



It Is Time Now

OFFERINGS FROM THE STAR ISLAND
BELOVED COMMUNITY PROJECT



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Star Island Corporation

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OUR VISION

Our vision is to create on Star Island an environment that frees all who come to renew spiritually, explore matters of consequence, and gain knowledge about the world as it might ideally be.

OUR MISSION

Our mission since 1915 is to hold and maintain Star Island and such other property as the Corporation may hold or acquire, as a center for religious, education, and kindred purposes consistent with the principles of the Unitarian Universalist Association and the United Church of Christ.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Time is Now: Offerings from the Beloved Community Project is the first installment of a series of educational resources Star Island plans to share as part of our Beloved Community Project. The Beloved Community Project is a journey Star Island has begun as an organization, to open minds and hearts, to be deeply inclusive, and to bring more justice and peace into the world. We recognize and affirm that others have been on this journey for a long time, and we are excited to learn from them as we embark on this important initiative. We hope to inspire readers to be part of our journey toward becoming a more welcoming and intentional community, and to help spread more empathy and understanding in the world.

Star Island is deeply grateful to the following individuals, who wrote and inspired the content of this book:

Rev. Wendy Bartel
Rev. Eric Cherry
Rev. Patrice Curtis
Rev. Dr. Leon Dunkley
Rev. Lynn Gardner
Ruth Idakula
Rev. Chris Jablonski
Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker
Rev. Lauren Smith
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IT IS TIME NOW

REV. CHRIS JABLONSKI
REV. DR. LEON DUNKLEY

Welcome

Welcome to the first publication of the Beloved Community Project.

The Project was born out of a desire on the part of the Star Island staff and Board to help Star Island be a resource in this complicated moment in which we live. As many of our communities grapple with how to effectively and meaningfully oppose and dismantle white supremacist culture, as many of us ask how we can build a more just and loving and joyful world, we saw an opportunity for Star Island to help contribute to this conversation.

And so we dreamed up a list of colleagues who we knew and had worked with in a number of capacities, and invited ten wonderful people to come to the island for a week of worship and reflection, a week of deep sharing and exploring, a week of embodying and exploring the Beloved Community. It was a beautiful time. And it created this resource.

We offer it to you now with gratitude and joy.



You can use it in a number of ways.

Most simply, you can just read it and enjoy it. It is separated into a number of small sections, and so each one can be read and reflected on, sipped and savored. Or you can plow through it and let it wash over you and then come back to pieces which stick with you.

Additionally, you can use individual sections as conversation and reflection catalysts. Many of Star Island's groups and conferences have chosen to use this as a resource for their programming. Feel free to do so.

On behalf of all of the participants in the Beloved Community Project, we send you love and courage. Know that the world we dream of is on the way. Know that together we are birthing something powerful and true. Know that there is a piece of this grand puzzle that only you possess. It is time now.

So much love to you and yours,

Rev. Chris Jablonski, Island Minister

Rev. Dr. Leon Dunkley, Star Island Corporation Board Member

REV. WENDY BARTEL

Star Island Calling

"We hold these truths to be self-evident,"
Excuse me, who, is 'we'?
and what do you mean when you say truths...and these...?

Ministry and majesty
condoning supremacy
throughout millennia, see,
in manifest destiny
and colonizing from the redwoods
to the gulf stream
whose land can this really be?

Unlearning centuries of practices of domination
invading and making ministrations
with lots of condemnation of those who otherwise
may make an oblation to the ancestors and the Earth
and the rhythm nation,
for generations and so-called civilizations.

g and f
n a
i l
s l
i i
R n
g

so rarely calling us
 to our better selves
 even as we sought a better life.
 Instead, a replication
 of systems of subjugation

 leading to the ruination of all.
 As if we had to ration
 all our sources rather than set a new course for the
 distribution of *soul force* where they are actually needed.

Our norms are not normal if they leave some out.
 If our aim is to normalize honesty and integrity,
 sustainability and voluntary complexity,
 island or mainland multiplicity,
 covenants of accountability,
 let's make explicit our agreements
 so we might all get free.

The delicacy of the taste of fresh joy on our lips
 dripping with beloved community.

Speaking our heart's deepest longings,
 received by ears and hearts that
 inspire a sense of belonging;
 packing up our sorrows, not to hide them
 rather to move with and through them
 for we are not only our grief

or the hard things that happen to us.

Our habit may be to weaponize
 long held habits that demonize
 Perhaps this changing could be part of the resistance
 the persistence
 and insistence
 for interdependence.

Practices and rituals building resilience.
 Each of our gifts used to make a difference,
 that we might just choose, once and for all,
 to answer Love's call,
 offer a faithful hand when we fall,
 especially if we're in it for the long haul.

It is time now that we thrive.
 Let us choose to pick up the best of our hearts.

REV. CHRIS JABLONSKI

It Is Time Now

For you.

For your community, for your family, your conference, your neighborhood.

There is always something that you can do to help aid and abet love and justice, liberation and thriving.

Sometimes I think we can get stuck because we get too attached to an idea of what a mobilized, energetic, anti-oppressive community should do.

For instance, years ago I had a friend and colleague who had just started her first ministry. She and I had worked closely together in some anti-oppression initiatives and so when we first connected, months into her work there I asked whether or not she had been looking to do any anti-racism work with them.

“Please,” she said. “First I need them to start liking one another.”

We laughed and I heard about how fractured and disconnected her community felt. Her first step there along with her leaders was to help the community connect and weave real relationships with one another.

Every community will have a different next step.

Finding the enthusiasm and openness helps. Finding positive and generative energy to build on helps.

In my most recent ministry, along with some wonderful leaders, we were discussing ways in which we could introduce some anti-racism work and activism in the congregation. Without prompting, one of my most respected and wise leaders asked if she could lead a class with her daughter, a book reflection and discussion book around racism. I joined her in the effort, and it was a wonderful class. And it was born of her passion and enthusiasm. It also happened to fit perfectly with a desired strategic priority.

Sometimes we who are blessed with the sacred task of leadership can be impatient. Sometimes we can try to force an initiative, a class, a strategy, we can push and push because we are convinced we know what is needed. But there is a next step, an organic, life giving, generative, appropriate next step. Sometimes we just might need help to see what it may be.

Seek out wise counsel. Find similar communities who have experienced successes. The work for liberation and love has been going on for a long time. Find ways in which your community has experienced similar successes and build on those.

The Beloved Community longs to be. Whatever context, whatever community you love, it longs to be healthy and thriving, liberated and free. And so the task of leadership is together to discern, in what ways might we set this community free. And then to go and do that.

REV. DEANNA VANDIVER

But What Is the Beloved Community Project?

I can tell a bit of why
And share some who

But the what
And the how
are being manifest even
as we lean into each other
with holy curiosity

The possibility of living
with self-differentiated, undefended hearts
brings songs flaring forth
like solar wind
Alive with the kinetic energy
of re-membling
respect, kindness, hope
A vast love blooming
In spirit, muscles, blood, and bones
Alive

Many storms—named and unnamed—etched
in our nervous systems
Barrels of pain stored
in our collective memories
Friends,
We are aching for the
forgiveness
Only possible when
the harm
has stopped
Thousands of years
of suffering and surviving and thriving
Daydreaming a whole and holy liberation

Tender solos rising up from choral strength
Sorrows held so, so gently
Joy reflected, like mirrors reflecting mirrors,
unto infinity
wonder tendered with trust
rituals created/re-created to hold
all that our words cannot

Each time we meet
In body or in spirit
my heart is stitched
by another thread of love
To your heart
And yours
And yours
And yours

And yours...

Choosing to be and do differently
 Than how we have
 done been conditioned to be and do
 Oh, how we co-create
 together
 With courage, faith, and wisdom
 a love net
 to hold us in the healing now
 of
 (even when it is not yet)
 Beloved community.

REV. LAUREN SMITH

For Freedom

This is my prayer for you, dear reader: Risk wholeness, aliveness and freedom.

Every Martin Luther King weekend, it has been my practice to reflect on and preach from Dr. King's teachings. Most years, I have selected a sermon from which to preach. This year I chose a lesser-known text, Dr. King's speech to the Freedom Riders in the spring of 1961.

The Freedom Riders were an integrated band of women and men who rode Greyhound buses across state lines with the goal of integrating interstate travel. De-segregated interstate travel had been the law of the land for a while, but it was effectively banned by the threat of violence. Like the sit-ins at lunch counters and the voter registration drives, the Freedom Rides were an action designed to ensure equal access to the rights of citizenship. It was a demand for freedom and a charge to the nation to live up to its ideals.

Dr. King described his work with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference as a massive campaign to end segregation, saying, "...we ... seek to mobilize thousands of people, committed to the method of non-violence, who will physically identify themselves with the struggle."¹ He said, "We must stand up not for ourselves alone, but in order to carry our

¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., "Address at Freedom Riders Rally at First Baptist Church," given in Montgomery Alabama, 5/21/1961. <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/address-freedom-riders-rally-first-baptist-church>

nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the founding fathers in the formation of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.”²

Freedom for ourselves. Freedom for others. This is one of the reasons we gather.

There’s a line in a Leonard Cohen song that I have always loved. It goes:

*Like a bird on a wire, like a drunk in a midnight choir,
I have tried in my way to be free.
Like a worm on a hook, like a knight in some old-fashioned book,
I have saved all my ribbons for thee.*³

For me, it always comes back to freedom. It comes back to the foundational belief that none of us can be truly free until all of us are. We are, in the words of Dr. King, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.

“I have tried in my way to be free,” Mr. Cohen sings. “I have saved all my ribbons for thee.” And his descriptions of himself reflect the challenge of it all, the human frailty and also, somehow, the beauty and the power.

About nine years ago, during another period of transition, I sat in the courtyard of Espresso Roma in North Berkeley, California. I wrote in my journal five words: “Whole. Alive. Free.” and “Connect. Serve.” Three adjectives, two verbs. The first three express what I believe the fruits of spiritual life ought to be. The last two express the charge to act in tangible ways, to be doers of the word and not just hearers, in the words of the apostle James.

This my prayer for you: that you accept this challenge, this core demand of our faith: Risk wholeness, life and freedom. Abet wholeness life and freedom in the world.

I will not lie to you. It may not be easy. Freedom, as we know from the bumper stickers, isn’t free. But take heart. There are those who have walked

this path before you, to whom you can turn for inspiration and insight.

I think of my great great great grandparents and their families. They were black men and women living in North Carolina in the waning days of slavery, the pressure cooker years before the start of the Civil War. They were free black people, but their freedom was circumscribed by law and circumstance. Their relative freedom depended on the passes they carried and the whims of the white people among whom they lived. They could be re-enslaved for modest infractions, real or manufactured. They lived on the knife’s edge. And this was the only reality they had ever known, the only place they had ever lived. The world beyond Wilmington must have felt like a great dark void, like the edge of the earth on world maps drawn before people discovered that the earth was round.

And yet, despite all this, they imagined a different future. They packed up, picked up, and moved on. They made the treacherous journey north to Oberlin, Ohio then east to New England. They set out for freedom, for a new life unlike any they had ever known. It was not perfect. Moving north of the Mason-Dixon line didn’t mean full access to citizenship, but it did open new doors of opportunity and they chose to walk through those doors. My great great grandfather became an educator, an architect and a Unitarian. He found a message of liberation in our tradition and a commitment to manifesting that message among some of its people. I am the beneficiary of my ancestors’ vision and courage. They remind me that I, that we, stand in a liberating stream of our faith tradition.

I think of my ancestors, and I think of Fannie Lou Hamer. She’s one of my heroes, a tower of courage and integrity to whom every American is indebted.

Hamer was born into a sharecropping family in Mississippi in 1917. Sharecropping was slavery lite, in many ways. Often, sharecroppers were not allowed to leave the plantations on which they worked without permission of the owners. There was an elaborate system of finance that bound families to the plantations through debt and being forced to purchase food and supplies from owners at inflated prices. And while black people technically enjoyed the rights of citizenship, there was a cultural prohibition against exercising those rights backed up by the threat of violence.

² Ibid.

³ Leonard Cohen, “Bird on a Wire,” 1961.

This is how Fannie Lou Hamer grew up. It's all she knew. But from very early in her life, she was determined to get away. One day in 1962, she attended a mass meeting sponsored by SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. SNCC organizers were encouraging black people to register and vote. Mrs. Hamer says she never knew until that time that black people *could* vote. 72% of the people in her area were black, which means that if black people voted in large numbers, they could upend local power dynamics. When the organizers asked who would go down to the courthouse to register, Mrs. Hamer volunteered. She went by bus with a group of people down to the courthouse and made her wishes known. The people on the bus were afraid, but when tension started to rise, Mrs. Hamer began singing in her powerful deep voice what would become her signature song: "This Little Light of Mine." And the people settled down a little.

Days later, she had to flee from her home with her family to a friend's home. An attempt was made on her life there. She fled to a third location, but somehow an organizer tracked her down in a plantation shack. He walked in the door and found her sitting in a chair next to wood stove. He said, "I'm looking for Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer."

She rose from her chair.

Not yet knowing who he was, not knowing whether he was friend or foe, she stood up and said, "I'm Fannie Lou Hamer."

In later years, she would endure threats and a brutal beating at the hands of police officers in Winona, Mississippi—a beating that caused permanent damage to her internal organs. But after all that, she said, "From the time I began working, I never had a mind to stop. ... After that happened to me in Winona, I knew there wouldn't be anything to stop me other than death."⁴

I heard her say those words in an old recorded interview. When Mrs. Hamer said, "... After that happened to me in Winona," I expected the sentence to end the way I would have ended it. I expected her to say, "... I lost my faith," or "... I had to retreat for a while," or "... I didn't know if I

could go on." But she said, "I knew there wouldn't be anything to stop me other than death." I will never be as strong as that woman. I can't fathom moral courage like that, or a will to live free that runs that deep. But I, we, bolstered by her example, can live into the outer reaches of our own capacity for moral courage, love, and allegiance to life.

Especially now, in these turbulent times, it matters that we embrace life, that we work for freedom for all people. It matters that we, in the words of Dr. King, "carry our nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the founding fathers."

We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.

This is my prayer for all of you.

Be whole, alive and free.

Connect and serve.

Make no mistake: The way will sometimes be hard. Freedom is neither free nor easy.

But you are not alone.

The towering figures of the past and present are with you.

Let them be your strength and your inspiration as you discover the outer reaches of your vision, imagination, and courage.

Let their love be your consolation and your peace.

Blessings to you on the path.

Traveling mercies.

And much love.

Amen.

REV. LYNN GARDNER

A Process of Beloved Community

We gathered in a circle and spoke of our tender, brave, and painful truths, with faith in the Holy to help us find the words, and with a growing trust in one another. The rocks, the sea, the sunlight and rain, and even the gulls helped shape a container to hold the experiences of relationships and communities constricted and shredded by a culture of white supremacy.

And, rising up through our songs, tears, prayers, laughter, sharing and yearning was the sweet smell of hope, whispers of possibility, and the grounding strength of our commitments.

In process theology the Divine and all existence is always becoming. Our collective attention, actions, and thoughts impact the present, and what is possible in the next moment. Poet and professor Christina Hutchins describes how she chooses a broad vocabulary, not just because it makes

current language more interesting and specific, but because she wants to expand, rather than limit, word choices in the future. Our living is a series of potential endings and beginnings, and our choices affect what will and can unfold.

Oppression constricts, silences, and destroys, not just humanity, not just all ecosystems on Earth, but the Mystery that moves in and among us.

As we gathered on that rocky island, I imagined the possibilities of God expanding. I felt connected to all those who have yearned and worked for collective liberation.

Buoyed by the inspiration and strength of our time together, I move through my small fears and self-doubt. Who am I to keep God smaller than God is possible of becoming?

REV. CHRIS JABLONSKI

What Makes You Come Alive?

I love this quote from Howard Thurman,

“Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and go and do that, because what the world needs is more people who have come alive.”

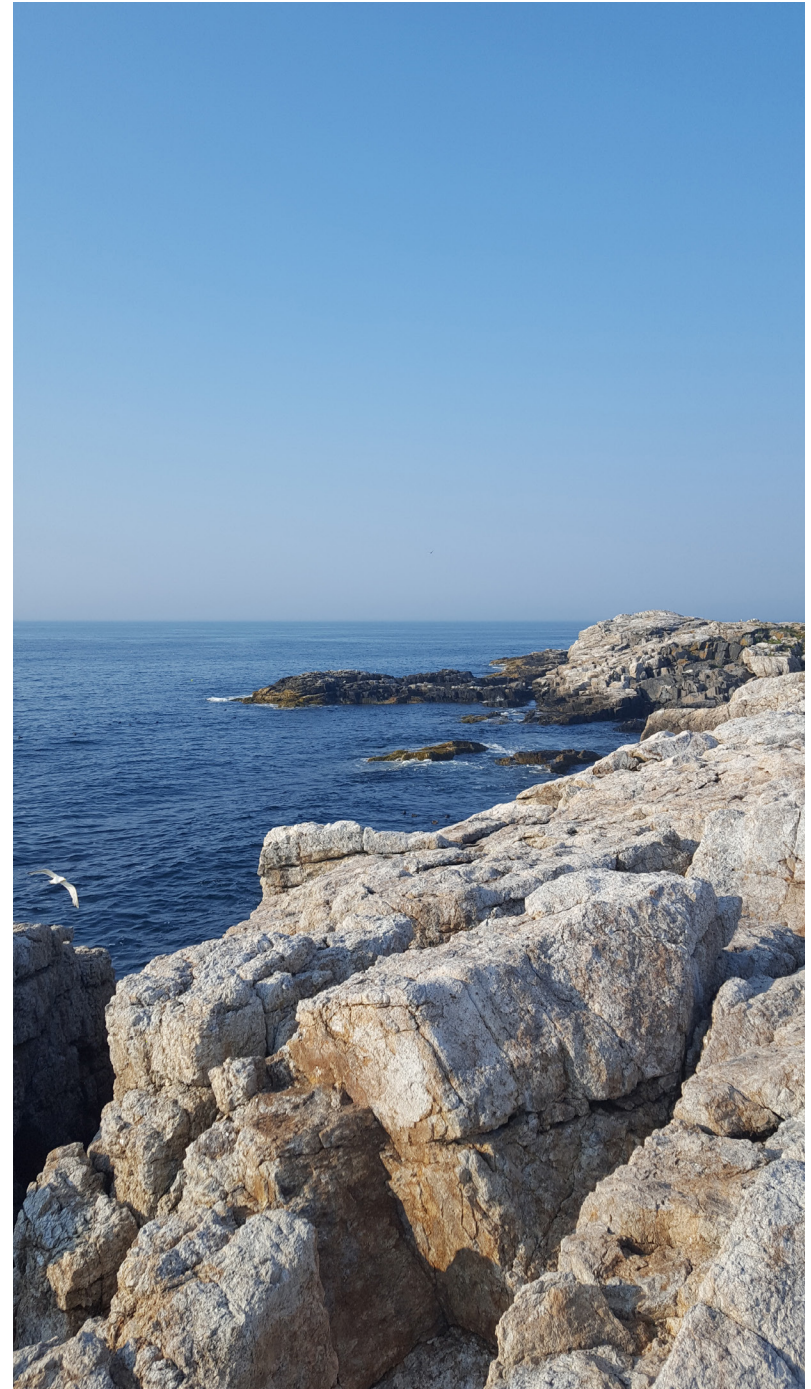
This has been a guiding light idea in my ministry. I see part of my purpose as helping people come alive. I see part of my purpose as helping our communities come alive.

I believe that this aliveness is contagious. The more we come alive, the more we abet aliveness in one another and in the communities we create.

And I mention it here because I think that sometimes when we ask how can my church, or my conference, or my community, embrace these ideas and practices of the Beloved Community, sometimes we can think of what our church needs. We can think, oh, my conference could be so Beloved if only... if only...

Whereas, I think, perhaps we could ask, “What would make my conference come alive?” Or “When have I felt my community most alive?” And go and do that. Build on that aliveness and allow that aliveness to pull you into deeper connection, clearer purpose and more authentic joy.

So what makes you come alive?





Back row: Rev. Chris Jablonski, Rev. Dr. Leon Dunkley, Rev. Lynn Gardner,
Rev. Wendy Bartel, Ruth Idakula, Rev. Patrice Curtis

Front row: Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker, Rev. Lauren Smith, Rev. Deanna Vandiver,
Rev. Eric Cherry



REV. DR. LEON DUNKLEY

Willow Tree Flowers

We sang our way through how difficult this is. It is not impossible to meet the challenge of anti-racism in our time but it is incredibly difficult. It requires a great commitment from us. That commitment comes at a cost. James Baldwin once said,

The day will come when you will trust you more than you do now. When you will trust me more than you do now. We can trust each other. I do believe... I really do believe in the New Jerusalem. I really do believe that we can become better than we are. I know we can. It's just that the price is enormous and people are not yet willing to pay.

James Baldwin believed in the New Jerusalem. Until the end of his life, he was working towards it earnestly. For him, the New Jerusalem was that soul-rich state of mind in which it was possible to overcome the difficulties and challenges of our time—the difficulties of what Derrick Bell describes as the “permanence of racism” and the challenges of white supremacy culture.

How powerfully we have turned to confront these things. How passionately we have responded to honest critique. And, unfortunately, how ineffective we have been. We have been ineffective for one simple reason. It is not because we have been disinterested in anti-racism workshops. It is not because we have been unable to attend revolutionary



love conferences. It is not because we have been unwilling to make long-term, structural commitments to doing the work of justice. We have been ineffective in our response to racism and white supremacy culture because we have failed to trust one another. We have yet to commit—soul-level deep—to the spirit’s call for freedom in our time.

This is the time of mass shootings—in a high school in Parkland, Florida; in a black church in Charleston, South Carolina; in a synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA. This is the time of the travel ban. This is the time of the border wall. This is a time in which the public trust has been badly broken. We are shattered from ourselves and from one another. We don’t know how to talk about it. In the presence of all that is broken, we don’t know how to believe in one another. We don’t know how to believe in ourselves.

This is a time of great heartbreak. If we are courageous, it can also be a time of great healing. It is up to us. We have to decide. We must choose. If we decide to surrender to heartbreak, we need to do nothing at all. What we are in the middle of doing now will get us there. If we choose to surrender to healing, we have to trust one another. Far more deeply, we have to trust ourselves.

James Baldwin said that this day would come and he was right—this day when we would learn to trust ourselves and one another. This is that day. This was what we found in the Project. This is the meaning that we made in beloved community. How did we meet the challenge of the New Jerusalem? How did we allow the best within us to blossom in this world of ours that has become so hostile and vitriolic? We sang our way through to beautiful things—trust, integrity, fairness, fidelity, freedom, dauntlessness and grace. This is what it takes to make us flower.

We sang our way through. We sang our way through the difficulties with the help of Ferron. We sang our way through the challenges with the help of Joan Baez. We sang our way through to freedom with Richie Havens. In our spirit, we sang of freedom...

Freedom, freedom...
I got a telephone in my bosom
and I can call him up from my heart

—*Richie Havens*

This is how Richie Havens talked about the call that is within us. In our study, we sang of challenge and we sang of amazing grace. With the help of Joan Baez, we sang,

A young man came to a house of prayer
They did not ask what brought him there
He was not friend, he was not kin
But they opened the door and they let him in
And for an hour the stranger stayed
He sat with them and he seemed to pray
But then the young man drew a gun
And killed nine people, old and young
In Charleston in the month of June...

We sang of the challenge in Charleston because we were concerned with our habits of storytelling. As Joan Baez sang,

We argued where to place the blame
On one man’s hate or a nation’s shame
Some sickness of the mind and soul
And how the wounds might be made whole
But no words could say what must be said for all the living and the dead
So, on that day and in that place, the President sang Amazing Grace
My President sang Amazing Grace

—*Joan Baez (Zoe Mumford)*

President Obama did not have the words. As eloquent as he is, he was almost speechless on the day that he memorialized Senator Clementa Pinckney on June 26th of 2015. At the site of those terrible murders, President Obama said that Clementa Pinckney,

...embodied the idea that our Christian faith demands deeds and not just words, that the “sweet hour of prayer” actually lasts the whole week long and that to put our faith in action is more than individual salvation. It’s about our collective salvation— that to feed the hungry and clothe the naked and house the homeless is not just a call for isolated charity but the imperative of a just society. What a good man. Sometimes I think that’s the best thing to hope for when you’re eulogized, after all the words and recitations and resumes are read, is to just say someone was a good man.

Because of the limits of words and theirs stories, the president sang out from his heart. He sang Amazing Grace.

How do you tell the stories that leave us speechless? The Beloved Community Project began to answer that question. We used seven tools of analysis—trust, integrity, fairness, fidelity, freedom, dauntlessness and grace. Of these, trust was the most important. Without trust, we lacked the ability to use the other six.

On June 17th of 2015, Dylann Roof entered a house of prayer. He entered Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church on Calhoun Street in Charleston. Armed with a .45 caliber handgun, he took the lives of nine church members who were in Bible Study. Armed with a “sickness of the mind and soul,” he broke the heart of a nation. Armed with a story, he broke our hearts. What story was that powerful to him?

Three days after the shooting, The New York Times reported that an unsigned 2,444-word “manifesto” had been found online. It supposedly explained the shooting. It read,

I have no choice. I am not in the position to, alone, go into the ghetto and fight. I chose Charleston because it is the most historic city in my state... We have no skinheads, no real KKK, no one doing anything but talking on the internet. Well someone has to have the bravery to take it to the real world, and I guess that has to be me.

According to the “manifesto,” Roof was “truly awakened” by coverage of the shooting of Trayvon Martin. Continuing,

I read the Wikipedia article and right away I was unable to understand what the big deal was. It was obvious that [George] Zimmerman was in the right.

According to Wikipedia,

Wikipedia is a multilingual, web-based, free encyclopedia based on a model of openly editable and viewable content, a wiki. It is the largest and most popular general reference work on the World Wide Web, and is one of the most popular websites by Alexa rank. It is owned and supported by the Wikimedia Foundation, a non-profit organization that operates on money it receives from donors. Wikipedia was launched on January 15, 2001, by Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger.

In many ways, Wikipedia has become the defining authority of the public story. But what is that story saying in the article is entitled “The Shooting of Trayvon Martin.”

There was a terrible question before us: What was it about this Wikipedia article that convinced Dylann Roof (or anyone, for that matter) that George Zimmerman was “in the right” when he shot and killed an innocent man. Regardless of whether or not Dylann Roof actually wrote his “manifesto” and without elevating the thoughts of a murderous and deeply troubled individual to the level of fact, the Beloved Community Project analyzed the Wikipedia article—the last one that was available before the shooting, the one that was edited on June 9th of 2015 by an online character named Faceless Enemy. We analyzed it intellectually. We analyzed it symbolically. We analyzed it energetically and were much amazed.

It took real courage to analyze this article. It took great strength. It took faith. Most deeply, it took trust, trust that we would survive our own analysis with our soul intact. Willfully or unwittingly, the Wikipedia article is ‘designed’ to break the reader. It breaks hearts. It breaks trusts. It breaks the possibility of healing. I am not being hyperbolic. Joan Baez sang,

We argued where to place the blame
On one man’s hate or a nation’s shame
Some sickness of the mind and soul
And how the wounds might be made whole

Our wounds are not made whole by reading the Wikipedia article. The Beloved Community Project was courageous enough to find out why.

Collectively, we read through the Wikipedia article. We read it thoroughly as one would a religious text. We did an exegesis...not to discover its sacred gifts but to make sense of the absence of them. We put the article on a series of notecards and spread it out on the floor so we could see it as a whole. When we analyzed the article, we used the seven spiritual tools—trust, integrity, fairness, fidelity, freedom, dauntlessness and grace.

After doing so, we raised unnerving questions:

1. To what degree was the Wikipedia article supportive of the actions of the shooter at the expense of the person that was shot?
2. How often was “The Shooting of Trayvon Martin” arguing in favor of the killer at the expense of an innocent, African American, seventeen-year-old kid?

And, most powerfully,

3. What is the public impact of this action (and the private impact) of this act of storytelling?

It took real courage to ask these questions. It took deep trust to answer them—trust that we would be able to hold each other through the pain of what we would discover, trust that we would survive the enormous spiritual price that we believed we were asked to pay.

What we discovered astounded us. We discovered that only 5% of the article was best analyzed with the tool of trust. The usefulness of our spiritual tools of analysis revealed themselves in the following way:

Trust	5%
Integrity	21%
Fairness	21%
Fidelity	23%
Freedom	2%
Dauntlessness	8%
Grace	<1%

We systematically analyzed every aspect of the 14,998-word article and found that Trayvon Martin’s name was mentioned in 420 of the article’s 733 sentences. We found that George Zimmerman’s name was mentioned in 609 of the article’s 733 sentences (understandably, some sentences contain both names). We further discovered that of the 420 sentences that contain Trayvon Martin’s name, only 23 sentences conveyed meaning that was positive and 51 were neutral. So, of the 420 sentences that contain Trayvon Martin’s name, the overwhelming majority conveyed meaning that was negative—346 of 420 sentences. When mentioning the name of a murdered, unarmed and innocent man, the Wikipedia article edited by the online character named Faceless Enemy was negative about Trayvon Martin 82.4% of the time.

On the other hand, we found that George Zimmerman’s name was mentioned in 609 of the article’s 733 sentences. We further discovered that of the 609 sentences that contain George Zimmerman’s name, only 37 sentences conveyed meaning that was negative and 365 were neutral. So, of the 609 sentences that contain George Zimmerman’s name, the overwhelming majority conveyed meaning that was neutral or positive—572 of 609 sentences. When mentioning the name of a murderous, armed and guilty man (however “justifiably guilty”), the Wikipedia article was neutral or positive about George Zimmerman 93.9% of the time.

Dylann Roof may have pulled the trigger on nine innocent people at Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina but the public story that inspired him (arguably) pulled the trigger on Trayvon Martin. What does this reveal about the baseline narrative of public life? How do we stop telling our public story in a way that justifies the senseless deaths of innocent people of color? By the grief that attends these questions, the Beloved Community Project was driven into reflection. What emerges from that reflection is still flowering. You can be part of a beautiful unfolding. You can be a part of the sure emergence of the New Jerusalem, that deep trust that overcomes the difficulties of what Derrick Bell describes as the “permanence of racism” and the challenges of white supremacy culture. You can be a part of the coming beauty.

In our spirit, we sang of freedom. In our study, we sang of finding ways that our wounds might be made whole. In our soul, we sang about the flowers on the willow tree. With the help of Ferron, we sang a song called, “The Return.” We sang,

For to lay my head on your restless arm
 I take my cue from the willow tree
 For it don't break with just one storm
 But bends with the strength that keeps it free
 —Ferron

What strength keeps us free these days? James Baldwin said that the day would come when we would trust ourselves and one another more. He said that he believed that we could grow but that the price would be high. The price of our distrust is now enormous—at least, as enormous as the price of doing otherwise and arguably more. We can pay for heartache or we can pay for healing. The choice is ours, what will be. The Beloved Community Project made its decision to trust. That decision brought us a great deal of joy. Will you join us?

REV. ERIC CHERRY

Beloved Community: a Credo

I believe in original sin, in the sense that human sinning has no lack of originality and that it is entrenched in institutions and systems.

I believe in original blessing, too, and the power of creativity which builds and strengthens goodness, beauty, harmony and recovery—and the potential for more.

I believe suffering from sin is inescapable for the sinner, and most people experience this in larger measure than appearances suggest.

I believe suffering inflicted upon others by sin is evil incarnated.

I believe responsibility for the pain, injury and trauma inflicted on others by sins committed—and by culpability—requires more spiritual attention and accountability than is commonly given.

I believe in universal salvation, not because a peaceful eternity is easily earned or deserved, but because God's love is at work and that strong.

I believe in grace.

I believe that grace requires honest confession.

I believe that everyone, yes, everyone, needs more confession and grace.

I believe in prayer.
 I believe in the power of penitential prayer.
 I believe in the power of righteously angry prayer.
 I believe that prayer changes people, or it isn't prayer at all.

I believe in absolution—in the same way that I believe in reconciliation,
 forgiveness, and mercy.
 I believe absolution requires hard, hard, hard work—the journey of a lifetime.
 I believe the past is not changed through absolution, only the future,
 sometimes the generation to come.
 And, I believe being an obstacle or diversion to someone's absolution path
 counters God's work and love.

I believe in Beloved Community, and not just eschatologically.

But...

But, I don't believe the moral arc of the universe bends towards justice, the
 peaceable kingdom, or Beloved Community. Though, I would like to.
 I hope someday I will.

Instead...

I believe the curve of the moral arc of the universe is shaped and
 re-shaped by:

Original sin
 Original blessing
 Confession
 Grace
 Prayer
 Penitence
 And Absolution

I believe religious communities and their sacred, sacred, sacred places
 can be reformed so that they remain sanctuaries—though too often of
 privilege—but also convents for the blessing and absolution path for all.

And,

I believe, this is one way in which Beloved Community becomes.

REV. PATRICE CURTIS

Letter to my Fellow UU Humanists

Dear Fellow UU Humanists,

This letter is to you the humanist who does not believe in God, or Gods.
 You may also call yourself an atheist or non-theist or something else
 altogether. No matter; what you believe in is that from goodness and
 glory and compassion and love, we people can create a community of true
 beloveds on earth. If this is you, your dream, I invite you to read on in the
 spirit of a heart-to-heart conversation, and not scholarly commentary.

I am going to take it as a given that as a humanist you believe you have
 great power within you (though no more so than any other person). This
 does not mean you are not humble, nor that you are full of your own ego
 (though you may be seduced by this darkness from time to time). I am
 also going to take it as a given that we have won a rightful place in the
 family of religious and spiritual beliefs to follow our own paths of open-
 heartedness; no one will be successful in silencing us as “nonbelievers”
 and indeed, we may now choose to be identified as what we are, rather
 than what we are not (but that is for another time).

Now, then, is the time for us to take the energy we have used to proclaim “we are here” and instead use it to claim a place with others who are building a beloved community.

To consider this, we need to face some truths. We must admit that though we are powerful, we have not activated that power for good. It is true we have accomplished good in the world: slavery is no longer legal anywhere (yet it continues to flourish as modern-day sailor slaves and sex-trafficked women and children; and through migrant workers who pick our fruits and vegetables). We are partially to blame for the manmade island of a disgusting and growing pile of plastic human detritus, now floating in the Pacific Ocean.

We have turned our backs against the possibility of a supernatural force that will save us from any of this and worse; that will save us from ourselves, or from each other. We have thrown our lot in with each other. We are left, powerfully, with the simple idea that we must get busy if we want to see a different world than the one we have now. In other words, upon our shoulders is the weight of the human world.

We must therefore vow to see the best in each other. If you are white, male, financially comfortable, and educated, this will be easiest; indeed, you may have never thought about what it would be like to have to believe in humanism day after day in the face of evidence to the contrary. Imagine moving through a city of people who point at or avert their eyes from your hijab; or question why you wear your kinked and wild hair high like a crown rather than smoothed down flat; or have strangers stare, rudely, then ask what you are, either implicitly or with malice attempting to strip you of your humanity; or have your body parts grabbed in a subway, on a bus, or at a party.

How do we live this faith in humanity? We might do so by honoring and learning from the strength of humanists who, in the face of racist and misogynist cuts day after day after day, still yet awaken in the mornings renewing their humanist vows. The Beloved Community means all are centered.

My people, my dear humanists, my central thought is this: you and I have chosen a long, and hard, and potentially incredibly enriching

road to walk. The tasks needed to reach our destination of a Beloved Community are mine, and yours, to do.

It is up to us to provide fishes and loaves, and clean water. It is up to us to provide good health care and to clothe each other; to clean up our environment; to treat well our neighbors and colleagues and co-congregants, the ones we dislike too; and more. Disregarding the Bible does not mean we get to disregard the reported words of that social justice activist, Jesus of Nazareth. Rather, we have chosen to take the weight of his charge to create Beloved Community upon our own shoulders, to hold our heads high, to be willing to be poked with thorns when we speak truth to power.

We also must acknowledge that some of us will be poked with the biggest thorns, while some will be treated with such deference that the thorns never come. If you have been gifted with such deference, then I wish to demand of you that you use that power to make a discernible difference with a greater number of people than someone who must fight their way simply to survive.

We have fallen, are falling short; yet we have not fallen catastrophically. Hope is alive. We can see it in our movement, though at the moment we chafe at change. We will get there when we find a way to center all voices equally. That seems to mean decentering voices currently taking up all the space in the middle to create space for other voices or finding a way to make that middle larger.

In close, dear ones, we have considered the capacities humans desire in and from God, and have chosen to have faith that humans can offer the same to each other, such as grace; forgiveness for the most heinous evil acts (while holding evil-doers accountable); kindness to all things and people unconditionally; love to those who are different; and more. You may see God as myth, as do I, but we must admit, acknowledge, and embrace that those desires attributed to living in covenant with a god resonate as some of humanity’s deepest desires. May our humanist faith give us strength to help build the Beloved Community.

Yours in the struggle,
Patrice

REV. DR. REBECCA PARKER

Choose to Bless the World

Your gifts—whatever you discover them to be—
can be used to bless or curse the world.

The mind's power,
the strength of the hands,
the reaches of the heart,
the gift of speaking, listening, imagining, seeing, waiting

Any of these can serve to feed the hungry,
bind up wounds,
welcome the stranger,
praise what is sacred,
do the work of justice
or offer love.

Any of these can draw down the prison door,
hoard bread,
abandon the poor,
obscure what is holy,
comply with injustice
or withhold love.

You must answer this question:
What will you do with your gifts?

Choose to bless the world.

The choice to bless the world is more than an act of will,
a moving forward into the world
with the intention to do good.

It is an act of recognition,
a confession of surprise,
a grateful acknowledgment
that in the midst of a broken world
unspeakable beauty, grace and mystery abide.

There is an embrace of kindness
that encompasses all life, even yours.

And while there is injustice, anesthetization, or evil
there moves a holy disturbance,
a benevolent rage,
a revolutionary love,
protesting, urging, insisting
that which is sacred will not be defiled.

Those who bless the world live their life
as a gesture of thanks
for this beauty
and this rage.

The choice to bless the world can take you into solitude
to search for the sources
of power and grace;
native wisdom, healing, and liberation.

More, the choice will draw you into community,
the endeavor shared,
the heritage passed on,
the companionship of struggle,
the importance of keeping faith,

the life of ritual and praise,
the comfort of human friendship,
the company of earth
the chorus of life welcoming you.

None of us alone can save the world.
Together—that is another possibility, waiting.





Star Island
Isles of Shoals, NH