

ASUUC Sermon: There's a Revolution Outside, by Roger Butts

A word of welcome. Roger

This is a different kind of service. We wanted to get back in the building. I'm joined by Stephen Thompson, a substitute today for Sharon. We are going to experiment with words and silence and music. It may not be perfect. It is intended to make no argument. Rather, we are here to do what the church can do in times such as this, get in touch with the deepest parts of our heart space and observe and feel what is there, sit with the discomfort, and listen, deeply.

And, we are responding to the imperative of the UUA report Widening the Circle of Concern, best we can right now.

We are called in that report to support and center voices from the margins. We are called to lift up the voices of those bipoc folks who are calling us to new ways of being.

That is what we are doing today. The voices will come from Tracy K Smith's remarkable book of letters—poems, essays, prayers—called There's a Revolution Outside, My Love. A book that collects writings from BIPOC writers on Covid 19 and the Black Lives Matter movement and all the violence and hope and love and so on that emerges from that movement.

I will read a few passages; Stephen will play some music in response.

What caught my attention in Widening the Circle of Concern is this statement: Theologians among us must articulate what a liberation theology would look like for Unitarian Universalists. This service, designed to touch your heart and move you, and center the voices—just a few—from this book of essays and poems, is my first little step into that pool.

A word about liberation theology. James Cone says that liberation is not an adjective describing theology, liberation is a synonym for theology. Liberation is the essence of theology. And what liberation theology do, how does it function? Simply this: it calls us to stand against those forces which serve the status quo and that dehumanize anyone—racism, misogyny, homophobia, xenophobia. And it calls us to lift up a vision of freedom and flourishing for all.

James Cone, author of Black Theology and The Cross and the Lynching Tree, the father of black liberation theology, writes this: I firmly believe that the issues to which theology addresses itself to should be those that emerge out of life in society as persons seek to achieve meaning in a dehumanized world. That is where we find ourselves as Unitarian Universalist—standing with those persons seeking to achieve meaning in a dehumanized world. That is what we can do. And this is a first small effort in that direction.

Thank you for being here this morning.

RING THE BELL

SILENCE

Prelude. A bit on Lift Every Voice. Stephen

Chalice Lighting Roger

A. Powell Davies

Let me tell you why I come to church. I come to church—and would whether I was a preacher or not—because I fall below my own standards and need to be constantly brought back to them. I am afraid of becoming selfish and indulgent, and my church—my church of the free spirit—brings me back to what I want to be. I could easily despair; doubt and dismay could overwhelm me. My church renews my courage and my hope. It is not enough that I should think about the world and its problems at the level of a newspaper report or magazine discussion. It could too soon become too low a level. I must have my conscience sharpened—sharpened until it goads me to the most thorough and responsible thinking of which I am capable. I must feel again the love I owe to others. I must not only hear about it but feel it. In church, I do. I am brought toward my best, in every way toward my best.

Opening Hymn. Enter Rejoice and Come In

Meditation/Naming

I hope that in this year to come, you make mistakes. Because if you are making mistakes, then you are making new things, trying new things, learning, living, pushing yourself, changing yourself, changing your world. You're doing things you've never done before, and more importantly, you're Doing Something. So that's my wish for you, and all of us, and my wish for myself. Make New Mistakes. Make glorious, amazing mistakes. Make mistakes nobody's ever made before. Don't freeze, don't stop, don't worry that it isn't good enough, or it isn't perfect, whatever it is: art, or love, or work or family or life. Whatever it is you're scared of doing, Do it.

Make your mistakes, next year and forever. Neil Gaiman

We pause now and bring to mind those who have walked with us, taught us, inspired us, and we make space for the speaking of those we remember this hour.

--Silence

SERMON roger and Stephen, improv and call and response

Reading 1. p. 36-In the immediate aftermath of George Floyd's murder...to p. 37: the hard part begins the day you return to your normal routines.

Michael Kleber-Diggs says this:

As the more obvious aspects of the uprising tapered off, white nationalists in menacing trucks quit zooming around town without license plates and stopped causing mayhem every night. When I survey the sky around me, I don't see towers of smoke, I see something resembling the way things were. In the immediate aftermath of George Floyd's murder, when we were still shocked by his slow assassination, when we were stunned to see 8 minutes and 46 seconds of inhumanity dispatched with nonchalance—friends checked on me to ask how I was doing. Some check-ins were friends who already know the multiple ways state murders affect Black survivors, the ways in which sadness, anger, disappointment, frustration, worry, fear, past trauma, and fatigue affect our bodies and spirits. Other check ins were friends becoming more aware of racism and its daily wage. Some wanted to know my family was safe from far-right instigators.

Sometimes, Michael Kleber-Diggs, writes: Sometimes, I spoke the general truth: "I feel all the feels all the time, in various ways and amounts." Sometimes I offered the kindest lie: "I'm fine." And in many

ways, I was. Being Black in an Anti-Black country is like being handed a stone at birth, an object you have to carry and can never throw. It's manageable but wearying; it gets heavier the longer you hold it. You know you can't put it down, so you try to get used to it. From time to time, when people notice the stone, when they remember your burden, when it occurs to them that hauling a stone all the time might weigh a person down, when they recognize how unfair it is, you can almost feel seen or validated.

I didn't say what I wanted to say. I held back the whole truth.

Often when I do this, I wonder if I can love my white friends without being candid with them. I wonder if they can love me if I hold them at a distance, if race and racism function as a veneer, a layer between us obscuring any substance underneath. When I don't answer fully, am I not saying I don't trust you to do anything about it?

What I wanted to say and didn't say was this: "I'm fine today; the hard part will begin soon. The hard part for me starts when things get comfortable for you again. The hard part begins the day you return to your normal routines."

Music 1 Motherless Child

SILENCE

Reading 2 Su Hwang.

White supremacy and white complacency can't hide anymore. There is no longer the cloak of ignorance to reason away truth. Cameras are rolling. Every marginalized human is exhausted and fucking pissed. The global pandemic has disproportionately affected Black and brown communities but this virus has proven to be the great equalizer in many respects, showing 99 percent of us that we are not immune from the evils of capitalism or the ineptitude of those who are supposed to protect and serve the people.

George Floyd was a transplant like me, Su Hwang writes. I'll be forty-six years old later this year. George was known as Perry or Big Floyd by his loved ones; some dear friends call me Su Bear. Like me, he was a libra with a taurus moon, and made his way from House for better opportunities and started to put down some roots in Minnesota. He was working two jobs while building his community when the pandemic hit. He worked security at a restaurant. I've worked in hospitality for over a decade. We could have been coworkers, perhaps even friends. George Floyd was murdered a mile up from where I live on Chicago Avenue at the intersection I drive past every damn day. And just like any other Minnesotan, George Floyd had the right to complain about the weather and bad drivers who can't merge for shit, eat cheese curds dripped in chocolate at the Minnesota State Fair, get photographed holding a humongous fish.

There's a lot more to say, but my thoughts are in shared. My heart is broken.

Music 2. Do you hear the people sing?

SILENCE

Closing reading.

We'll return to Michael Kleber-Diggs and his essay *On the Complex Flavors of Black Joy*. It is an essay about Big Boi's song *Chocolate* saving his life.

He ends his essay with this:

In spite of everything we're still on our feet. More than anything, one line in *Chocolate* stood out for me. It is a line connected to a life preserver that arrived when I felt I couldn't tread water much longer, when I was tired and felt alone, like there was no safe harbor in sight. It wasn't that I wanted to let go and sink. It was that it was hard to keep my head above water and carry my stone at the same time. I wanted to rest. Okay? I wanted to float just for a while. There's the line that says this song is just for you, Michael. All my songs are for you and for us—people born into it and people who opt in. The line always arrived right on time. Whenever Big Boi said:

Making music for the people that be feeling me...

My pulse rate elevated. My heart beat hard, vibrant and alive. We are vibrant and alive. See? He said: Making music for the people that be feeling me.

And I had the same thought every time: "*Chocolate*" is a club song and I am in the club.

*Chocolate* is pro joy, even though our club is bitter sweet. We dance anyway.

"We deserve pleasure." I say it out loud.

I can bring the club wherever I go. We can spark a revolution just by walking down the street.

The club is a place where I belong.

I'm never alone, I realized. The club is with me wherever I go.

Music 3: Welcome Table.

Joys and Sorrows. Roger will do some centering bells.

Offering:

This haven, this refuge, this place of worship and wonder exists because we make it so, with our contributions: the gifts of our time, our skills, our food, our love, our laughter, and our money.

Please join me in giving, so that we may continue to have a place that fortifies and challenges us in these trying and troubled times

Offering Music: Lift Every Voice...

Benediction

If it is God you seek, may God walk with you.

If it is life you embrace, may life return your affection.

If it is the right path you seek, may the way be found and the courage to take it step by step.

Postlude Music: Beautiful city