



## Themes: Wisdom, Liberation, Thresholds

### Wisdom

By The Rev. Heather Janules

Last month, I had the joy of attending a program co-led by Rebecca Kelley-Morgan, Donna Reed and Marianne DiBlasi, "Creating Your Spiritual Legacy." In brief, participants were invited to consider our values and the lessons we have learned so we may pass them on to others.

This was a refreshing approach to *legacy*. As a single person with no children, I sometimes think about my estate. I have very few things of significant financial value but many things with personal history. *This is the hand-made white embroidered wall hanging I brought home from my last trip to Transylvania. This is the inscribed scarab my father gave me from his mineral-collecting club when I was young. As a child, I thought it was a mysterious artifact but he claims these scarabs are inexpensive and meaningless. Yet the sense of mystery remains...*

Who will inherit these unique things and the stories that come with them? The Buddhists remind us of the danger of attachment. As you may have guessed, my attachment to these things in the Museum of Me is strong.

But the spiritual legacy conversation helped me realize that I have acquired understandings, what some would call wisdom, that, together, can be a gift to others. And I can gift this gift at any time!

We spent time in the Spiritual Legacy session writing down some of our lessons. Here are a few things I listed:

*Feelings aren't facts. Just because you think someone is trying to hurt you, that may not be true.*



*Photo: In our recent Creating a Spiritual Legacy program, Judy Murray shared a list of things her father would say that her family had framed. It currently hangs in her home. Her father's wise sayings are "The shortest way is the way you know; Find a job you like and you'll never do a day's work; If you're rich and you live like a poor man, you're poor. If you're poor and you live like a rich man, you're rich. It's easy to like good people. Second man low."*

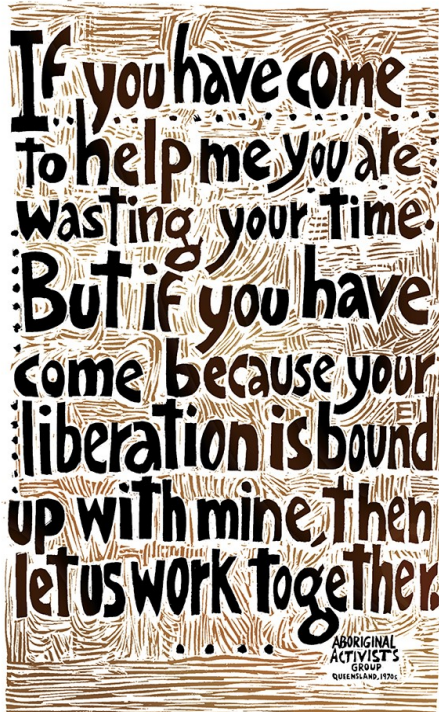
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## Liberation

By Sam Wilson, Director of Youth Ministry



"If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together." This quote, commonly attributed to Lilla Watson - an aboriginal activist, artist and academic - was born from the collective beliefs of communities that Watson was a part of.

As I write this I am in a van full of teenagers from the First Parish Needham UU youth group, en route to the border wall (that already exists across much of the US/Mexico border) as part of an immigration justice-focused immersion learning journey with the UU College of Social Justice. This trip is done in partnership with Borderlinks, an organization in Tucson that's committed to deepening knowledge of the borderlands and migration through solidarity and relationship with the

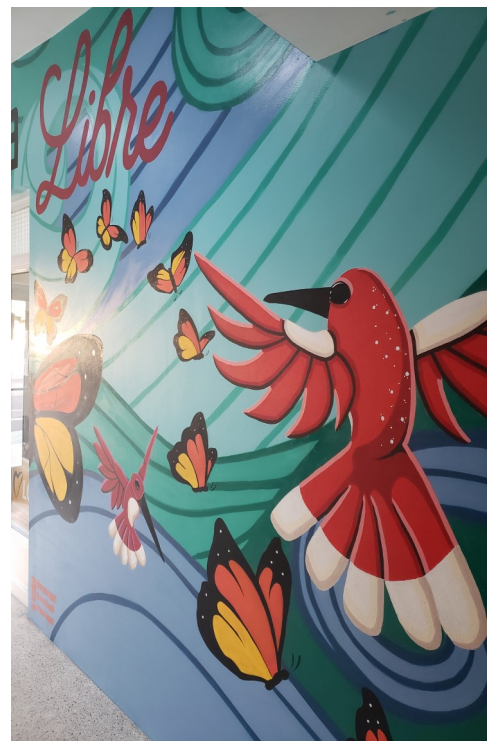
communities that are most directly impacted. A few years ago, several of our own youth also participated in this trip with me (and, sidenote, we also do trips here with adult delegations! Wink wink.)

One of the most striking aspects of this journey for me is Borderlinks' deep commitment to this mission, and the way in which that commitment of solidarity permeates throughout all of their work; from the folk they hire to cook our meals to the ways that they center voices from specific communities during presentations from partner organizations, it is clear that they are thoughtful and intentional in their commitment to solidarity.

One of the workshops that they lead here is titled "Solidarity Charity" and analyzes the ways in which these 2 frameworks compare and contrast with one another. It can be particularly difficult for some who otherwise are taught that giving things to people and helping people (a *lá* charity) are always completely positive experiences. One of the better ways to frame this is thinking about the difference between going somewhere to "help" and offering them something, as opposed to going somewhere and asking them what they need and what help looks like to them. I distinctly and fondly remember Patty Cameron explaining this difference as part of Long Haul's philosophy when WUSYG went to New Orleans 5 years ago. I also look forward to bringing this understanding with WUSYGers when we arrive in West Virginia in a couple months: How can we help you? What do you need? And if the answer is simply move this pile of

dirt from here to there, then, guess what we'll be doing!

For me, lifting up a model of solidarity is an act toward collective liberation. It is a recognition that through our interconnectedness and interdependence, we all have something at stake when we make the conscious and intentional decision to center the agency, power and knowledge of marginalized communities. It is also a model for living everyday life that emphasizes community-based solutions and accountability for impact over intent. In what ways is our community (or any community you are a part of) modeling solidarity and where might it have some room to grow? I look forward to exploring this question with all of you when I return, reinvigorated by my immersion in such a caring community here in Tucson. I hope you will join me in this exploration!



## Thresholds

By Rebecca Kelly-Morgan, Director of Lifespan Religious Education

Thresholds mark a boundary, the border between one space and the next. Often once you cross over a threshold, a door closes behind you. It might even lock. Some thresholds allow a physical return, but others are invisible; ones that bring new understanding, new knowledge, and once you've crossed those thresholds, there's no going back.

I like going to Canada. It is a gorgeous drive up through the north-east kingdom and as you gradually leave the glaciated bowl of Vermont there is this really – there is no other word for it – sweet border crossing. The United States entry side is pretty intimidating, you have to slow and let cameras take pictures of your car and license and usually someone gets searched. I'm sure the guards take lessons in surliness, and even if you aren't a terrorist they make you feel like you should be. "Gee officer, I'm sorry I'm not carrying contraband weapons. Will this tire iron in the trunk do?"

By contrast, entering Canada is sort of like visiting your relatives back on the farm. They're so happy to see you. They have charming accents and (at least to the naked eye) a low-tech sort of surveillance, which seems to consist of peering into the car to see who's in the back seat. They smile, give you weather updates, directions, and make sure you're good to go. I've even gotten some restaurant advice on my way to Montreal.

Years ago, one particular trip did not seem to be fulfilling its promise of an easy drive and pleasant border crossing. My daughter, Sarah, and I were on our way to make another college visit so she could decide what institution she wanted to grace with her presence and my checkbook. Earlier in the day, I had made it clear that we needed to travel before the forecasted heavy weather rolled in, and Sarah - true to form - came home later. Much later. FOUR HOURS later and not yet packed for the weekend. To make matters worse, just as we were leaving the house, I took a phone call. And I shouldn't have. It contained painful news, news of the sort that makes you feel like you've been punched in the stomach.

I maintained some level of stiff lipped composure until we got into the car, out of the driveway and onto the highway just as the hail began. The storm that assailed us from the sky was no match for the one in the car. I began with an explosion and then moved on to rant and rave. I catalogued all of Sarah's current offenses and threw in some additional stuff for good measure. I think I may have scolded her for teasing her brother . . . in 1997. At some point Sarah realized that I was completely irrational, apologized once more for her lateness, and wisely decided to go to sleep.

And there I was with my temper tantrum shut down, so I did the next best thing. I cried.

I had crossed a threshold that I felt completely unprepared for. A border of another kind, moving into a new space, leaving the old behind.

I no longer had absolute certainty that I was old enough, wise enough, and mature enough to parent this young woman. More sensible than I, she knew how to deal with my extravagant emotions, already possessing considerable equanimity and an enviable ability to distance herself from someone else's drama. How. . .adult. How shockingly, frighteningly, gloriously adult. I was in another country all right. With an alien sleeping in my car. What's the language? What currency should I use? Surely this can't be Canada.

It was Canada, though. I could tell by the immediate change in the quality of the roads. But Canada existed only outside of the car. On the inside it was another country entirely. I wish the friendly border guard had known about this second crossing. Child to adult. Smugness to humility. Wouldn't it have been nice to have a welcome when I came to this other border crossing?

Looking back to the many threshold experiences of my life, a number of them were clearly marked. A wedding ceremony, a divorce decree, a birth, a death. But there were other thresholds that became obvious only in retrospect. The transformation of relationships, the growing awareness of being mismatched to a career, the restlessness of being squeezed into a life that had become too small.

Wouldn't it have been nice to have someone there to establish my readiness to cross the thresholds leading into a new country of my interior self? Wouldn't it have been

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# Happy Birthday Beethoven!

By John Kramer, Music Director



On Sunday, March 29<sup>th</sup> we will be celebrating the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Ludwig van Beethoven with a Music Sunday worship service. Beethoven is still considered one of the greatest composers to have lived, and his music is a magnificent expression of the human experience. But Beethoven is also important to us, and for us as UUs, in other ways which we will soon explore.

Beethoven was born in Bonn, Germany (then part of the Holy Roman Empire) in 1770 (he was baptized on December 17<sup>th</sup>) and was taught by his father and other notable musicians, including, for a time, Franz Joseph Haydn. He rose to prominence in Vienna and spent much of his life there. Beethoven was an artist in the modern conception. He worked neither for a church as did J.S. Bach, nor for a royal court as did Haydn, but worked mostly on commission and had students as today's composer does. He was also a formidable pianist, famous for his improvisations as well as his compositions.

Beethoven was born during the Age of Enlightenment and much of his work resonates with the Humanism that comes out of this time. These same ideals influenced early UU thinkers, especially the Unitarians and in a sense, both Beethoven and modern day UU religion can be thought of as children of the Enlightenment. It is also notable that Beethoven was not particularly religious, although his works project a deep belief in nature and human potential, echoing modern UU sentiments.

Beethoven did not write much for the church, and even a seemingly religious work like his *Missa Solemnis* is too long and requires too many performers to be practical for a church service. Nor did he compose a lot of choral music, although his *Ninth Symphony*, with the choir and soloists participating in the fourth movement, is one of the most famous pieces for choir there is. But much of his choral music reflects ideas of early (and modern) Unitarianism; emphasis on a deity rather than the trinity, the use of nature as an inspiration, and the belief in the ability of humanity to transcend strife and unite for the betterment of all.

Three pieces we are presenting on March 29<sup>th</sup> elucidate this idea. The *Choral Fantasy*, *Elegischer Gesang*, and the *Hallelujah from the Mount of Olives*. We will present the *Choral Fantasy* a slightly abridged form, but will sing all of the text. When one considers this text against the standard church mass which constituted the majority of choral music of the time, it becomes fairly radical.

*Graceful, charming and sweet is the sound  
Of our life's harmonies,  
and from a sense of beauty arise  
Flowers which eternally bloom.  
Peace and joy advance in perfect concord,  
like the changing play of the waves.  
All that was harsh and hostile,  
has turned into sublime delight.*

*When music's enchantment reigns,  
speaking of the sacred word,  
Magnificence takes form,  
The night and the tempest turns to light:  
Outer peace and inner bliss  
reign o'er the fortunate ones.  
All art in the spring's sun  
Lets light flow from both.*

*Greatness, once it has pierced the heart,  
Then blooms anew in all its beauty.  
Once one's being has taken flight,  
A choir of spirits resounds in response.  
Accept then, you beautiful souls,  
Joyously the gifts of high art.  
When love and strength are united,  
Divine grace is bestowed upon man.*

The *Elegischer Gesang (Elegiac Song)* was written for his friend and patron Baron Johann Baptist von Pasqualati of Osterberg after the death of his wife. In place of a traditional requiem text Beethoven uses these words by Ignaz Franz Castelli: "Life gently touched thee, and passed as softly, thou spirit, too holy to know pain! No eye could weep for this heavenly spirit, when homeward turning Ah, life gently touched thee, and passed as softly. Yes, and passed as softly."

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## Goodbye from Marianne

By Marianne DiBlasi, Intern Minister

As a teaching congregation, many interns have passed through the doors of Winchester Unitarian Society before I arrived and many more will pass through after I leave. Interns, on the other hand, only pass through the door of one internship congregation. The imprint an internship congregation makes on an intern forever shapes their ministry. I am blessed to have my ministry forever imprinted and shaped by WUS and with each of you. With deep gratitude, I want to thank all of you for the generosity of your time, wisdom, and compassion as you companioned me on my path of ministerial formation.

Although I began this internship knowing it would end in two years, as I became deeply woven into the fabric of the WUS community, there were times I forgot it would end. Yet, it indeed is coming to an end and it is time to say goodbye. I cherish this internship as time of profound learning – how to serve a congregation as a minister and how to be my own unique expression of ministerial presence. As I reflect back on the good ministry we have done together, I leave you with a few things I've learned:

- ♥ No minister, staff member or congregant can do ministry solo. Vital congregations are places

where the minister, staff and lay leaders with different talents, perspectives, and passions come together to co-create something greater than any individual can create on their own.

- ♥ Collaboration takes more time and energy, but in the end, what is created is often more extraordinary than what was initially imagined.
- ♥ Creating a learning container where people are encouraged to experiment, be creative and take risks is when we grow personally and spiritually.
- ♥ Offering tangible support to help someone say “yes” when they are doing something new, challenging or scary is a way to foster personal and spiritual transformation.
- ♥ When meetings are infused with laughter, hearts and spirits are uplifted and the work of ministry happens with greater ease.
- ♥ Hospitality is sacred ministry. Warm food, a warm smile, a warm greeting, a warm hug does wonders to nourish the body, heart and soul.
- ♥ To look for and notice moments of grace where the holy shines through the ordinary.
- ♥ Not to be afraid of pauses. They are invitations for Spirit to be present.
- ♥ Being a conversation partner requires having the courage to

speak the truth with love and to listen with open-minded, open-hearted curiosity with a willingness to see the world through the eyes of the other.

- ♥ There is no “right way” to do worship, or ministry, or any other aspect of life. It’s all a creative and adaptive dance in relationship with others.

My prayer in leaving is that your commitment to immigrant justice and helping refugees to “*find love again*” continues to deepen and expand. That festoons of rainbow decals appear in every doorway of Winchester as your flags continue to wave unharmed, providing a visible sign of welcome to people-of-color and the LGBTQ community. That Winchester Unitarian Society continues to flourish because the world needs places where generous, kind-hearted, spirit-filled, justice-making community thrives.

As I say goodbye, I say thank you from the depths of my heart. In the words of Winnie the Pooh, “*How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard.*”



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## Sue's Testimonial

By Sue Kiewra



When my youngest daughter was born, my husband and I looked for a church that would be consistent with our values and mixed religious backgrounds and offer the sense of community we needed. That was more than 20 years ago.

Both of my daughters participated in the religious education program here and both had experiences that made a difference in their lives. In Neighboring Faiths, my oldest daughter found a belief and lifestyle that she has followed since. On service trips with WUSYG to New Orleans and War, WV my youngest daughter helped others and learned first-hand the harsh reality that was

difficult to comprehend living here in Winchester.

Those events are reason enough to value my commitment to Winchester Unitarian Society, and though I have always known there are other reasons, they have been difficult to articulate. It is a bit of a standing joke when I am out with one of my daughters and say HI to someone ... they ask, "Who is that? – No wait – I know, it's a really nice lady from church, because you always say that if they're from the church." My daughters often ask why I go to "so many church meetings" or why I accepted another request to volunteer for something. My answers never seemed to satisfy their quizzical nature - until recently.

My oldest daughter, now 22, was part of an online forum where she was the subject of some bullying. She was asking me why people are so awful and treat others so poorly. I tried to respond – though mostly expressed my own bewilderment - at which point she pointed out that it was a rhetorical question and that she didn't really expect an answer, she just wanted to vent a little. But then I said --- I do have an answer, but it's to a different question.

You always ask me why I spend so

much time and money on church – and in talking to you now about how many awful things there are going on in the world and the bewildering and often hateful behavior of others, I just realized what the answer is.

**Being at church not just with a few people, but with a large group of people who care about each other and the planet and ALL of the people who live on it AND are doing things to make it better - gives me hope! – and having hope is truly priceless – so, it is clearly worth the investment I'm making.**

And as co-treasurer, I cannot help but remind all of you how important your financial support is in keeping that hope alive for all of us. Last Annual meeting we approved a budget with a substantial deficit, and we are in the early stages of planning for the 2020/21 fiscal year and expect a deficit once again. So please fill in those pledge cards and pledge as generously as you are able – spending our reserves for regular expenses is not sustainable – and we all know how much the people of WUS care about sustainability and all the great things happening here. Please keep the hope alive! Thank you very much!

**Pledge Campaign 2020.** Our campaign ends March 1st but we will continue to accept pledge cards throughout the month of March. Pledging is easy: submit your card during the offertory, by mail, drop it off in person in the office, leave it in the designated basket during coffee hour or pledge online at [www.winchesteruu.org/giving/pledge/](http://www.winchesteruu.org/giving/pledge/). Your generosity is appreciated and is important - if we reach our \$400,000 goal, we won't need to operate at a deficit. Blank pledge cards will be available during coffee hour.

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*But feelings are important information. Feelings should be honored.*

Let it suffice to say that that these few sentences summarize many mistakes I have made and many hours I have worked with friends and trusted advisors to understand why I acted as I did and what other choices I could have made.

Another lesson I have learned is that *Some of the best leadership coaches are dog trainers.* That is only partly a joke. It can be very effective to reward behavior that you find helpful in others and simply ignore that which you don't. (I am sure many have used this approach with me.)

Dog trainers have also taught me that *curiosity is the opposite of fear.* And we are most likely to be aggressive when we are afraid. When tension is high, what do you do to become more curious?

And the dogs in my life have also taught me a lesson: *Regard each stranger as a potential friend.* As someone naturally shy, I am still working on that one but my Lab Luna (may she rest in peace) was a great teacher in conveying this wisdom. I sometimes describe her as "Universalism on Four Legs."

And sometimes wisdom is not what we think but how we act. How we are. Over time, I have learned different ways to respond to what

life sends me. Much of this "wisdom" can be summarized by a title of a book by Sylvia Boorstein: "Don't Just Do Something – Sit There." While this is a clear reference to meditation – and I am a terrible meditator – I have learned that every event doesn't require an immediate response. Sometimes it doesn't require a response at all.

As I recalled in worship recently, a wise philosopher, Kermit the Frog, once said that "it's in every one of us to be wise." We all have a wisdom legacy to leave and we can bestow these gifts at any time. What lessons have you learned? And who have you shared them with lately?



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nice to know exactly when I got there? Wouldn't it have been nice to get some guidance as to where I should have gone next?

How about signs that are clear, passages that are marked? Hello, you're aware, welcome to the country of maturity. Hello, you're capable now, welcome to the country of mastery. Hello, you're ready to take risks, welcome to the country of testing.

Beyond all the thresholds we've willingly crossed and all the ones

that we do not choose, but are led, or pushed over, we find ourselves in new and unknown spaces. Whether we call them threshold experiences, or border crossings, they come at the end of a route we've traveled until that moment. We might think we know what to expect, everything about our destination, but we don't. We might not even know we've crossed a threshold until long afterward.

It's been years since that trip to Canada. In those years, Sarah and I have lived our own lives, made our own plans, followed some dreams, discarded others, made the best of

the unexpected, and accepted any consequences of our choices. Whether we are intentional about crossing, or not, this is what awaits any and all of us at the border crossings, the thresholds - those new spaces, these unknown countries. We cross into living our own truth, making our plans, following dreams, accepting the consequences and responsibilities of choices we make. But even as I accept that truth, I can't help but wish there were bigger signs, a word or two of welcome and a friendly guard, just to make sure we're good to go.



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Beethoven's Humanism can also be seen in his oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives* from which we will be singing the *Hallelujah*. This is evidenced by the work concluding with Jesus accepting his fate, placing the emphasis on his own decision rather than on the crucifixion or resurrection.

I would also like to briefly touch on the power of Beethoven's instrumental music, his symphonies, string quartets, piano sonatas, and other works that comprise the majority of his compositional output. Many have written about the spiritual and "ennobling impact" of this music, and surely this power has influenced many generations of musicians. Beethoven's music aligned with the growing European and American merchant and middle classes is such a way that many learned to play it and then shared it with their family and community. Indeed, no 19<sup>th</sup> century pianoforte would be complete without a volume of Beethoven sonatas on it. The general sentiment

was that by playing or even listening to his music, you would become a better person, your spirit strengthened. His instrumental music also evidences the power of music without words to charm the imagination and lead one on voyages not capable by words alone. Where texts often lead us into a specific corner, their absence can free us to see in infinite directions.

The music of Beethoven has had an enormous impact on all of us and it is safe to say that today's music would not be the same without his influence. This musical influence also aligns with certain moral and philosophical ideas that continue to influence our thinking. But above all, his music is simply glorious to behold, full of emotion, covering a broad range of human experience and also, just a lot of fun. To quote from the *Ninth Symphony* his music contains, "joy.. whose magic brings together what custom has divided. All people shall become one wherever those gentle wings hover."

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## Concert Series



*Windborne*

Friday, May 8th

8:00 p.m.