

Olympia Unitarian Universalist Congregation

“Emergence” May 3, 2020

Rev. Mary Gear

Opening words:

“Thresholds” By Arlen Goff, adapted

Thresholds.

We cross them every day.

From room to room,

from outside to inside,

and back again,

from here to there,

from anywhere to everywhere...

Each threshold offers an opportunity

for change, for renewal, for transformation,

from what we were and what we are

to what we can be.

In this hour and in this space,

we cross a threshold from

our day-to-day everydayness into

space and time attuned to the other,

to the sacred, to the holy,

into an awareness of new life

pregnant with possibilities.

How will we be renewed in this moment?

How will we be changed by this hour?

How will we be transformed through this
gathering of beloved community?

Come, you longing, thirsty souls!

Come, let us worship together!

Reading:

Our reading for today is from the book Emergent Strategy by adrienne marie brown:

Emergence is one of the best concepts I have learned for discussing this wow, this wonder. *“Emergence is the way complex systems and patterns arise out of a multiplicity of relatively simple interactions.”*

It is another way of speaking about the connective tissue of all that exists--the way, the Tao, the force, change, God/Goddess, life. Birds flocking, cells splitting, fungi whispering underground.

Emergence emphasizes critical connections over critical mass, building authentic relationships, listening with all the senses of the body and the mind.

With our human gift of reasoning, we have tried to control or overcome the emergent processes that are our own nature, the processes of the planet we live on, and the universe we call home. The result is a crisis at each scale we are aware of, from our deepest inner moral sensibilities to the collective scale of climate and planetary health and beyond, to our species in reaction to space and time.

The crisis is everywhere, massive, massive, massive.

And, we are small.

But emergence notices the way small actions and connections create complex systems, patterns that become ecosystems and societies. Emergence is our inheritance as part of the universe; it is how we change. Emergent strategy is how we intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated world we long for.

Homily and Ritual

January 21: a traveler coming through Sea-Tac airport was the first known case of a new virus in the US. February 29: a man died of the new virus in a care facility in Kirkland, Washington and Gov. Inslee declared a State of Emergency. Within just a few days, 10 more people died. It's been almost 40 days since we entered into a time of sheltering in place.

On Friday, we learned that we have a few more weeks to go before we can begin to safely move out of our shelters. I want to acknowledge that so many people don't have a place of shelter and for some, their home is not a safe place. We've been in the complexity of liminal space and time for a while, and for what sometimes feels like years.

I am extremely grateful for the leadership of Gov. Inslee and the many public health officials in the state who have made the best decision that they could with the limited information we've had. I have immense respect for them. I have counted on their guidance and leadership as we have made decisions about OUUC and I know we will continue to do so into the future.

Several weeks ago, I spoke about the in between, liminal space and time, when we've left behind what was and aren't really sure yet what will be. I described this as a time that is both a beginning and an ending, as we say goodbye to what was and look to what may be. The in between is a time of letting go and loss. It is also a time of possibility and growth.

The liminal time of a transition often ends with a ritual or ceremony. We mark the passage from childhood to adulthood with graduation or a first car or first apartment. We mark the transition from being single to being married with a wedding or commitment ceremony. We mark the transition from life to death with a funeral or memorial. There is a threshold that is crossed marking the end of transition.

Last year we crossed a threshold together. OUUC had been in ministerial transition for several years and was in the search process for a settled minister. I was completing my contract at First Unitarian-Portland and was seeking a settlement. Almost a year ago, on May 5, this congregation crossed a threshold in the congregational meeting where you voted to call me as your minister. I crossed a threshold when I accepted your call. We stepped across a threshold together to begin the transition to shared ministry.

Welcome to our spiritual theme for the month of May: Thresholds.

As Arlen Goff wrote in our opening reading, we cross thresholds every day, and each threshold offers an opportunity for change, for renewal, for transformation, from what we were and what we are to what we can be.

We are now at a threshold, waiting to re-emerge from where we are sheltered. We are standing in our doorways, quite literally thresholds, preparing to enter the world of physical and social contact once again. When we move out of our shelters into the world, it won't be the same world that we left, and chances are we won't be the same people. No one goes through liminal time unchanged. And, we will need to learn all over again how to be together in this new world.

Before we move across that threshold, I invite us to take a moment to reflect on what we have left behind. Many sweet and beautiful moments have happened in this liminal time. And, there is much that has ended, that we have let go of, that we are mourning.

At this point, almost 65,000 people have died from the virus just in the US, more than 240,000 deaths world-wide. Those numbers are so big, they can be abstract and hard to take in. Some of us in this community have lost loved ones and are supporting friends and neighbors who have lost loved ones. In the

OUUC community, we experienced the death of Rob Radford right before the pandemic hit here, and we have mourned not only his death, but the opportunity to celebrate his life together. Multiply that loss by thousands.

Over 30 million people have applied for unemployment in the US. So many people have lost jobs, benefits and livelihood.

We've lost people, jobs, and our routines, our sense of the usual. We've lost the life we thought we'd have these past months, complete with weddings and graduations, and just normal life. Our way of being has been challenged. As someone who plans ahead, this time of uncertainty has been a regular reminder that there is so much that I have no control over. I am letting go of the illusion of knowing.

I can name many things that we are mourning in the OUUC community: being together in the sanctuary on Sunday morning; this is our 8th online service together. Many of us miss sharing coffee and snacks in the Commons. We have an Our Whole Lives class that is 2/3rds done and a Coming of Age group of young people waiting for a camping retreat to cross this important threshold. We won't have the in-person auction dinner that has been a tradition at OUUC for years.

So many losses, so much that we leave behind.

So, I invite you now into a time of reflection. Settle in. Let's take a breath together. Close your eyes if you wish. Imagine that you are in a doorway, a threshold. Now turn and look behind you.

What has ended?

What have you let go of?

What are you mourning?

Bring your losses into your awareness and then bring them into this space in some way.

As I light this candle for our losses, consider saying your losses out loud wherever you are. You may also share them in the chat box.

Take a moment. We'll hold a time of silence together, then a musical meditation.

(Light candle, silence then music for transition)

We send love and care to the families, friends and communities of those who have died. May they enjoy sweet memories. We send love and care to ourselves and to each other for all that we lament, all that we leave behind. May we find peace.

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With our grief and lamentation, here we are, poised in our thresholds, waiting to re-emerge.

adrienne marie brown tells us that emergence is the way small actions and connections create complex systems, patterns that become ecosystems and societies. We might feel small, but over these past days and weeks, we have each made decisions about how to be that have impacted us and our communities. Some of us have had hard choices to make about our responsibilities, our livelihoods and our health. We've wrestled with questions such as: Do we stay home? Do we go out and when? How do we interact when we do go out? How do we stay connected to others that we care about?

In the days to come, as we emerge from our shelter, we will have more decisions to make: When do we go out and where? Do we wear a face mask? Do we stay separate from people? Do we avoid groups? How big? Each decision is ours and it may seem small, but the impact can be huge, and our culture will change. Six months ago we would have thought it unusual or even frightening to see someone in the grocery store wearing a medical mask, let alone a cloth one or bandana. Now it is expected and normal.

This is how we change-one small action connects to another and another. Our actions connect with the actions of others, and others, and others. Each action we take, however small, is connected to all of our other actions and the actions of other people. It's the interdependent web. If we had any doubt before, how

could we doubt it now that we are connected to others all over the world? We live and thrive together, or not.

So, as we emerge, we have a choice. We can rush to return to the way things were or we can act in a way that grows our capacity to embody a just and liberated world, as Brown says. We can put this liminal time behind us and forge ahead, or we can learn the lessons we are being offered and make meaning from this experience. We can spin this time as one of division, greed and grasping for power, or a time of collective growth and building bridges.

We can't decide for everyone. We decide for ourselves. We don't control everything. We control our actions and reactions. We decide how we emerge, and that will shape the world we emerge into.

So now, I invite you to return to a time of reflection. Settle in. Let's take another breath together. Close your eyes if you wish. Imagine once again that you are in your doorway, a threshold.

What will you bring with you as you move across that threshold?

What tangible objects? What experiences, what ideas, what lessons?

As I light this candle for what we will carry with us, consider saying out loud wherever you are, what you will bring with you across your threshold. You may also share them in the chat box.

We'll hold a time of silence together, then a musical meditation.

(Light candle, silence then music for transition)

Spirit of Life and Love,

Be with us as we are poised, waiting to re-emerge.

May we honor the losses.

May we honor the lessons.

May we emerge with grace.

May we embody a just and liberating world for all.

May this be so. Blessed Be and Amen.