



Beloveds,

June 4, 2020

Come Sunday, it will be three months since we last gathered in-person together. The afternoon of March 7th, after the youth service, I had a conversation with a neighbor about what he thought about coronavirus--this new thing that we'd been hearing of and probably needed to take seriously. I was so naive then.

This neighbor echoed opinions I'd heard from a number of people within our own congregation: We know that quarantine and contact tracing are effective ways to curtail the virus, but Americans are too resistant to the idea of surveillance and restricting freedom of movement for that to work. We were so naive then.

The neighbor, a Black man in his 30's, continued with something I hadn't yet heard in this context: Of course, that's not true. Americans are just fine with people being tracked and watched. People being pulled off the street and locked up for unknown periods of time. It happens all the time in my community. Americans are just fine with it; it just depends on which Americans we're talking about.

Isn't that the truth--and a damning one at that. Much has changed about the world, my perspective, and perhaps yours, in the last few weeks, months, years, and decades, but if you are surprised to hear about uprisings or riots across our country or shocked to hear that Tony McDade, George Floyd, or Breonna Taylor were killed by police, that particular naivete is dangerous. When elected officials in Pittsford are unbothered that the town has only 2% of residents who identify as Black/African-American but neo-nazi groups are also openly recruiting in the same town, we cannot afford to be naive now.

I know that some of you may have been confused over this past week when you did not get a stunning statement from me condemning the pandemic of Black death from state-sanctioned violence, health disparities, poverty, and the long-term effects of generational and ongoing trauma. Let there be no doubt that I will continue to proclaim that Black Lives Matter until it becomes as antiquated as "abolish slavery" or "let women vote," but I also believe that the anxiety and stress of these past ten days should not be ameliorated by a strongly-worded letter from your minister proving that we have *the right opinions*. We, and white people in particular, will need to continue to be uncomfortable beyond the outrage of this news cycle. Here at First Unitarian this week, your staff and leaders will begin to engage in the work of expanding our moral imaginations by learning about alternatives to policing.

It is simply not enough to say that Black Lives Matter. This is long haul work, my friends.

As a Unitarian Universalist, I am called to recognize the suffering of others and work toward collective liberation, and as your minister, I ask you to join me in this work. This invitation comes with a warning: dismantling racism in our wider society will, if we enter into this work with humility and honesty, will force us to reckon with various learned allegiances to systems of domination and inequity. Unlearning white supremacy is

soul work: deep spiritual work that implicates our families, our stories, our values, and very senses of self. The warning is not a threat but a promise: We must allow ourselves to be transformed. And we will be.

Our leaders here, ministers and other religious professionals, our board members, our children, are companions on this journey, and as my fellow UU minister, The Rev. Theresa Soto writes, "**All of us need all of us to make it.**" This is my fight and yours. Thank you for allowing me to be a companion on this journey with you.

Love and courage,
Rev. Shari

Some next steps:

1. **IN PERSON** If you've been to a hardware store or similar in the last two months and your health has not changed, then I assume that you are comfortable socially distancing outside with masks. Show up in solidarity with the Movement for Black Lives this Saturday at 1 pm at Twelve Corners in Brighton, just down the street from our building. [Event info here](#). Get grounded and get ready the night before with an online sign-making party and spirit rally 6-6:30 pm on the [First Unitarian Community Facebook page](#) or on our [Zoom](#) (if you don't have internet or prefer to join by phone, call 646-876-9923, and use meeting ID #5852719070).
2. **FROM HOME** There's a concerted effort in NY State to repeal law 50a, which prevents public disclosure of police documents, including excessive force complaints. [You can learn more here](#) and then get over your fear of the phone and call legislators this week. [Here's a script!](#)
3. **IN SPIRIT** If you're feeling like this has nothing to do with you, take the first step by watching Thirteenth this summer and commit to attending three events related to racism at church this coming year. If you find yourself caught in a cycle of outrage, practice meditation, prayer, singing, or another spiritual exercise daily. (Soul Matters, Wellspring, and your ministers can be helpful in guiding you to a practice that works on you, if not for you, exactly.) If you're weary in soul, [let this gem of an anthem wash over you](#).
4. **IN COMMUNITY** We are stronger together than we are alone. If you are a non-Black person of color, commit to forming a small group of people to check in with about unlearning the anti-Blackness that is fed to and consumed by so many communities around the world. If you are a Black person, commit to checking in with a group--you need not carry the weight of the world alone. If you are a white person, commit to conversations with fellow white people. Ask your friends how they are engaging with Black Lives Matter. Ask your family. Form a small group to check in regularly to identify ways racism is showing up in your own lives and strategize about how you might build up alternatives.