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| **Monton Unitarian Church**  **30th August 2020**  **Celebrating with Pride**  **Welcome**  As we light our chalice, these are words from The Pride Flame, by Linda Lee Franson.  We light this flame to ignite our hearts and minds— the spark of knowledge that enlightens, the shimmering hope that burns, the blazing love that engulfs our actions, the bonfire of our commitment.  We light this flame for those who celebrate themselves, who fear, who hope, who persevere, who stand on the side of love for all.  We light this flame for those who have been ridiculed, that they may find peace; for those who have fought to marry, that they may celebrate; for those who live in uncertainty in the world, that they may have hope.  We light this flame to renew our commitment that no one shall ever again suffer for the right to love.  We light this flame to celebrate our kaleidoscope of diversity: working, loving, and living on the side of love. For this, we light this flame. |
| **Prayer – by Amy Johnson**  Spirit of Life, beyond our understanding yet closer than our breath, breathe into us your love so that we may love ourselves and others as you do.  Help heal the fear, hate, and judgment that wound so many. Help us know, deeply and certainly, that your love transcends all labels, all categories, all words.  Your love is. Your love rains down on us all. Everyone is invited to the table of life. We each bring our whole and broken parts and come together in your love,  which binds us and heals us all. Amen.  And let us sing together Spirit of Life.  Spirit of Life, come unto me,  Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion.  Blow in the wind, rise in the sea,  Move in the hand giving life the shape of justice.  Roots hold me close, wings set me free,  Spirit of Life, come to me, come to me. |
| **Reading – Mermaid  by Robert Fulgham’s**  Giants, Wizards and Dwarfs was the game to play. Being left in charge of about eighty children, seven to ten years old, while their parents were off doing parenty things, I mustered my troops in the church social hall and explained the game. It's a large-scale version of Rock, Paper, and Scissors, and involves some intellectual decision making. But the real purpose of the game is to make a lot of noise and run around chasing people until nobody knows which side you are on or who won.  Organizing a roomful of wired-up gradeschoolers into two teams, explaining the rudiments of the game, achieving consensus on group identity--all this is no mean accomplishment, but we did it with a right good will and were ready to go.  The excitement of the chase had reached a critical mass. I yelled out: "You have to decide *now* which you are--a GIANT, a WIZARD, or a DWARF!"  While the groups huddled in frenzied, whispered consultation, a tug came at my pants leg. A small child stands there looking up, and asks in a small, concerned voice, "Where do the Mermaids stand?"  Where do the Mermaids stand?  A long pause. A *very* long pause. "Where do the Mermaids stand?" says I. "Yes. You see, I am a Mermaid."  "There are no such thing as Mermaids."  "Oh, yes, I am one!"  She did not relate to being a Giant, a Wizard, or a Dwarf. She knew her category. Mermaid. And was not about to leave the game and go over and stand against the wall where a loser would stand. She intended to participate, wherever Mermaids fit into the scheme of things. Without giving up dignity or identity. She took it for granted that there was a place for Mermaids and that I would know just where.  Well, where DO the Mermaids stand? All the "Mermaids"--all those who are different, who do not fit the norm and who do not accept the available boxes and pigeonholes?  Answer that question and you can build a school, a nation, or a world on it.  What was my answer at the moment? Every once in a while I say the right thing. "The Mermaid stands right here by the King of the Sea!" says I. *(Yes, right here by the King's Fool, I thought to myself.)*  So we stood there hand in hand, reviewing the troops of Wizards and Giants and Dwarfs as they roiled by in wild disarray.  It is not true, by the way, that Mermaids do not exist. I know at least one personally. I have held her hand. |
| **Sharing our music**  Make your own kind of music – sing your own special song. Those were the words sung by Paloma Faith in her beautiful song of celebrating identity. To be able to do that – you need to know who you are. I invite you to think for a moment – if you had three words to say who you were, what would those words be? They could be emotions – timid, confident, quiet, strong, angry, scared – they could be actions – dancing, singing, walking, crafting, loving – they could be political – justice-seeker, all-inclusive – they could be relationships – parent, child, lover, loner.  Take some time – find three words (or two or four) – that describe you – either you right now, or you this week, or you this year. Whisper those words to yourself – or shout them out loud if the mood takes you! But claim them – they are your words.  These words that you have chosen describe a part of you – but not all of you. And you may not always want them to describe you – some words we are trying to escape from maybe, and other words we are yearning to be. But whatever words you are now and shall be in years to come – you are unique, you are beautiful, you are loved. Don’t ever forget that. |
| **Humanity’s Psalm – by Cynthia Frado**  This is a psalm that has featured in several of our Pride services, because it is just so perfect.  Creator of Life, Source of All Being  It was from the particles of the Universe that you formed us... Iron and carbon and phosphorous Mixed with energy, passion and dreams.  We were made in your image, says ancient Scripture. Made from the colors of the rainbow, Shaped with bones straight and curved, Padded with flesh flabby and lean, Near-sighted, far-sighted, short-sighted, and long in vision.  We were made in your image, says ancient Scripture. Made strong and tall, short and stout, Born with hands tender and fragile, Aged with hands gnarled and mature. Large nose, small nose, crooked nose Who knows the mathematical infinitude of your genetic possibilities?  We were made in your image, says ancient Scripture. Made to give love and receive love. Your passion courses through our veins. And when we touch another human being in love, It matters not what gender ignites the flame, It matters only that the fire of life brings its light to the darkened deadness of a world that cannot exist without love’s transformative power.  We were made in your image, says ancient Scripture. But who are you? We need to know. We who have eyes that are brown and blue and green and hazel. We who are intellectually gifted and mentally challenged. We who speak the languages of the world and no language at all. We who know scientific equations and musical sonatas, and know only the magic of a daily loaf of bread, and the taunting sounds of racism, and the mockery of my sexual orientation, and the lack of respect for our aging bodies. We who are all of these things and more want to know: Who are you that we are made in your image?  I am, says ancient Scripture. I simply am.  I am the Light of All-Being, I am the Divine Spark. I am the Source of Love, The most transformative power In the Universe. All life is in my image. I am in You, And you are in me. I am in your siblings. They, too, are in me. I am in your pain and suffering, And I am in your compassion and joy. I am Light and Love, And Hope and Possibility… And so are you.  Creator of All Life, Source of All Being It was from the particles of the Universe that you formed us... Iron and carbon and phosphorous Mixed with energy, passion and dreams. Forgive us. We forgot that you are everywhere. We forgot that we are everywhere. Thank you for reminding us of who we are. |
| **Reflection – This is me, this is us**  Salford Pride celebrations happened back in June – because of the pandemic, it was all online, and I missed it completely. Manchester Pride is this weekend, though, so I will have a chance to be part of their online celebration. Because Pride, and our Unitarian belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every person, is very important to me.  While there has been progress over the last 50 years in achieving equal acceptance, legal standing and social inclusion, our society, and the global society, is still a long, long way from perfect – and in some countries, sadly, we are seeing more and more discrimination, abuse and violence. There is so much work still to do to help people see that, regardless of what type of reproductive organs someone was born with, what combination of X and Y chromosomes, and what combination of clothes, hairstyles, lifestyles that person chooses to put with that, and who (and how) someone chooses to love, everyone – EVERYONE – is a beautiful, amazing, divine human being – and you can read the word divine in whatever sense you want!  There is already so much pressure to conform, to fit in, to comply with the norms, and it is so wrong, even just with general aspects of lifestyle and behaviour. But it is even more wrong when it comes to our very identity in terms of gender and sexuality – who we are at the core of our being, and who we love from the bottom of our hearts and with every inch of our bodies. It is distressing enough watching someone struggling with feeling that they cannot express their true gender identity, through clothes, or hairstyle, or pronouns, or being afraid to hold their lover’s hand in public because they are the ‘wrong’ gender – I cannot imagine how much it must hurt to be in that position. I have never experienced it myself, I imagine many of us cannot begin to think how it must feel to be so afraid of showing your true self, and it hurts to think that so many people cannot see the beauty and the wonder – that is both inside themselves, and inside each person they meet.  And that is why the welcome that we offer, the open arms that we must stretch out to everybody, are so important. Jonathan Chapman explains this so beautifully in his reflection, Widening our Welcome. He writes;  Recently, I ordered 4-foot-tall rainbow bunnies for my church. Just after I hit “order,” I wondered if we really needed them.  Later that day, one of my parishioners sent us a picture taken in front of another local church: on the lawn was an enormous banner with a picture of the Holy Family, and the message: “God’s Marriage = 1 Man + 1 Woman”  Often people ask us why my church constantly hangs banners welcoming folks — particularly the LGBTQ community. They wonder why we’re always lugging out our rainbows. This is why. Because, you see, every church says “Everyone is welcome” — but many of them make that a conditional welcome. You’re welcome, but not your relationship… or who you love. Or how you look. Or how you think, or how you believe.  Most churches don’t put up banners like the one I saw, but many aren’t far off from sharing the same sentiment.  Listen, people can think what they want and believe what they want. I don’t have to agree with everyone, and they don’t have to agree with me. But as long as there are congregations willing to limit God’s welcome, ours will work hard to widen that welcome. And as long as there are churchgoers who question the depth of God’s love, we will keep hoisting our banners and hauling open our doors that proclaim its breadth.  The truth is that we will fall short (and we do). But we keep trying. Because, you see, there are people in the world who wonder if God could really love them — if God could love them despite who they love.  And in case that’s you: Yes. There’s no “despite” about it. God could love you; God does love you. And so does this church.  Rev Cheryl M Walker once said, that our core task, in her opinion, was to tell people that they are loved – totally – unconditionally – for who they are. And she’s right – providing, of course, that telling people they are loved is aligned with actions that match that statement – in other words, providing we walk the walk, as well as talk the talk.  And so I would say, to you, to everyone, that you are beautiful, and you are loved. As in the words found in one of our local museums, which I know I’ve read to our congregation before:  Hey you!” Yes you! You’re it. You’re beautiful.  You’re the one. You happen all the time. Every second, you’re happening  From all the billions and zillions of molecules that could be something else, someone else, it’s you that was made and forged in that microscopic, infinitesimal crucible.  Unique, singular, the only one. You’re the rarest of the rarest. You’re a walking miracle of all those molecules. That means you matter. You’re actually matter.  Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise. You’re a living poem. You’re the art of matter. You living, breathing, beautiful you.  We are each powerful. We are each beautiful. It is a privilege to be us. It is a privilege to know each of all the other powerful beautiful people here. But there’s an extra thing we need to remember – we are all flawed, and fragile, and broken too. So when we approach another, in our power and beauty, we need to remember to be gentle, and understanding, and respectful. We do not know where each other’s fault-lines lie, where the tectonic plates are shifting, where that person’s very foundations may be shaking, so that the slightest word may bring the whole edifice down. It doesn’t mean we don’t speak our truth, just that we speak always with love and compassion.  And if we are strong, and beautiful, and compassionate, then through our living, we can help others realise their strength and beauty. And that would truly be a beautiful thing.  And so we say, today and everyday, clearly and loudly and gently and compassionately – you, in all your brokenness and fragility, in all your uncertainty or total conviction, in all your beauty and strangeness, in all your strength and vulnerability, in all your power and weakness, in all your courage and fear, in all your masculinity, and femininity, and neutrality, and fluidity, in all your claiming of a label, and your refusal of any labels, in all your humanity, and in all your glorious divinity – you are worthy, you are welcome, you are precious, you are loved.  **Blessing**  Blessed is the path on which you travel. Blessed is the body that carries you upon it. Blessed is your heart that has heard the call. Blessed is your mind that discerns the way. Blessed is the gift that you will receive by going.   Truly blessed is the gift that you will become on the journey. May you go forth in peace. |