

## ORDER OF SERVICE

NOVEMBER 13, 2022

|                                |  |  |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| CHIME                          |  |  |
| WELCOME                        |  | Deb Stubeda  |
| PRELUDE                        | <b>"Serenade in A"</b><br><i>Alexander Zemlinsky</i>   | Mike Leonard, saxophone<br>Polly Oliver, piano                     |
| OPENING WORDS                  |  | Alyssa Lee, Ministerial Intern                                     |
| LIGHTING OF CHALICE & COVENANT |  | Cullen Family  |
|                                | <i>With open minds and loving hearts, we gather to search for meaning,<br/>to care for one another, and to work together for a better world.</i> |  |
| HYMN #216                      | <b>"Hashiveinu"</b>  | Joan Shear, Hebrew pronunciation<br>Charlie Anderson, round leader |
| TIME FOR ALL AGES              |  | Lucy Pease   |
|                                | <i>Children leave for SEEK programming</i>   |  |
|                                | <i>"Go now in peace. Go no in peace. May the love of all surround you, everywhere, everywhere you may go."</i>                                   |  |
| ANTHEM                         | <b>"We Rise Again"</b> <sup>1</sup><br><i>Leon Dubinsky, arr. Lydia Adams</i>  | Lucy Pease, alto<br>First Parish Choir                             |
| READING                        | <i>excerpt from "Why We Are Polarized"</i><br><i>by Ezra Klein</i>   | Chris Cullen   |

The human mind is exquisitely tuned to group affiliation and group difference. It takes almost nothing for us to form a group identity, and once that happens, we naturally assume ourselves in competition with other groups. The deeper our commitment to our group becomes, the more determined we become to make sure our group wins. Making matters worse, winning is positional, not material—we often prefer outcomes that are worse for *everyone* so long as they maximize *our group's advantage* over other groups.

[Political] parties used to be scrambled, both ideologically and demographically, in ways that curbed their power as *identities* and lowered the partisan stake of politics. But these ideologically mixed parties were an unstable equilibrium reflecting America's peculiar, and often abhorrent, racial politics. The success of the civil rights movement, and its alliance with the national Democratic party, broke that equilibrium, destroyed the Dixie-crut wing of the Democratic Party, and triggered an era of party sorting.

That sorting has been *ideological*. Democrat now means liberal and Republican now means conservative in a way that wasn't true in, say, 1955. The rise in partisanship is, in part, a rational response to the rise in party difference—if the two sides hated and feared each other less fifty years ago, well, that makes sense; they were more similar fifty years ago.

But that sorting has also been *demographic*. Today, the parties are sharply split across racial,

geographic, cultural, and psychological lines. There are many, many powerful identities lurking in that list, and they are fusing together, stacking atop one another, so a conflict or threat that activates one activates all. And since these mega-identities stretch across so many aspects of our society, they are constantly being activated, and that means they are constantly being reinforced.

**HYMN #52                    "In Sweet Field of Autumn"**

**TIME FOR PRAYER AND MEDITATION**

**PRAYER**

Rev. Dr. Stephanie May

*Breathe in/out*

Spirit of Life

That animates the breath within us,  
The wind through the trees and the falling leaves,  
We rest in this moment  
Grateful for our life,  
For the living plants, animals,  
And people with whom we share  
this planet.

We pray for wisdom on how to live with others,  
For how to live equitably with those who are different,  
And for how to live sustainably within an ecosystem  
That strains and struggles in an era of climate change.

We are grateful for all those working for a more just world,  
For the global leaders who came together in Egypt this week  
In an effort to chart a collaborative course forward  
For mitigating the worse of climate change.

We are also grateful for all the poll workers, monitors,  
And most of all voters who supported a day  
Of peaceful voting in our nation this week.

As we face so many issues and ideas that divide us,  
May we also listen for the ways that  
we remain connected across our differences.

Amidst the conflict,  
We pray for our leaders and ourselves  
To create paths of peace and justice,  
Compassion and equity  
In our shared world.

Resting now in a moment of stillness,  
Please silently pray for your own hopes for our shared future...

**MOMENT OF STILLNESS**

**JOYS AND SORROWS**

Erik Felton

**OFFERING**

Rev. Dr. May

Give online <https://www.uuwayland.org/donate>;

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**OFFERTORY "Much Ado About Nothing"**

Mike Leonard, saxophone

*Erich Wolfgang Korngold*

Polly Oliver, piano

**SERMON**

**"We the People"**

Rev. Dr. May

I am an American.

I am a daughter, sister, and mom.

I am college educated.

I am a cisgender woman,

which is to say I identify with the gender of female

assigned me at birth.

I am straight.

I am white.

I drink lattes with oat milk.

I shop at Whole Foods.

I am liberal.

And I drive a red Chevy pickup.

And you? What are your identities?

As people, it is normal to claim particular identities,

to feel affinity for people with similar identities,

and even to sort ourselves into groups

of shared identities.

These identities can be assigned to us by fate

or chosen by our preferences.

They can be shallow—true perhaps,  
but not central to our sense of who we are—  
or they can be deeply rooted  
by cultural or emotional connections  
that strongly motivate  
our actions and responses.

In Ezra Klein's early 2020 book, *Why We're Polarized*,  
he argues that voters are sorted into polarized parties  
using what he calls "mega-identities."  
To explain the idea of "mega-identity,"  
Klein points to a 2004 ad by a conservative interest group  
against then presidential candidate, Howard Dean.  
Klein writes:

*In the ad, an older white couple is stopped outside a shop  
with patriotic bunting and asked about  
Dean's plan to raise taxes.*

*"What do I think?" the man replies.*

*"Well, I think Howard Dean should take his  
tax-hiking, government-expanding, latte-drinking,  
sushi-eating, Volvo-driving,  
New York Times-reading—"*

*Then his wife cuts in:*

*"Body-piercing, Hollywood-loving,  
left-wing freak show back to Vermont,  
where it belongs."*

*And that, my friends, is pure, uncut*

*mega-identity politics.*

Layer upon layer of identities stack upon one another  
to become a mega-identity.

We associate choice of coffee (Starbucks or Dunkin'?)  
with choice of food (burgers or sushi?)  
with what someone drives (Prius or pickup?).

We assume people that identify as members of this group  
would never do x, y, or z.

Or expect people that do a, b, or c  
to also identify as part of this group  
rather than that group.

We've sorted people not only into boxes,  
but boxes big enough to contain  
a whole cluster of identities.

According to Klein, political parties were not always so polarized,  
nor were they always so sorted by mega-identities.

Indeed, in 1950, the American Political Science Assn  
released a massive report warning  
that there was too much diversity  
within each party and  
no real choice between the parties.

Each party had a range of liberal and conservative  
points of view within the party that meant  
belonging to one party or the other  
did not automatically define you  
in any one way.

Concerned about these muddled parties,  
the report called for parties to have more

internal unity of position as well as  
clear difference from the other party.  
In other words, they needed more polarization.

*Be careful what you wish for!?!*

While Klein certainly has concerns about the many ways  
the media, political fundraising, and more  
reinforce polarization,  
he doesn't entirely dismiss polarization  
as a problem on its own.

In his concluding chapter, Klein explains,

*"In a multiparty system,  
polarization is sometimes required  
for our political disagreements to express themselves.  
The alternative to polarization  
often isn't consensus but suppression.  
We don't argue over the problems we don't discuss.  
But we don't solve them, either."*

Sometimes we need to be clear about the differences we hold  
in order to tackle the challenges we face.

The differences we hold are real.

For one, they reflect our responses  
to shifting demographics and to social changes  
that are creating a more racially, culturally,  
and religiously diverse nation.

Changes that are not going away  
but will demand political answers

of who will hold power  
and whose grievances will be heard.  
And so, the question, Klein suggests,  
is not how to reverse polarization  
to some idealized former era,  
but rather how to reform the political system  
to be able to function amidst polarization.

Klein offers suggestions for reforms to the political system,  
but this is a sermon, not in fact  
an essay on political parties.

Rather than further delve into Klein's book,  
I want to tell you about my experience  
on Election Day in Pennsylvania  
as a liberal minister.

Firstly, I want to thank everyone who expressed support  
for my work on Election Day.

And I want to give a shout out to all the members  
of this congregation who also  
worked the polls or as poll monitors.

Supporting the democratic process  
is part of our principles as Unitarian Universalists.

Like many of you, I have been fearful  
that our democratic institutions are under threat.  
Unfortunately, efforts to suppress the voices of some,  
particularly black and brown voices,  
is nothing new in our nation.

Volunteering as a non-partisan presence  
to support peaceful voting was an easy choice—  
not only as an American citizen and voter,  
but also as liberal, UU clergy.

I was assigned to Berks County, Pennsylvania  
in partnership with another clergy person.

Most of the day, we stayed in Reading,  
the city you may know from its rail line  
in the game of *Monopoly*.

Today Reading is a majority minority city  
with about 80% identifying as non-white or mixed race.

The polling locations we visited reflected  
these demographics in both the poll workers  
and the voters.

In these locations, I was warmly welcomed  
in my collared clergy shirt  
and bright yellow “Safety Squad” sweatshirt  
from the organizers of the  
“Election Defenders” project.

In one location, I helped put up “Vote Here” yard signs  
in English and Spanish.

In another location, I noticed they did not have  
any yard signs.

Returning to the first site,  
they happily said I could bring some  
of their extra signs to the other location.

I answered parking questions of voters  
and helped a visually impaired woman



to the door of her location.

There were no lines.

All was peaceful and, quite frankly,  
a bit dull in the very best way!

Then we received a request from Election Defenders  
to check on a polling location outside of the city  
in a more rural area  
following a voter complaint  
of an intimidating electioneer.

As with the urban locations,

I first walked into the polling room  
to quickly identify myself to the person in charge  
before moving back outside.

However, as I approached, she met me with

a gently sarcastic, "The Safety Squad is here."  
After identifying myself and our work  
to insure peaceful access to voting,  
she assured me that there had been no issues.

As I lingered outside,

I chatted first with a respectful electioneer  
who was standing to the side of the walkway  
and offering pamphlets with an ask  
to consider her preferred candidate.

She mentioned that another electioneer

had left for a bit to feed his dog.

When he returned in his red Chevy pickup,  
I started the conversation there.

As we chatted about trucks,  
he stood on the walkway to the building,  
halving the access to the building for voters  
and rather insistently handing pamphlets  
to people.

I strongly suspect he was the source of the initial complaint.

Suggesting he might stand to the side  
to make more space for voters,  
I was simply ignored.

And soon the head of the polling location  
was beckoning me over to tell me that  
she had called in about me,  
learned I had no official role,  
and that I needed to stop talking to voters.

In short, I was the problem.

I was identified as a source of voter intimidation.

Now, first of all, I'm still a "good girl"  
who does not like being told I'm doing something *wrong*.  
Nor am I someone who likes to be told to shut up.  
As you might imagine, a slew of emotions  
began to churn within me.

I took my cue,  
spoke briefly to the two electioneers,  
and left.

What made this location such a different experience?

Here is where Klein's book comes in.

I would suggest that I was not seen  
as non-partisan in either space.

In the city, I was identified as an ally  
for the coalition of minority voters.

In the rural, predominantly white location,  
I was identified as a threat,  
or, at the very least, as  
an agitating outsider.

And yet, I truly wanted to be non-partisan.

Yes, of course, I have political opinions and vote accordingly.

However, on that day and here today in this pulpit,  
my commitment and deeper value  
is to the importance of democracy  
as an expression of my religious faith.

When I think about the various threads

in my religious journey that led me to Unitarian Universalism,  
there are two on the foreground today.

One is the freedom of conscience,  
the freedom to choose according to my values  
without coercion or the threat of violence.

The other is universalism,  
the radical notion that all lives are worthy  
of love and inclusion.

Together, these fueled my desire to drive to Pennsylvania,  
risk the possibility of harm,  
and to do what I could  
to insure all people had the experience

of voting peaceably without intimidation.

I am glad I went *and*

I am deeply grieved by the experience  
of polarized partisanship even in this work.

Klein's work helps frame my experience  
by underscoring the larger context  
of our current polarization.

We are in the midst of major social change,  
especially regarding the shift of demographics  
of power away from a white majority  
that has long been dominant.

Because I *am* a universalist  
and believe in the worth and dignity of every person,  
I am in the fight for a multi-racial,  
religiously plural,  
diverse and equitable nation.

I am *not* interested in suppressing the voices  
of non-Christians or of People of Color  
to preserve power for a white, Christian minority.

I *disagree* with those who believe otherwise  
and if this sorts us into two camps,  
then I accept that reality.

Sometimes encountering difference  
means being clear and open about our disagreements.

As Klein says, "We don't argue over the problems  
we don't discuss.

But we don't solve them, either."

We are living in a partisan world

where political affiliation has become an identity  
that pulls us farther apart from others.

Sometimes for good reason.

We may not like conflict

or being told we are wrong by another,

but we may in fact disagree

on some very significant issues.

Even so, I like to think that there is still freedom  
to mix up our identities.

To be a Republican and an environmentalist—

like Governor Charlie Baker.

Or to be a Democrat and prefer Dunkin' coffee.

Or, like me, to be a liberal

who drives a red Chevy pickup rather than a Prius.

Resisting the pull of these mega-identities

to sort us not only by party affiliation

but also by coffee preference

might help blunt

some of the polarizing forces.

Paying attention to the ways we are not divide—

or need not be—might help

to retain some of what binds us together

as a nation.

The U.S. Constitution begins with the words,

“We the people.”

That *we* has always been a mix

of opinions and identities.

That *we* has also lionized inclusion

while suppressing voices.

Nearly 250 years into our experiment with democracy,

the people of the United States

are still striving towards “a more perfect union”

as we wrestle with how to define

that “we” today.

As each of us participates in this struggle,

my hope is that we hold fast to both

the power of individual conscience

that resists polarizing mega-identities

*and* to the Universalist affirmation  
of the worth and dignity of every person,  
which, I believe, calls for  
a multi-racial, religiously plural,  
diverse and equitable nation.

In our changing world,  
we will disagree with some.

Even so, perhaps we might resist  
the urge to demonize those in the “other” group  
by holding fast to the common  
humanity and dignity  
that connects us all,  
even when we disagree.

So may it be. Amen.

**HYMN #168**                    **“One More Step”**

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

**BENEDICTION**

Rev. Dr. May

**CHORAL RESPONSE**    **“We Rise Again”**, reprise

**POSTLUDE**    **“Finlandia”**    Polly Oliver, piano  
*Jean Sebelius*

