Note from Rev. Scott – any sermon I preach has a few changes from the text – so, this is a rough approximation of what I prepared for Sunday, February 18. You'll find notes along the way of things that were cut for time.

If you look at the translation of the gift of music, in your Order of Service, you'll see these words, "Armed with strength and courage, dispel all fear."

Courage is critical. The Rev. Marisol Caballero offers this writing, "Courage Requires Vulnerability":

> "Though we tremble before uncertain futures, may we meet illness, death, and adversity with strength. May we dance in the face of our fears," writes trailblazer Gloria Anzaldua, who knew a thing or two about courage.
>
> Courage requires both vulnerability and careful strategy.
>
> Courage does not require perfection from us, or air-tight plans, or even expertise. I'll tell you what courage does require: Courage requires taking great risks while stepping into the unknown.
>
> It takes no courage to listen when needed.
>
> Courage does not ask us to stop trembling; it asks us to find ways to incorporate our trembles into our dance.
>
> Courage is the generations and generations of ancestors who taught us to actively pursue joy, laughter, and celebration alongside outrage, grief, and fatigue.

(italicized text wasn't included for time):

> *The goddess Tonanztin, madre de los Méxicos, bringer of corn, nuestra morenita, teaches that we can make for ourselves a place of comfort and leave room for wonder, even when our home has been invaded and has become nearly unrecognizable.*
>
> *Courage is being firm in saying, "I know exactly where home is and what it looks like. I will figure out any way to get there, with the help of good friends. We will dance the whole way there, through the terrifying unknown. I will brave the rough waters knowing that my boat may be small but it is strong. I will leave a trail of beauty in my wake, so that other courageous seekers who follow will not be lonely on their journeys."*

There is so much to say. Which is why I ask us to pause for a moment to consider the role of race in our lives. Perhaps that's not something that you do often, perhaps it's something you do every hour of every day.

From Theodore Parker to Martin Luther King, even to President Barack Obama, we are reminded that "The arc of the universe is long – but it bends towards justice." Oh, how it is long these days – but it does bend toward justice.

This morning I want to share a couple of personal stories of people of color who are Unitarian Universalist – as I mentioned earlier, it is important to intentionally lift up the words of People of Color throughout this sermon, while at the same time not appropriating their words. It is both important for people in my position and identities to amplify the voices that are not heard as often, and for us to find ways to be quiet – I recognize the irony of preaching right now.

So often we talk about race and racism, oppression, bigotry as it relates to classes of people or systems and institutions. Clearly this is important; and yet, it has an everyday impact on individuals, on each and every one of us.

(italicized text wasn't included for time):

HEALING By Adam Lawrence Dyer

> Don't speak to me of "healing" racism,
> or "wounded souls" or the "painful hurt"
> until you are willing to feel the scars
> on my great-great-grandmother Laury's back.
>
> Don't speak to me of "values"
> or "justice" or "righting wrongs"
> until you are able to feel the heartache
> of my great-grandfather Graham
> whose father may have been his master.
>
> Don't speak to me of "equity"
> or "opportunity" or the "common good"
> until you are able to hear the fear
> from my grandmother Mae
> as the only black woman in her college.
>
> *Don't speak to me of "passion"*
> *or "longing" or "standing on the side of love"*
> *until you know the shame*
> *felt by my mother Edwina*
> *mocked by teachers for the curve of her back.*

Don't speak to me of "together"
or "understanding" or "empathy"
until you know my rage
as a young actor hearing the direction
to "be more black . . . more male."

The pain you are trying to heal has no real name.
This "pain" you speak of has no story;
it is anonymous, vague, and empty.

Don't speak to me of "healing"
for I heal the second I am ripped apart.
My wounds self-suture,
and like the clever creature I am,
I just grow new legs to outrun the pain ever faster.
It is something I have had to practice for generations,
that feel like an eternity.

So, please don't speak to me of "healing"
because you cannot know what healing means
until you know the hurt.

Healing is not just about the past but about what happens in the present – as reflected in these two stories. The first is about a woman of color, a Director of Religious Education, who attended a Unitarian Universalist summer camp.

Rayla D. Mattson serves as the Director of Religious Education for a Unitarian Universalist congregation in Connecticut,

First, she speaks of feeling excluded, including not being welcome at the tables during meals and of clear slights towards children (her own and other children of color). Then she writes,

> Then one evening my youngest finally settled down enough for me to attend evening worship. I was so excited; I grabbed my lantern and journeyed to the chapel. The guest speaker spoke so eloquently talking about what he called "the elephant" in the space—how the camp was rooted in racism. His words brought me to the edge of my seat. I was thrilled and excited: I hadn't been paranoid! This white man saw what I saw. He was naming my hurt, my truth and I was elated.

> As we left worship, my heart felt light. In the darkness that surrounded us, the voices started. I heard campers—who couldn't see me, a black woman, listening—agree that it was one of the worst services they had been to at the camp. And how they couldn't believe he dared to say those things. And how they, who come to the chapel to be uplifted, did not want to have that kind of mess thrown in their face.
>
> But I'm tired of being silent. It's a heavy load to carry day in and day out. So, I ask this question whenever someone will listen, "Who is standing in your dining hall [or in your congregation] looking for a seat at the table? And can you make room for them too?"

Connie Simon is an Intern Minister who wrote this reflection about "Missing Voices," *(italicized text wasn't included for time):*

> When I started attending a UU church, I was excited by the promise of worship that would draw from the arts, science, nature, literature and a multitude of voices. Indeed, some of the voices that Unitarian Universalists hear in worship each week belong to Thoreau, Emerson, Ballou, and others. Their words are beautiful, but they come from a culture and experience that's foreign to me. When do I get to hear voices from my culture? I quickly learned that, other than the same few quotes from Martin Luther King, Jr. and Howard Thurman's "The Work of Christmas," it wasn't gonna happen. I sit attentively and listen with my head to "their" voices while my heart longs to hear more of "our" voices.
>
> I am a Black Woman. When I look around on Sunday morning, I don't see many people who look like me. In most of the congregations I visit, I don't see anybody who looks like me. So I guess I shouldn't be surprised that I don't hear voices of people who share my experience. But it still hurts. *I want to hear voices that tell the struggle of living under the weight of oppression in this culture of White Supremacy. I want to hear stories of trying to stay afloat in the water we swim in. I want to hear voices of Living While Black in America.*
>
> I don't hear those voices in UU churches so I have to supplement my worship by reading black theologians like Anthony Pinn and Monica Coleman. I read Maya Angelou, James Baldwin and my favorite poet Paul Laurence Dunbar. Though not a Unitarian or a Universalist, Dunbar chronicled the African American experience in the years following the Civil War and the emancipation of enslaved Africans — *a time of opportunities for blacks as we migrated north in droves seeking employment and education but also a time of continuing segregation, racism and oppression.*

> For Dunbar, the struggle was real. One hundred years later, hearing Dunbar express his frustration and give voice to the contradictions of our existence as African Americans encourages me and nourishes my soul. His voice speaks to my heart. He knows my pain and understands my sadness, my fear and my rage. He understands the tears I cry as I pray for strength to get through another day in this world. He gives voice to my deep faith that real change is coming someday.

She speaks of the fact, the essence that we derive meaning and truth from a variety of sources – including things that challenge our experience. But we also need to reflect our experience. But without representation, it is hard to have your heart in a holy place.

(first service, I included the following but didn't have time for it in the second service:)

> *Dateline September 1963, a bombing at a Black church in the South kills four*
> *Dateline June 2015, a shooting at a Black church kills nine*
>
> *Dateline March 1965, protestors dedicated to ending violence against Black Lives disrupt traffic and daily life by walking from Selma to Montgomery Alabama*
> *Dateline January, June, and July 2016, protestors dedicated to ending violence against Black Lives disrupts traffic and daily life in San Francisco, CA, Memphis, TN; and the Twin Cities in Minnesota*

If indeed the arc of the universe is long – oh how it can appear to be long in trying times such as these – how has and how does it bend toward justice?

Current issues nationally – as people are speaking up, tensions are also flaring. Lately, I've heard a handful of people saying something like, "We didn't have these issues in earlier times". Which may seem true but if so only because we (as a society) silenced and oppressed people even more actively than now. Technology has allowed more voices to be amplified. As important as it is to listen to the stories and voices of people of color, those who are queer or LGBTQ, women, and more – it's important to listen to the uncomfortable truths we here that can harm us (not to take them in but to realize they're there).

For instance:

- Nikolas Cruz in Parkland, whom many students and educators said was already on their radar.
- Dylann Roof, from the Charleston, SC shooting of an predominantly Black church. told his black neighbor he would do this – and told his friends he was planning to attack a primarily black college before he went to the predominantly black church

Usually people don't suddenly become this way – pay attention to what is being said and done; this is the flip side of listening to stories about race from people of color – that we can no longer ignore the words/deeds of those who are obviously troubled, or write them off as benign.

This comes up in our society too, around the recent #MeToo movement and learning about sexual assault. We must learn to listen and trust the voices among us.

Here we are, still working to ensure that Black Lives Matter – and yet we are not even a year removed from the events in Charlottesville. Our national attention right now is somewhat focused on things like the movie "Black Panther" (one of the important things to realize is what the BP historically did – community ambulances in Winston-Salem North Carolina, and school breakfast in the Bay Area of CA. And now, at many of the premieres for the movie "Black Panther," different groups are working to register voters.

How then will the arc bend toward justice? Via the hands and hearts of dedicated people who are committed to change and justice.

(first service, I included the following but didn't have time for it in the second service:)

> *Dale Hansen is a sportscaster in Texas whose commentaries go viral; (worked there for 35 years now). In a NY Times interview, he says he thinks people listen because he's an big old white man from Texas.*
>
> *In Feb 2015, after students from a predominantly White HS held up signs that said White Power during a game with a school that was predominantly students of color, Hansen tells a story about his own life and learning racism, and unlearning it. He says,*
>
> *"Maybe because I used to be one of those kids," Hansen said during a broadcast this week. "I was raised in a small Iowa farm town that had only one black family in the county and raised by a man who used the n-word like it was a proper noun. I think I was 12 before I realized that the n-word actually wasn't the first name of Willie Mays, Hank Aaron, Elston Howard and so many more. My dad always referred to the black athlete and any person of color he didn't know that way."*

Hansen continued, "But he loved the Mathews family. Henry and Billy Mathews were good people. The whole family was. My dad always said, 'They were different.' The one black family [my father] knew were good people; all the others he didn't know, they were the bad people. The ignorance in that reasoning if you think about it long enough will twist your mind and it twisted mine."

"Kids have to be taught to hate," Hansen said. "I was."

Hansen recently lost friends by saying in Sept 2017, "The young, black athletes are not disrespecting America or the military by taking a knee during the anthem," WFAA's Dale Hansen said on the station's Monday night broadcast. "They are respecting the best thing about America. It's a dog whistle to the racists among us to say otherwise."

And then this week, he turned his attention to the school shooting in Florida, one of eight already this year. An excerpt:

"If it was a Muslim or a Mexican doing the shooting, how many new laws and how much money would we spend then to stop the madness? But since it's almost always a white kid, there's just nothing we can do."

This week, the events in Florida have reminded us of the double standards that can occur in the media/public discussion.

(I hoped to include the following but didn't have time for it in either service)

Suzanne Schneider is, the deputy director of the Brooklyn Institute for Social Research, and is the author of "Mandatory Separation: Religion, Education, and Mass Politics in Palestine."

We all tell ourselves stories about who we are, what we do and how we differ from others — markers of distinction that undergird our individual and collective identities. In recent years, for instance, politicians and pundits have gone to great lengths to distinguish "our" violence from "theirs," referring to Muslims.

Despite evidence to the contrary (the incarceration rate for native-born Americans is nearly twice that of undocumented immigrants and nearly three times that of legal immigrants)

As is often noted in the wake of mass shootings, white American perpetrators are deemed "troubled" or "disturbed" (as Trump described Cruz on Thursday), while their Muslim counterparts are purportedly motivated by nothing but religious fanaticism. Indeed, the question of mental health rarely seems to enter into the equation when the perpetrator is Muslim.

We've embraced the false dichotomy: If browser history and social media accounts link a shooter to some form of radical Islam, then he is a terrorist (as in the case of Syed Rizwan Farouk, one of the San Bernardino, Calif., attackers), even though the animating factor may have been mental illness.

That truth transcends borders, but Americans continue to embrace the expensive fiction that outsiders are the real threat, with 45 percent of Americans saying immigrants worsen U.S. crime.

Scholars in a range of disciplines — from comparative literature to social theory to psychoanalysis — have long noted the tendency to project our faults on people who seem alien to us. With regard to safety and security, demonizing refugees, Muslims, Mexicans and so on does the important work of seeming to take action while leaving the existing order (and the incredible profits of gun manufacturers) intact. In a world that can undoubtedly feel like a scary place, we might want to believe that our biggest threats come from without. That they might already be walking among us is apparently too much to swallow.

And yet, when it comes to bending the arc of the universe toward justice, which we are called to do, we bend the arc of the universe ourselves, and mostly locally.

The Reverend Pamela Wat was one of a few people interviewed about activism within our faith, in the UU World, and she highlighted acting locally, going deep, and recognizing how issues intersect *(italicized text wasn't included for time):*

Find what you are passionate about and stick to it. Don't be the fair-weather activist who shows up only when the whole country is outraged over an issue. By committing to one area (antiracism, reproductive rights, transgender rights, etc.) you get to go deep. You can still be involved in other areas (and be in a keen position to notice areas of intersection), but keep your focus.

If antiracism is your thing, participate in local efforts first—Black Lives Matter, NAACP, interfaith coalitions. And stick with that work, even when results are not forthcoming or fast. *My hope is that our congregations are made up of members who have committed deeply in particular areas so that within any given congregation there might be a group of people (I didn't say "committee") who are knowledgeable and connected each in their respective area and who can draw the congregation into that work throughout the year.*

Some of our local work in this congregation has included, or will include the following:

- "How to talk to kids about racism" workshop
- I recently proposed to Racial Justice and a few others the idea of a history bus tour, with an active social justice/service learning project, perhaps voter registration (it dawns on me after hearing the three women who are Resilience Productions talk about the power of telling stories, perhaps we can call it the "Resilience Road Trip")
- Many of you know Bloomington United has reformed and is getting launched
- Implicit Bias training here in town where some of our folks have attended and will bring back the lessons
- The Reverend Mary Ann and I are looking to host, in a few months, a book discussion featuring Chris Crass, a white Unitarian Universalist who speaks often and well about race and racism.
- And many of you are aware of the situation this past week and forthcoming week where our community has been discussing the role of policing and peace; there is a town hall on Tuesday (and a reminder that today, Sunday, at 3, is the concert at Second Baptist Church)

So the question before us is where to go from here, how to continue bending the arc of the universe.

(I hoped to include the following but didn't have time for it in either service)

> *In her article "Men Are Responsible for Mass Shootings: How toxic masculinity is killing us.," Jennifer Wright recaps a scene from the recent movie, "Beatriz at Dinner." Beatriz, an immigrant, played by Salma Hayek, is talking to a Trump-like developer played by John Lithgow. The developer is talking about how much he loves big game hunting and killing elephants. Beatriz says, "You think killing is hard, huh? You wait in the bushes. The animal might outrun you or charge you. It's not easy to get your shot? Try healing something. That is hard. That requires patience. You can break something in two seconds, but it can take forever to fix it."*
>
> *This means taking in the words of Adam Dyer who doesn't say healing cannot happen – but that first, we must fully listen to and hold dear the history and legacy of racism before we can work towards it's healing.*

Rev. Ranwa Hammamy (from UU World article on activism) is a chaplain for an elder care provider in Oakland, California, and is a community minister affiliated with Mt. Diablo UU Church in Walnut Creek, California. She is co-president of DRUUMM (Diverse Revolutionary UU Multicultural Ministries).): "Teach us therefore to love" is tattooed on my arm just below an image of a heart broken open, flames coming through its cracks. This line from a prayer by the Jamaican Unitarian minister Egbert Ethelred Brown speaks to the despair that our "troubled and puzzled world" brings, and to the duty that comes with bearing witness to that pain. That duty, I believe, is the commitment to action that comes with the decision to call oneself a Unitarian Universalist.

(second service, I included the unformatted text in the following but didn't have time for it in the first service, and didn't have time to include the italicized text in the second):

Rev. Rebekah Savage is the Associate Minister at the UU Congregation of Rockville, MD:

I ignite my flame of justice and shine a light on this scar because the healing is not done. The healing is not done because we are still called to do the work of dismantling white supremacy culture and decentering whiteness from our bones: from our congregations, from the ways in which we interact and support each other. We are called to fulfill the promises once made in the name of faith and proclaiming Beloved Community. We are called to match our words with our actions, to bring the holy into our midst by truly and without fear honoring the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

This is a beautiful time of opportunity, Beloveds, born of truly listening to people of color and beginning to repair the fabric of community that has been torn. Ripped asunder by years of broken and empty promises: words of good intention, unmatched by purposeful action.

While I grieve, I also have much reason to claim hope. I celebrate where we are as a people of faith because we are bravely facing the devastation and illness of "othering" people. We are looking at ourselves in the mirror and seeking a new way. I celebrate that we have the moral and spiritual courage to listen deeply to voices that have been marginalized. I celebrate that beloveds are choosing to move back humbly, to make space for an evolution in leadership and consciousness. *The spark of working towards the greatest good is seen in every moment of insight as so many are waking up to our participation in centering whiteness.*

Beloveds, now is our time to lead with love and make right the ways our denomination has fallen short of our shared principles. We are a powerful, aspirational covenanted people and we are being called to account for our historic moral and spiritual failings, in order to move into authentic Beloved Community.

Now is our time to harness our ability to reflect inward in order to reemerge with a power greater than ourselves that gives rise to a new day. Beloveds, with love and peace in our hearts, may it be so.