

ORDER OF SERVICE

MARCH 17, 2019

CHIME

GREETING & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Jim Kitendaugh

PRELUDE

"Troubled Waters"

Polly Oliver, piano

Margaret Bonds

OPENING WORDS

The Rev. Dr. Stephanie May

We live in a world
in which hatred for a person
who has a different religion, skin color, or gender,
too often erupts into violence and harm.

As Unitarian Universalists,
we affirm that each and every person is important.
We affirm that there are many sources
of religious insight.
And we promote a vision of a world
at peace and structured by justice.

We come each week
to be reminded of the values and the vision
of the world we dream is possible.
And we come here
to be renewed—and sometimes comforted—
from the challenge and the cost
of living in a fractured and troubled world.

In our service today,
we reaffirm our commitment to justice, to peace,
and to the value that each person is important
by exploring the lives of a number
of African American women.

Our prelude was by Margaret Bonds (1913-1972),
an African American woman born more than 100 years ago.
She was the first African-American soloist
to appear with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.
I admit that I had never heard of her, have you?

Too often, our history leaves out the stories
of women, African Americans, and other marginalized persons.
May this service not only teach us
something about a few women,
but also deepen our affirmation
of the importance of the lives of
all African American women.

I lead this service not as an expert,
but with the humble awareness
that much of my knowledge *and* my ignorance
emerge from my education and location
as a white woman.

In and beyond this hour,
may we all take the risk to learn more
about those whose lives are different than our own
as we affirm the gift of
living in a world full
of difference and diversity.

*CHALICE LIGHTING & COVENANT

Oliver Chapman

The risk of saying the same thing...rote...

*With open minds and loving hearts, we gather to search for meaning,
to care for one another,
and to work together for a better world.*

***HYMN #38**

"Morning Has Broken"

Besides being Women's History month,
Today of course is St. Patrick's Day—
In honor of this, our opening hymn
is an Irish melody

TIME FOR ALL AGES

Kate Holland

Hymn #152 *"Follow the Drinking Gourd"*

Children leave for SEEK programming

*"Go now in peace. Go now in peace. May the love of all surround you,
everywhere, everywhere you may go."*

SERMON I

"Making a Way: *Billie Holiday*"

Rev. May

As you may know, "making a way out of no way"
is a popular African American phrase

that points to the creativity and tenacity
of people in the face of oppression.

In the National African American Museum of History and Culture
in Washington D.C., the phrase is used as the [title of an exhibit](#).

Using case studies, the exhibit explores
how African Americans have found

a way out of no way through education,
health, religion, business, and more.

The exhibit also illustrates a long history
of activism and resistance of making a way out of no way.

In the museum, there is also an extraordinary exhibit
of African American musicians.

Moving through this vast exhibit,

I was humbled to consider

both the many names I recognized
and the many I did not.

And so, when I began thinking about how
to celebrate Women's History Month, I decided
to focus on African American women musicians.
In the prelude, we already heard music
from composer and pianist Margaret Bonds.
And, in our Time for All Ages,
we learned about Harriet Tubman's
use of music in the Underground Railroad.

Significantly, Margaret Bond's piece we heard, "Troubled Water,"
riffs on the African American spiritual, "Wade in the Water."

As we heard in the Time for All Ages,
many spirituals, had layers of meanings.

"Wade in the Water," referenced
both the Christian practice of baptism,
as well as the need for escaping slaves
to literally wade in the water of rivers
to avoid detection by dogs
tracking their scent.

By using this spiritual as the base of her 20th century composition,
Margaret Bond honors the struggle of her ancestors
and the music they created for their resistance.

Singer Billie Holiday was a contemporary of Bonds.

Holiday also broke new ground
as one of the first African American
women to perform with white artists.

Known affectionately as "Lady Day,"
Holiday is remembered as
"the pre-eminent jazz singer of her day"

and among the most revered vocalists
of the [twentieth] century.”
Among her many hits, the anti-racism song, “Strange Fruit,”
remains an enduring part of her legacy.

In 1937, New York City teacher Abel Meeropol
wrote the lyrics of “Strange Fruit”
after seeing a photograph of two men,
Thomas Shipp and Abe Smith,
who had been lynched.
Although lynching was declining in America,
it had by no means disappeared.
Meeropol set his words to music
and began to sing it as a protest song.
The song made its way to Billie Holiday
who began to close her set with the song.
After her primary label refused to record
the controversial song,
Holiday recorded “Strange Fruit”
under the Commodore label in 1939.

When Holiday performed the song,
the lights would be dropped except for a single light
on her face to show her expression.
As the instrumental opening began,
she would close her eyes as if in a prayer.
Then, with emotion, she would begin to sing.
With a similar spirit of reverence and respect,
may we listen now to Billie Holiday’s 1939 recording.

Song: “Strange Fruit”

At the end of the song, the spotlight would go dark.
When the houselights came up, Holiday was gone.
No encore.

Instead, the audience, like us today,
would be left feeling with a swirl of emotion
and, perhaps, discomfort.

For too many African Americans,
lynching or the fear of lynching,
was their experience.

This is our history.

The legacy of lynching.

The song that would not let us forget.

In performing the song,

Holiday poured her own heartbreak and struggle
of racism, sexism, poverty, and abuse
into the emotions of the song.

While her tremendous voice

brought her widespread admiration,

she also struggled with alcohol and drug abuse.

In the end, this struggle killed her at the young age of 44.

As I consider her story,

her courage to sing out in protest of racism

and to make a way for herself

as a singer strikes me—

as does the cost she paid

in her heart and soul.

With respect and honor,

let us remember her name and her life:

Billie Holiday.

*HYMN #212 ———— "~~We Are Dancing Sarah's Circle~~"
#211 "We are Climbing Jacob's Ladder"

For our next hymn,

I would like us to sign #211, "We are Climbing Jacobs Ladder"
Rather than 212, Sarah's Circle.

It is another African American spiritual.

While it is not clear whether or not it is also
a 'coded' song of layers of meanings,
it is clear that it's a song
in tune and words that calls
from a place of pain
to the hope of something better.

Please join in singing 211, We are Climbing Jacobs Ladder

SERMON II "*Making a Way: Marian Anderson*"

On Easter Sunday of 1939,

the year Billie Holiday recorded "Strange Fruit,"
the internationally renowned contralto Marian Anderson
performed on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial
in Washington, D.C.—

the image on the cover of your order of service.
A multiracial crowd of 75,000 had gathered to hear her sing
with hundreds of thousands more listening
to a live radio transmission.

However, she was not supposed to be there.

Howard University had invited Anderson
to perform in D.C.,

but they could not accommodate
the anticipated crowd on campus.

When promoters attempted to secure

Constitution Hall as a venue,
they were turned down by
the Daughters of the American Revolution
who owned the hall.
The DAR had a "[white-artist-only clause](#)"
in every contract they issued.

Throughout the 1930's,
Marian Anderson had toured the capitals of Europe,
performing for kings and queens.
Returning to the United States,
she performed for Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt
at the White House in 1936.
After Franklin's election as president,
the DAR had granted Eleanor Roosevelt
a membership in their organization.
However, when they refused
to allow Anderson to sing at their hall,
the First Lady resigned her membership in protest.
Working behind the scenes,
both Roosevelts helped to arrange
for the Department of the Interior
to approve the concert
on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

When Anderson stepped up to the bank of microphones
on that Easter morning,
she began to sing, "My Country 'Tis of Thee."
With the massive statue of Lincoln,
the emancipator of enslaved persons,

seated behind her,
and the vast multiracial crowd before her,
these lyrics resounded powerfully.
Notably, in the second verse,
Anderson switched “of thee *I* sing”
to “of thee *we* sing.”
In an 2014 article on Anderson, [NPR reported](#):

*A quiet, humble person,
Anderson often used “we” when speaking about herself.
Years after the concert, she explained why:
“We cannot live alone,” she said.
“And the thing that made this moment possible
for you and for me, has been brought about
by many people whom we will never know.”*

While the concert that day did emerge
from the actions of many people,
none of it was possible without
the talent, hard-work, and willingness
of Marian Anderson.

When Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes
introduced Anderson on that April day, he said,
*“In this great auditorium under the sky,
all of us are free.*

Genius, like justice, is blind.

Genius draws no color lines.”

And yet, in a country that repeatedly forced Anderson
to enter performance halls by back doors (if at all!),
denied her entrance to white-only

hotels and restaurants,
and required her to sit in segregated train cars,
the color of Anderson's skin did matter
in her experience of life.

Even so, with the support of others,
Anderson made a way out of no way.

With respect and honor,
let us remember the name and life
of Marian Anderson
as we listen to a recording of her 1939 Easter Sunday
performance of "My Country Tis of Thee."

TIME OF PRAYER & MEDITATION

TOUGH WEEK...BREATH IN/OUT..2X

Prayer

Rev. May

Breathing deeply

With sun pouring through the windows
We feel the hope of spring
And the promise of the renewal of life

In a week that witnessed

More bloodshed and violence in New Zealand,
We lean upon these fragments of goodness
Even as grieve the loss of innocent lives.
We pray for the families of those who died
And were injured that they may
Feel supported in this time.

And we pray for the global Muslim community
As they face waves of Islamophobia—

We pray also for those whose pain and hate
Would have them see enemies
In those who are different.
May their hearts be changed
To see the full and equal humanity
Of those who look, worship, or love
Differently than they do.

May we all seek to be open-hearted
To others, to risk learning and loving,
As we seek to build
A world rooted in peace and justice.

Resting now in a moment of stillness,
May we remember those whose lives
Have been lost from violence and hate . . .
And those who have long resisted hate
In the name of love ...

Moment of Stillness

Sharing of our Joys and Sorrows

Roger Horine

SERMON III "Making a Way: Aretha Franklin"

In 2009, at the other end of the National Mall
from the Lincoln Memorial,
Aretha Franklin stood on the steps of the Capitol to sing,
"My Country 'Tis of Thee,"
for President Obama's historic inauguration.
The echo of Marian Anderson seventy years before was clear.

Born in 1942,
three years after Anderson's Easter Sunday performance
and Billie Holiday's recording of "Strange Fruit,"

Aretha Franklin's life and career
emerged in a different generation—
although she would still face both sexism and racism.
Nonetheless, Franklin would place
more than 100 singles on Billboard charts,
receive 18 competitive Grammys,
and be the first woman inducted into
the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

Known as “the Queen of Soul,”

Franklin's path was not straightforward.

As the daughter of a prominent Baptist preacher,
she began performing gospel as a girl and teen.

Gospel music would remain a recurrent thread
throughout her life.

However, assigned R&B and pop music

by her first label, Columbia,

these early records only hint at the power to come.

Recruited to Columbia by John Hammond,
the same man who years earlier had

brought Billie Holiday to the label,

Hammond [later said](#) of Franklin:

*“I cherish the albums we made together,
but Columbia was a white company
who misunderstood her genius.”*

Although a new label allowed her voice

as the Queen of Soul to emerge,

Franklin would struggle in her personal life—
including a difficult marriage

to Ted White who attempted

to control her life and her career
until their divorce in 1969.

Despite the challenges of her life,

Franklin just kept on singing and recording
decade after decade.

As Franklin performed—and out-performed—
younger artists, her voice seemed to defy age.

When I saw her perform in Boston in 2016,

her interactions with her younger women
back-up singers and dancers
made a big impression on me.

She seemed to delight in their youthful energy.

Far from any sense of resentment or jealousy
about her own aging body,

she seemed wistfully appreciative
of their own delight in being
young, sexy, and talented.

In this way, Franklin seemed deeply committed
to her ballad in praise of
feeling like a (natural) woman.

Franklin is also known for creating

a synthesis of gospel and secular music.

Today we're going to blend in the other direction—
bringing her secular song into our Sunday service.

The song, "I Say a Little Prayer for You,"

was written for a woman thinking
of her loved one fighting in Vietnam.

First recorded by African American singer Dionne Warwick,

Franklin brought her own soulful rendition
to the song a year later.
[As the offering is received],
let us listen to this song of love,
remembering the name and of Aretha Franklin
with honor and respect.

OFFERING

"I Say a Little Prayer"

Bert Bacharach and Hal David

arr. Michele Wait; recorded by Aretha Franklin

SERMON IV

"Making a Way: Say Her Name"

It is now 2019.

Beyoncé, Rihanna, and Alicia Keyes
are among today's top African American women singers...
with Mariah Carey's bestselling legacy
still keeping her in the mix.

Janet Jackson is being inducted into the
Rock & Roll Hall of Fame this year.

There are so many more names present and past
who could be remembered and honored today.

In a society shaped by both racism and sexism,
African American women too often face harm and injustice.

As persons committed to a better world,
it is important to acknowledge and deepen
our understanding of these dynamics.

However, I think is just as important
to recognize the many ways African American women
have actively resisted injustice,
created opportunities,

and made a way out of no way
for themselves, their families,
and their community.

When I walked through the
National African American Museum of History and Culture
in D.C., I was confronted
with all I did not know
about black history and culture.

If we do not know the stories
of resistance,
of achievement,
of success,
then I fear we may fail
to understand the full story.

Whatever our racial identity,
it is important that we know not only the stories
of oppression, but also
the courage, tenacity, and hard work
of those who have resisted
and made a way out of no way.

Knowing such stories may shift
not only our knowledge of the past,
but also our perceptions of the present.

We will never know **all** the names of those who have struggled
and those who have succeeded in making their way.
And, we must also remember
that some black women have lost
their struggle against racism and sexism.

The hashtag “say her name” emerged on social media
after Sandra Bland, an African American woman,
was arrested in a traffic stop,
then found dead in her jail cell three days later.
To “say her name” is to show respect
for the worth and dignity of her life.
To “say her name” is to say that her life matters,
that the lives of black women matter.

Living at the intersection of racism and sexism,
African American women have too often been erased.
May we learn more of their stories.
May we say their names.

So may it be. Amen.

***HYMN #1040**

“Hush”

(on the last verse, please turn toward rear doors for the benediction)

***BENEDICTION**

Rev. May

***CHORAL RESPONSE “Reprise: I Say a Little Prayer”**

POSTLUDE

Recorded Selections

**Please rise in body or in spirit.*