet do not. (Let me say, parenthetically, they never have on this continent. Back to Fred:). It is a painful reminder that in our society today, we have the walking dead. These are the people who are seen in society as already dead socially so when they die physically, there is no further loss felt. How does a nation grieve the loss of someone who is already dead to society?

But it isn't just Black lives that are socially dead. The mentally ill are socially dead. The elderly are socially dead. The poor are socially dead. The disabled are socially dead. And now that our (nation) has found the slaughtering of children bearable because our (society) has placed 2<sup>nd</sup> amendment rights as more important than the lives of our children, our children are socially dead.

When the walking dead begin to resurrect and claim their voice; whites with privilege, whites with power, whites who bask in the benefits of white supremacy become nervous and uncomfortable. There is a scramble to enact laws to keep them dead. Voting ID laws, gerrymandering voting districts, laws to prevent municipalities enacting minimum wage standards, laws to limit or destroy unions, welfare reforms, all are geared towards disenfranchisement and all to keep the socially dead, dead. Don't believe me? Look where we slash our budgets on the state and federal levels? Medicaid, Mental health services, Aid to families, education services, children services, food stamps. These cuts are allowed because these people are not valued, their lives do not matter.

When we are not outraged when a mentally ill person wielding a serving spoon is shot by police because the police officer feared for his life at a distance of 24 feet; when we are not outraged when a Black person is shot and killed at a simple traffic stop; when we are not outraged when Medicaid is cut and lives are lost then we declare these people already dead in society. We do not fund the dead. The only thing left for them is to be buried.

What does our faith call us to do? It certainly does not call us to huddle in our predominant white congregational havens where we can wag our fingers and heads at those outside these

doors who shoot Black Lives with impunity. No, our faith calls us to love mercifully, to act with justice, and to walk humbly in our place in the universe. This is not a time to act all high and mighty and laud our liberal faith of acceptance yet do nothing to create substantive change.

It is a time to speak up boldly on behalf of those who have lost their voice or are having their voices constricted. It is a time to stand on the side of love not just along the side of the road in picket line formation but in the office, in the park, in the grocery store, in the daily interactions we have with everyone we meet. Our being in covenantal relationship does not end once we leave these hallowed halls. Rather it begins. It is time to be an anti-racist, anti-oppression faith, not just in the ideal pretty words on a page, but in the hard daily reality.

Fred does not hold back, which is why I find him so compelling. He is asking us to do exactly what we claim we wish to do in the UCL Mission Statement: Show UP. Holly Near asks us to do the same, even when we are tired from showing up in the past.

But Fred Hammond does not leave us in despair without reminding us of what we can do:

It comes to this. Our faith does not require that we all believe in the same God or in any God. Our faith does not require that we profess a creed of doctrines that would enable us to enter the gates of heaven. Our faith does require us to love one another as we love ourselves in the here and now. Our faith *does* (italics mine) require us to be stubbornly determined in (breathing) life into society's socially dead — because black lives matter.

That is our resurrection miracle. Lazarus, a black man, raised from the dead is now seen as crucial to the prosperity and general welfare of the entire community. To remove the blindness from the eyes of those who would oppress (so that they might) suddenly see Lazarus's inherent worth and dignity (must be viewed) as vitally connected to their own inherent worth. Lazarus's resurrection and liberation is tied into our (own) liberation and resurrection. We cannot be fully alive and liberated without the liberation of Black Lives — (and women's lives, and Native American lives, and Hispanic lives, and the planet's life. That is true understanding of the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.)

These are the times in which *we* (italics mine) are found. Do not think that because you are in a white liberal and progressive faith, that you alone of white liberals will be protected from being held accountable. For if you remain silent in the crisis facing Black Lives, relief and deliverance for

liberation will arise from another place, but this faith will be found irrelevant and will vanish from society. And who knows if you have come to this faith for such a time as this?

Only you can answer, both individually and collectively!

What can you actually do? Talk to Amy Miller about the

work of the ACLU in Nebraska; talk to Melanie about

Nebraskans Against Gun Violence; come hear Patrick

Jones of UNL speak on Black Lives Matter; listen to

NPR and find a passion that matches yours. Then,

actually put your body where your passions lie!

Become a person for “such a time as this!” Show up!

Omain, Amen, Blessed Be!

**Offering and Offertory: “One Heart, One Hand”**

By Bernstein and Sonheim

***Returning to Community: the work of the people***

***Sharing of Joys and Sorrows***

***I want to thank Bill Carpenter for so beautifully enhancing the service today with his thoughtful selections and musical talents...***

***In addition, let us broaden our welcome to include those among and beyond us who share in our larger work to build a world, a community, by celebrating and practicing our principles.***

***We have a practice of folks lighting candles before the service begins each Sunday and writing in the small book the names of people that would like remembered, or any joys or concerns they themselves might have. Today we have...***

***Let us make a place now for those of our members and friends who are unable to be here with us today...And let us welcome those parts of ourselves unseen and unattended, recognizing that each of us, each week, pass milestones telling our progress, carry millstones demanding our strength and find stepping stones revealing our way.***

***Please say out loud from where you are your name or the names of any one you wish remembered with concern of in sorrow.***

***And please say out loud from where you are your name or the names of someone with whom you wish to celebrate a milestone or a stepping stone in joy.***

**Meditation**

***Now in the sanctuary of shared silence, let us make room for all, both spoken and unspoken. (1 minute)  
Thank you for your presence.***

### ***Integration and Release***

**Closing Hymn:** #1014 “Standing on the Side of Love”

**Closing Words:** from “Ella’s Song”

By Bernice Johnson Reagon

## **Ella’s Song**

Refrain:

We who believe in freedom cannot rest

We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes

Verses

Until the killing of Black men, Black mothers’ sons

Is as important as the killing of White men, White mothers’ sons

And that which touches we most is that I had a chance to work with  
people

Passing on to others that which was passed on to me

To me young people come first, they have the courage where we fail

And if I can shed some light as they carry us through the gale

The older I get the better I know that the secret of my going on

Is when the reins are in the hand of the young who dare to run  
against the storm

Not needing to clutch for power, not needing the light just to shine on  
me

I need to be just one in the number as we stand against tyranny

Struggling myself don’t mean a whole lot I come to realize

That teaching others to stand up and fight is the only way my struggle  
survive

I’m a woman who speaks in a voice and I must be heard

At time I can be quite difficult, I’ll bow to no man’s word

**Postlude:** “Somewhere”

By Bernstein & Sondheim

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