

*Beyond A Month***A Message for All Faiths Unitarian Congregation****By The Rev. CJ McGregor****Delivered on February 6, 2022**

This is Black History Month and we will be considering Black Leadership in our messages this month. It's Black History Month and I pose the question...When is Black Future Month? When will Black History, and All of our diverse peoples Histories, be such a part of us, of our culture, of the fabric of our society, that we know and value each other as equals, as citizens, as people who HAVE a future, to work on together. This is the question asked by author of Science Fiction, or Speculative Fiction, N K Jemisin... she titled a book of short stories with this question...When is Black Future Month...And it struck me as a great question... one that she answers it with a number of short stories where black women are seen as central, as full and flawed, desirable and interesting people...In, of course odd but interesting situations..

But of course, that is the purpose of speculative fiction... to project what life would be like if society, the culture, were different from today... evolved into something else because of things...Like the warping of time and space or Artificial intelligence takes over, something odd is going on in the stories, as my wife would say, space ships and aliens... so we know the stories are not real... Or are they?

So the question, When is Black Future Month? Is still open...How do we get to there from here...When will the future be equitable, inclusive, and full of worth and dignity for all people? Full of our UU Principles in real life action? I suggest it begins with the more realistic, more difficult to accomplish goals from our reading, the op-ed by Stacey Abrams in the Washington Post...

Now, we are a religious community, and we also are a diverse community, with the potential to have people who are democrats, independents, and republicans within our ranks...And I am aware that Stacey's article was written to move Democrats to action, but the values espoused, and the actions proposed have Unitarian Universalist Principles written all over them...She speaks to "Meaningful progress on health care, racial justice and the economy... " requiring aggressive action on voting rights, partisan gerrymandering and campaign finance. Stacey promotes rebuilding and expanding our democratic rights to vote, giving all of our citizens a voice in their government...She outlines three specific bills to move equality forward...

The For the People Act to protect and expand voting rights, fight gerrymandering and reduce the influence of money in politics; The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act to restore the full protections of the 1965 Voting Rights Act;

And the Protecting Our Democracy Act to constrain the corruption of future presidents who deem themselves above the law. To some these might seem to be political issues...

But I submit that to Unitarian Universalists these are acts that Affirm and Promote our Principle of Democracy...They are good spiritually, affirming the worth and dignity for all..

And good for the community, or religiously, because that is what religion is about...

How we agree to be in relationship to each other...

We use our Principles to guide this,

And each of us has our sources to make it so... our motivations if you will...

But There is one thing that I'd like to change in our Principles though,

And that is to get them to be less wishy washy...

Less about advertising, and more about intent and action...

More in tune with our Story for all ages... Activist Baby!

Who, even as a well, baby, did the things needed to promote a future of freedom.

and not just their own future, but the future of all kinds of people who would want to live together, no matter their differences!

Because we are better off with all kinds of voices, of thinking, of believing, of sciencing informing our collective lives...

Sounds like UU... believing in change towards equity and justice.

And this is where I would bring the proposed 8th principle to our attention...

Let me remind you of its words crafted by members of Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism and presented for consideration at our last General Assembly...

“We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote: journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions.”

Building a diverse, multicultural Beloved Community by Accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions...

This proposed principle is not wishy washy... it is directly charges us to have a goal of a Beloved multicultural Community by actively changing who we, and The Fellowship are.

And yes, the greatest argument against it being a principle is well isn't this implicit in our First Principle?

Affirm and promote the Inherent Worth and Dignity of every Person?

And aren't the following Principles just outlining actions to obtain the First?

Even the last Principle, respect for the interdependent web of all existence,
Doesn't it have care for ourselves built into its intent?

As a colleague and I discussed this 8th principle, and all the others, it struck me that Our principles need this directive, this clarification of actively dismantling racism and oppressions to jar us loose from the golden rule problem...

The golden rule is easy to make into a poster, and hang on a wall...

Everyone can agree with it, but it can only shake up the world if its meaning is in the actions, the words and works, of people who are compelled by it.

We affirm and promote the worth and dignity of every person

But dammit, when do we actively dismantle the structures that keep our neighborhoods redlined, our voting gerrymandered, our diversity hidden by white supremest policies?

When do we actively question our own Fellowships actions, structures and ways of doing things that go back to the fifties? When will not just a few in book clubs, but all of us, challenge ourselves to make a difference in how we bring up our children, How we govern, how we greet, and how we but change our own attitudes and beliefs?

When is Black Future Month? And Brown Future Month, and Indegenous Future Month? LGBTQ Future Month? When is the Working Poors Future Month?

When will white rich folks Future month, which happens every month, be dismantled, and rebuilt into All of Our Futures Month...

I think it begins with us, we have the Principles as foundations to build new Principles, ones with bite and sass, that tear at the fabric of society to bring down what is wrong, and build up what is right.

“We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote:

Journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions.”

Let’s find and build the programs, the will, the infrastructure in this fellowship to build a Beloved Community, here and in Fayetteville, and in Arkansas...

The UUA even has a curriculum to do so... and it has a new principle that leads the way...

Can we find it in our hearts and minds to take Unitarian Universalism into change? Into a Future, where it is Black, brown, immigrant, lgbtq, and white Future Month?

I know there are strong hearts, and brilliant minds in this religious community, May its spirit be strong to step into a new future,

So may it be,

We close with a hymn that has given white folks discomfort for many, many years, discomfort because it contains the underlying suffering and history of Black people in slavery, suffering that few European Americans can claim, except in shame.

I believe the proposal to make “Lift Every Voice and Sing” our national hymn is the right one, because this is the time for our histories to come together, to realize that all of us are still held in the grip of the racism born of slavery. That this is a hymn of binding together all of our histories, and all of our aspirations.

That it is time to declare our 8th principle as a manifestation of the first whose time has come... and maybe it is time to rewrite our principles not to be so much Golden Rules to hang on a wall and spout when asked, but rules that cannot be ignored for our collective road to equity, justice, and freedom for all of us... not just some.

Let us sing, zoom muted so we can hear our song leaders Renee and Jori, but sing it with them in your home or car or wherever you are, sing, "lift every voice and sing" and feel the words in your heart... in your bones, to move your feet in a march towards a God of Love, of Freedom, of Justice