

Homily: “Doorways,”

Rev. Lyn Cox

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The White Supremacy Teach-In, as I said earlier, was suggested by a nationwide team of UU religious professionals of color, a team that volunteered their time to create a rich collection of materials to help guide congregations in this exploration.

The teach-in is a time to inspire us to do better than we have in the past, to live into the vision of a faith movement that is geared up to dismantle racism at every level; to welcome and celebrate all of our members, children, youth, volunteers, and leaders; and to live into a future as a vibrant, multicultural, multiracial, liberating religious body.

Fearless self-examination of the impact of systemic racism on our own hearts and our most beloved communities is a personal and collective responsibility, and will lead to personal and collective deepening of our sense of meaning and purpose in the world. Unlearning and undoing racism is part of what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist.

The words “white supremacy” may be unsettling. These words are meant to get our attention. While I don’t believe anyone in this room is a white supremacist, our societal system that benefits people with white skin at the expense and to the harm of everyone else infects customs, laws, culture, manners, and assumptions that we come into contact with every day. White supremacy is part of the water we are swimming in. We need to develop stronger filters and better swimming skills to begin to undo the damage in our own minds and hearts, and then keep swimming as we clean up the ecosystems of our congregations and other beloved communities.

This homily is named, “Doorways,” because I believe Unitarian Universalism is on the threshold of an opportunity that we will not be given again in my lifetime. We have been given glimpses of what our life together might be through that door, through the gateways of self-examination, mutual accountability, institutional change, joyful community building, and unstoppable love.

In the title, I was also thinking of Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed's book, "Darkening the Doorways: Black Trailblazers and Missed Opportunities in Unitarian Universalism." Morrison-Reed lifts up Black Unitarian Universalists of the past, people like David Eaton and Joseph Jordan, namesakes of classrooms at Market Street, who offered profound gifts of mission and ministry and were prevented by their white siblings in faith from letting those ministries come to their full fruition. These obstructions were choices. We do not have to make the same choices again. By reviewing the past, he reveals the possibility of a different future. Morrison-Reed writes in the introduction, "The premise that liberal religion has not and cannot attract African Americans is false."

Morrison-Reed has written a number of other books. In "The Selma Awakening," he suggests that when Unitarian Universalism engaged positively with the civil rights movement of the 1950s and the 1960s, it was because people were called through personal relationships to join a movement of risk and sacrifice. We misunderstood our motivation as being about ideas, or about a sense of right and wrong. Those were important, too, but actually being in relationship across lines of race and class is what moved people to sustained action.

It is time for Unitarian Universalism to face that doorway. We will be strong in our commitment at the level of our Association, examining our bylaws and hiring practices as a denomination. We will be strong in our commitment at the level of our congregations, examining our assumptions about membership, worship, lifespan religious exploration, and all of our ways of being and doing ministry together. We will be strong at the level of our own hearts, minds, and souls, making spiritual practices of healing, resilience, re-covenanting, mutual accountability, and other ways forward on the journey.

I am excited about what we can do together. I look forward to a time when all of my beloved friends and neighbors and family who are Unitarian Universalists or who could be Unitarian Universalists can thrive and be fed and find their unique calling in this faith, free from micro-aggressions and systemic barriers that we have borrowed from a racist society. I can't wait to help build congregations that are abundant with a culture of

appreciation, forgiveness, truth-telling, and reconciliation. Just imagine the expressions of Unitarian Universalism that will manifest when we allow our communities to change and grow in response to the gifts among us.

We will face this challenge as a movement, and it will be hard, and it will take time. This congregation has witnessed first hand how difficult it is to build bridges, to handle conflict with love and in covenant, to put aside notions of self-righteousness and all-or-nothing in favor of the slow work of relationship repair and collective liberation. That you have encountered setbacks in your vision of a community that transcends the usual barriers of race, class, and geography is not surprising. Things worth doing are rarely easy. The road ahead is steep and rugged, and you are a congregation that can carry each other forward. Builders must be strong. There will be mistakes and hurt feelings. Let's call each other back to the path, with humility and grace. If I stumble, will you help me?

Let us have courage, my siblings. Let us have the courage to examine the customs, manners, and governance of this congregation, aiming to uproot white supremacy. Let us have the open minds and open hearts to continue to learn about systemic racism in Religious Exploration for adults as well as children and youth. Let us boldly experiment in worship, seeking to create sacred times and places where we are willing to risk discomfort so that all might be spiritually nourished. Let us envision a vibrant, thriving congregation of the future, one that centers the needs and leadership of those who know something about resilience in a challenging world.

Here is your homework: Dream big. What will it be like when we have turned the world around? What will our city, our neighborhoods, our congregation, our homes be like when we have uprooted white supremacy and other forms of oppression? What will it be like when we unfailingly show up for each other and all of our neighbors? What will the signs be that we are moving closer to that day? What is one thing you will do to move us closer?

At the core, the source of our values and the source of our commitment is the same: Love. We will travel together because of love. Those of us who are white will do the

work of unlearning and uprooting white supremacy because racism is hurting people we love. We will embrace spiritual growth because we are more committed to love than we are to the status quo. We will continue our religious witness for civil rights because, to quote Cornel West, justice is what love looks like in public. We will have hope and joy in the struggle because love is already winning.

So be it. Blessed be. Amen.