



Let me share with you a story, this version told by John Girard: “On a foggy autumn day nearly eight *hundred* years ago a traveller happened upon a large group of workers adjacent to the River Avon [in the rural English countryside]. Despite being tardy for an important rendezvous curiosity convinced the traveller that he should inquire about [what the workers there were doing]. With a slight detour he moved toward the first of the three tradesmen and said “my dear fellow what *is* it that you are doing?” The man continued his work and grumbled, “U[gh], I am cutting stones.”

[Getting the *message*] that the mason did not wish to engage in conversation the traveller moved towards the second of the three and repeated the question. This time the man stopped his work, ever so briefly, and stated that he was a stonecutter. He then added “I came to Salisbury from the north to work but as *soon* as I earn ten quid I will be going home.” The traveller thanked the second mason, wished him a safe journey home and [moved on] to the third of the trio. When he reached the third worker he once again asked the original question—[“What *is* it that you are doing? What are you building?”]

This time the worker paused, glanced at the traveller until their [eyes met]and then looked skyward drawing the traveller’s eyes upward. The third mason replied, “I am a mason. And I am building...a cathedral.” “I have journeyed many miles to be part of the team that is constructing this magnificent cathedral. I have spent many months away from my family and I miss them dearly. However...I know how important Salisbury Cathedral will be one day and I know how many people will find sanctuary and solace here. I know this because the Bishop described how people would come from all parts of the country to worship here. He also told that the Cathedral would not be completed in our days but that the future depends on our hard work [now].” He paused and then said, “So I am prepared to be away from my family because I know it is the right thing to do. I hope that one day my [children] will continue in my footsteps and perhaps even [my grandchildren] if need be.”<sup>1</sup> ...The Parable of the Stonecutters.

...When RevCathy and I were installed here in April as your twenty-second and twenty-third ministers, the called and settled Co-Ministers of the Unitarian Society of Hartford, a colleague and mentor of ours, Rev. Larry Peers, gave us our Charge. He asked us to keep always in our minds three questions: “For the sake of whom? For the sake of what? and For the sake of when?” RevCathy wrote these three questions on a post-it note that floats around the walls and deskpace of our shared office. And these questions have been surfacing for me lately, not only in the piles of paper on our desks, but in my mind and in our lives and work. I have been holding especially this first question, “For the Sake of Whom?”

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<sup>1</sup> Girard J.P. and Lambert S (2007) “The Story of Knowledge: Writing Stories that Guide Organisations into the Future” *The Electronic Journal of Knowledge Management* Volume 5 Issue 2, pp 161-172.

...Last weekend, I was sitting at Rowe Camp in the Rug Room of the Rec Hall on Sunday morning. I was sitting knee-to-knee with someone who literally became—in the Deep Time Work That Reconnects exercise we did together—she became the face of the future for me. She was the Future Being witnessing to and trying to understand the moment I and you are living in, now. I was her ancestor, 200 years prior to *her* life in 2215. She looked back at me and saw this moment, the one you and I are living in as a moment of discernment and transformation. “Ancestor,” she asked me, “there are stories and songs about what you and your friends are doing to leave us a livable world. What they don’t tell us, and what I would really like to know, is where you find the strength to do this. Where do you find the power to keep on going for the sake of life, despite all the obstacles and discouragements? Can you tell me?”<sup>2</sup>

For the sake of whom do we act, now? For the sake of whom will we take new risks and try our hand at creating something magnificent, something that will provide solace for those who desperately need it, something that we can not yet fully imagine or see clearly, ourselves? That person is now holding me accountable, that person—her name is Laurie, from Katonah. Laurie embodies for me now the face of those people who need us here in the Present to do whatever we can to change things for the better, to turn *towards* the crisis we are in as a country and a planet, to not turn away.

On October 17, Lisa Galinski, one of our active Twenties/Thirties group here at USH and a blessing to our Green Sanctuary efforts will be leading a workshop drawing upon this Work That Reconnects of Joanna Macy’s that I participated in in California in February and in Rowe last weekend. I urge you to check it out—Lisa’s daylong workshop on October 17. The Work That Reconnects has the power to transform and open your heart in a way that can only be *experienced* and it gives you new paths to explore as we all grapple together with the pain of this 21<sup>st</sup> century world. Let yourself go there. Sign up downstairs after the service at the Adult Programs table. Participating in the Work that Reconnects has helped me ask myself more fully and directly: “For the sake of whom am I worrying about this or that? For the sake of whom am I nervous about what we might do and stand for as a congregation?”

...I have been raised, perhaps like many of you, not to anger others. To be polite and socially appropriate, to not upset or offend, and as a woman to use anger very, very carefully and discreetly, perhaps only indirectly. It’s often taught that it’s improper for women to express anger. I was biking here to the Meeting House one morning a week or two ago now thinking about why I was anxious about some of the language and approach of the Moral Monday CT organizers, and I realized it was because I am afraid of making people mad. I was raised to do things that are gentle, positive, kind, thoughtful, things that bring people together, that ease tension. Unfortunately little in our society is dramatically changed just by putting out there: “how about we all be a little bit nicer to each other?”

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<sup>2</sup> Macy /Brown, Coming Back to Life p186.

There's a bumper sticker for this, I know: "Well-behaved women rarely make history." I realized that I was focusing on the possible, hypothetical reactions of people who are living relatively comfortable lives. *What about* the reactions of people who *need* something to happen, who need there to be some dramatic changes in our society in order that they might be seen, be freed from the narrow path our country has allowed thus far, a path that leads for far too many to a life of poverty, prison, early death, or working constantly at low-wage jobs in order to make ends meet? For the sake of *whom* might I take a risk, a risk of upsetting or offending someone? "Power concedes nothing without a demand," wrote Frederick Douglass in 1857. "It never did and it never will...."

Ta-Nehisi Coates shares with his son *this* short anecdote, a moment in his life to which I can relate, in my own way, as a parent: "One afternoon your mother and I took you to visit a preschool. Our host took us down to a large gym filled with a bubbling ethnic stew of New York children. The children were running, jumping, and tumbling. You took one look at them, tore away from us, and ran right into the scrum. You have never been afraid of people, of rejection, and I have always admired you for this and always been afraid for you because of this. I watched you leap and laugh with these children you barely knew, and the wall rose in me and I felt I should grab you by the arm, pull you back and say, 'We don't know these folks! Be cool!' I did not do this. I was growing, and if I could not name my anguish precisely I still knew that there was nothing noble in it. But now I understand the gravity of what I was proposing—that a four-year-old child be watchful, prudent, and shrewd, that I curtail your happiness..." (Coates 91-91).

Many of you will, I hope, read or reread *Between the World and Me* before our USH Book Group discusses it on November 5<sup>th</sup>. Keep an eye on your E-news for details about some loaner copies we may make available here in the USH Library. I want to share with you that I found myself having a hard time just finding the time and space to read this slender book. Like: nowhere I could find to read this book was comfortable. Wherever I was while reading this book, I felt uncomfortable—either there was too much noise or it was too quiet. Either it was too late at night or too early in the day. Eventually I just realized that reading this book is uncomfortable and embraced that, but still I tried to find someplace soothing as I pressed on in reading it. So that's how I found myself at Peaburry's Café in Simsbury, sitting in a oversized leather armchair with a wooden flute soundtrack gently playing overhead and people around me talking about travel itineraries and trips and which European countries are better or worse to drive in and tears are streaming down my cheeks as I try to take IN the heartbreaking honest necessity of what Coates is writing to his teenage son.

For the sake of his son, a young black man in the United States of America in 2015, he writes this: "History is not solely in our hands. And still you are called to struggle, not because it assures you victory but because it assures you an honorable and sane life" (Coates BTWM 97).

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...Pause for a moment and ask yourself: For the sake of whom are you here today? Whatever, whoever comes up is fine: perhaps you’re here for yourself, first and foremost. That’s fine. Now ask yourself again [close eyes]: For the sake of who...else? For the sake of who do we commit and recommit ourselves to this congregation, this Unitarian Universalist faith, this larger global community of liberal religion and independent interdependence? Who do you hold out a place for in the pew next to you? Who do you come here to be nourished for, that you might go out into this world more grounded, more focused, more giving, more available? For the sake of whom?

...Years ago now I was in a small group circle with colleagues at a retreat center delving into what or who calls us into ministry and keeps calling us through the inevitably challenging periods. This question is not a new or surprising one. In seminary one of my first professors, a Roman Catholic religious sister (who honestly kind of terrified me), would ask us with great exasperation in her voice, “you say you are called into ministry. But who’s calling?” She would rap on the table, hard. [Knock.] “*Who’s calling?*” And I, as an agnostic then, and even more of a religious humanist-atheist now, would say, did say some years later in my circle of colleagues, and still say now: I am called by the community that saw me. I am called by the community that made space for me. I am called to make a place for those who need it, just as a place was made and held for me.

A place was carved out for me as intentionally as stone was carved for the foundation of a cathedral. It has been clear to me for as long as I can remember—since before I can remember—that who I am is welcome here. It was conveyed to me that my very particular life, the life that I was trying to summon up the courage to live—that this life that I could not even remotely imagine yet in 1991—this life mattered. You, you Future Beings, you tell me that in 2015 I’ll be a mom and a legally married Unitarian Universalist lesbian atheist Co-Minister in Connecticut? What?! The seed of who I was becoming was safe here. I was loved by Unitarian Universalists as a child, as a teen, as a young adult, as a seminarian, as a new minister. This faith made a place for me, welcomed and inspired and even celebrated me as a young questioning lesbian in the early 90’s, in Oregon and then in New York City, in Philadelphia and then online in the listserv conversations of the Church of the Larger Fellowship following the events of September 11, 2001, when I lived in Taos, New Mexico.

Our Unitarian Universalist engagement with the world around us can be discordant and conflictual, we can be startled by our own range of experiences, personalities, and opinions, and still: we agree to create and be in community with one another. We agree to listen to one another, to hear each other out. We agree to look within and take responsibility for our part. We covenant with one another to seek the truth in love. It is written: “We drink from wells we did not

dig." We sit in cathedrals we did not build. As you all know well here, in the Unitarian Society of Hartford, our places of legacy and worship and gathering will not always look the same, be in the same place, they will not always draw upon the same components, or be made of the same materials. We have to keep up with *our* moment in order to create something relevant and resilient for the future. We have to pause and notice when "the way it's always been" doesn't make sense anymore because the people for whom that way was essential are no longer here, and the people who are here are hurting and in need of something different. Why are we doing what we are doing? Why am I, why are you? For the sake of whom? Let it not be "because we are afraid," "because I don't want to offend anyone." For your own sake, notice when you are caught up in fears, anxieties, resentments and frustrations that you could, perhaps, let go of. Let yourself be *for* someone, something, some value that you hold above all.

Who is calling you to action? When I asked Cathy this question, she said: "I'm committed to following the leadership of those who are most impacted." When I ask myself, it is for those future beings, Laurie in Katonah, the ones two hundred years from now who will look back and study who was a part of this transformative time. Who knew that they weren't just cutting stone, but a part of something transformative, a part of long-term, necessary change? I don't want to have stood in the way of positive change for the better. I want to be part of the solution, not an obstruction, not part of the problem. My life overall is lovely right now, in truth, so it takes recognition of that to acknowledge that spreading the discomfort around starts with...me. For the sake of whom am I willing to give up some of my conveniences, some of my privilege, some of my time and ease in this s/Society so that we might bring about some greater equality in this country, at least a little bit more rightness in the acknowledgment of so much that is wrong?

Who's calling...you?  
Who's calling you?  
Who's calling?

May you, too, hear the call. May it be so.

Offering                      "Like a Bridge Over Troubled Water"      USH Choir

\*Extinguishing the Chalice              Phil Gardner, Worship Assoc  
*We extinguish this flame, but not the light of truth  
The warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.  
These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

\*Benediction

\*Closing Hymn #1018                      Come and Go With Me