

**Theodore Parker Church**  
**The Tension Between “Mine” and “Ours”**  
**March 28, 2021**

As we finish up our monthly theme of Commitment, we’ll think about what our tradition offers us by way of emphasis. Is there room in our individualism for a shared construct?

**OPENING WORDS**

This morning as we acknowledge the Passover holiday and its call to freedom, I offer these words from the eco-feminist, Starhawk:

We are all longing to go home to some place  
we have never been—a place half-remembered and half-envisioned  
we can only catch glimpses of from time to time.  
Community.  
Somewhere, there are people to whom we can speak with passion  
without having the words catch in our throats.  
Somewhere a circle of hands  
will open to receive us, eyes will light up as we enter,  
voices will celebrate with us whenever we come into our own power.  
Community means strength  
that joins our strength to do the work that needs to be done.  
Arms to hold us when we falter.  
A circle of healing.  
A circle of friends.  
Someplace where we can be free.

**Story for All Ages**

**On Passover**

Rose Gallogly, Coordinator of Religious Exploration

This past week, instead of sharing a children’s story, I asked Rose to read the Book of Exodus from the Hebrew Scriptures. “Like many who grew up Unitarian Universalist,” she wrote in reflection, “I’ve been taught these stories in the context of learning about Jewish and Christian observances, but I’ve never been required to use them as my holy text or source of inspiration — and, honestly, I’ve avoided reading them for many years, unsure of how to relate to them.”

She told me that she understood it as the story of how, with the help and guidance of his god, Moses led his people (the Israelites) out of the cruel slavery they were experiencing under an Egyptian Pharaoh and eventually into liberation.

“I’m still not completely sure how to relate to them and have spent much of this week in that place of not-knowing. In the original text of Exodus, I found a really complex and (for me) morally ambiguous story, filled with cruelty and violence both on the part of the Pharaoh who was enslaving the Hebrew people, and on the part of the god who eventually liberated them. A central theme in the story is that, in seeing the suffering of the Hebrew people in Egypt, G\_d remembers the covenant he made with their ancestor Abraham to bring his people to a land where they might be free. G\_d wants to fulfill that promise, but only if the Israelites remember their side of the covenant: loyalty to him as their only god and to his rules and laws. In that way, covenant becomes the source of liberation — that is, adherence to one leads to the other.”

And then she continued with her thoughts . . .

“. . . Looking at the connection between covenant and liberation in the story of Exodus has made me curious about how we might see that connection within our own understanding of covenant. What if covenant is also the source of OUR liberation — a constant reminder that the promises we make to each other are the source and anchor of our collective freedom? Covenant is a tangible reminder that we are all bound together, and that none of us is free until all of us are free. And it is in that commitment to one another that we might build a promised land here, in this time, together.”

#### **MUSIC 104** When Israel Was in Egypt’s Land

**MICHAEL:** By way of remembering the Exodus story, I want to invite us to sing the hymn originally known as “Go Down, Moses.” It is an African spiritual - transcribed in 1861. . . the song actually had multiple messages: not only the metaphorical freedom of Moses but also the physical freedom of runaway slaves,<sup>[2]</sup> and many slave holders outlawed this song because of those very messages.<sup>[3]</sup>

Harriet Tubman is believed to have said she used "Go Down Moses" as one of two code songs fugitive slaves used to communicate when fleeing Maryland.<sup>[14]</sup> Some people even suggest that she herself may have written the spiritual.<sup>[16]</sup>

When Israel was in Egypt’s land, let my people go;  
Oppressed so hard they could not stand, let my people go.  
Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt land,  
Tell old Pharaoh, to let my people go.

The Lord told Moses what to do, let my people go;  
To lead the tribe of israel through, let my people go.  
Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt land,  
Tell old Pharaoh, to let my people go.

For you the cloud shall clear the way, let my people go;  
A fire by night, a shade by day, let my people go.  
Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt land,  
Tell old Pharaoh, to let my people go.

We need not always weep and moan, let my people go;  
And wear these slav'ry chains forlorn, let my people go.  
Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt land,  
Tell old Pharaoh, to let my people go.

**MEDITATION/PRAYER**          632 Passover Remembered, edited (on freedom)

A prayer for our journeys . . .

Pack nothing. Bring only your determination to serve and your willingness to be free. Do not hesitate to leave your old ways behind - fear, silence, submission. Only surrender to the need of the time - to love justice and to walk humbly with all that is Holy. You are going into the wilderness to make a new way and to learn more deeply . . . sing songs as you go, and hold close together. You may at times grow confused and lose your way . . . reach out to each other and keep telling the stories. It is the first of many beginnings. Remain true to this mystery. Together, travel well.

**Acknowledgement: National Vietnam War Veterans Day the Rev. Anne Bancroft**

While the ancient story of Passover and freedom challenges us, more contemporary struggles for freedom also give us pause. Several dates are coming up this week, during Passover and the Christian Holy Week, that are important to take the time to remember. Tomorrow, March 29th is the National Vietnam War Veterans Day. On March 29, 1973, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, was disbanded and the last U.S. Combat troops departed the Republic of Vietnam. Over three million people were killed during the 20 years of the Vietnam War. Let us be sure we honor all of those whose lives were lost in this tragic struggle. War is a sad road to freedom.

**Acknowledgement: Trans Day of Visibility - Wednesday, March 31**

Another date to pay attention to this week is Wednesday, March 31st, when we celebrate Trans Day of Visibility, an important reminder that many among us have been made to be invisible.

Transgender is an umbrella term. In its simplest form, it describes people that have a gender identity or expression that differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. But being transgender is not just about transitioning from male to female or female to male. It is a continuum between the binary of male or female. It includes folks who identify as non-binary, third gender, and two spirit, among others. . . Although increasingly folks are presenting themselves as who they are in public, far more do not. Many people say they don't know anyone who is Transgender. They may be wrong. They may have family, neighbors and co-workers who are Transgender but who are not visible and public yet. Visibility is important. Celebration is important. Awareness is important. Education is important. To our Trans friends and family members: we see you, and we will keep seeing you.

**OFFERING     Grateful for all you give . . .**

Offering     - by Rev. Peter A. Friedrichs

From the time you walk in  
the front door of the church  
on Sunday morning, you know  
that it is coming. Even earlier,  
it occurred to you:

There will be a time, within  
the hour, when the preacher  
will pause for the commercial announcement,  
using humor or pathos or a simple plea  
to help pay for the heat, and the ushers  
will, like apparitions, appear from the back of the room  
bearing baskets, or plates, or maybe they'll actually  
pass an honest-to-God hat.

From your seat toward the back  
you'll watch the ritual unfold, and the  
inexorable approach of the invitation.  
Some will frantically scratch out checks,  
seemingly shocked at the suddenness  
of the basket's arrival. Others will  
quietly place pocket change against the bottom,  
turning their heads toward the windows,  
guiding neighbors' eyes to follow,  
creating a momentary misdirection  
from their self-perceived poverty.  
Reaching for your wallet you find

two ones, a five, and – unexpected –  
a twenty, and you're confronted  
with the calculus of your own generosity.  
How much is enough? What can I afford?  
How will I pay for brunch? Could these  
wrinkled bills possibly be the currency  
of my redemption?  
With just a row to go now, you wonder:  
How might my life be changed if I  
had the courage to hand it all over?  
Not just the cash, but my credit cards, too.  
And the PIN to my 401(k), and the keys  
to my house and my car?  
Each day, the sun rises like an usher  
and approaches with the collection plate,  
asking what our offering will be.

**OFFERTORY 402 From You I Receive (@ 3'30")**

**make slides**

## **HOMILY**

I love that song – the idea that the life we are living is shared. It is especially poignant after this past week or more. It has been so very beautiful in our part of the world – these amazing early spring gifts of warmth and bird music and small things emerging like witch hazel and crocuses and daffodils and the early shoots that will become crowds of day lilies to stretch their colors skyward.

AND it has been a tragic time. We grieve for the lives lost in two more mass shootings; and in ongoing covid deaths. We despair of the hate that places blame on Asian lives, and the disassembled systems that leave hundreds of immigrant children waiting to find a place of welcome. And, not least, we want our Laura to be well.

We are all longing, Starhawk reminded us, for the place half-remembered; a circle of hands open to receive us, eyes that light up as we enter, arms to hold us when we falter; a circle of healing . . .

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Years ago, in one of the countless meetings with the leadership of the Coming of Age program I was in charge of, the conversation turned to our fundamental mission. What was it we were trying to make sure our young people learned during their year of adolescent exploration? Was it Unitarian Universalist identity? Was it a sense of calling to create justice in the world? I remember saying that at the end of the day, we wanted them to know something as simple as this: there is self, and there is other-than-self, and our job as humans is to negotiate the priorities between those two. There are my needs, my hopes, my longings; and there are the needs and hopes and longings of everything and everyone else, some who I love dearly, most of whom I have never met. How we each discern which needs to prioritize at any given time, on any given day, is our lifelong task.

I am sobered by the thoughts of theologian, Frederich von Hugel, "The deeper we get into reality, the more numerous will be the questions we cannot answer." (Frederich von Hügel, Letters to Niece) And thus, the fundamental: me and mine? Or ours?

Remember George Harrison? (I, Me, Mine)

At the time of this conversation, probably somewhere in the late 90's, Unitarian Universalism was still steeped in the culture of individual journey. Sadly, many people translated that to the simplistic qualifier, "you can believe whatever you want!"

That particular descriptor of our free faith shortchanges us in several ways: first, it under-represents our responsibility to appreciate that it is exactly that freedom that requires us to attend to the journey. I have often mentioned that it is wonderful to come in and find a home that does not demand a belief. We find a pew, or a Zoom box, and exhale. But freedom, like our Israelites discovered, is just the beginning. We have years of travel before the promised land, right?

Henry Nelson Wieman was a 20th century Unitarian theologian who maintained that "all life consists in a patient struggle with irreconcilables: a progressive unifying of parts that will never fit perfectly." Once we find this gift of freedom, our task is to keep working that puzzle.

The "you can believe whatever you want" comment also shortchanges a vital and vibrant history of theological grappling from both Unitarians AND Universalists. Indeed, we cannot believe - in such an offhand fashion - "whatever we want." We are called to a more thoughtful and nuanced journey. And, as we have matured in our collective identity, we are more aware that the journey is as much about all of us as it is about any one of us. In fact, we are beginning

to understand that our collective journey stretches beyond the boundaries of our congregations, as well, to all of those we live with and among.

Our theology of liberation, of freedom, hinges on what Rose made clear earlier, that our “Covenant is a tangible reminder that we are all bound together, and that none of us is free until all of us are free.”

Free of what, you might ask? Free of our assumptions that any one of us, or any set of us, has or should have the market on wisdom, or authority, or fixed truth, or power: free of the hubris that allows us to live in blindness to needs beyond our own; free of judgement; free of fear that somehow we are not enough; free of all those things that constrain our hearts and hold us back from that half-remembered, half-envisioned place called community, beloved community.

Each day, the sun rises like an usher  
and approaches with the collection plate,  
asking what our offering will be.

Let’s sing it together – We would be one.

**CLOSING HYMN 318 We Would Be One**

**gallery mode!**

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.

We would be one in building for tomorrow  
A nobler world than we have known today.  
We would be one in searching o that meaning  
Which binds 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**

The peace which passeth understanding,

The peace of the Eternal,  
which the world can neither give nor take away,  
be among us, and abide in our hearts.