

"The Day the War Came Home"
Worship Service Commemorating
The Fiftieth Anniversary of
The Shooting at Kent State University
The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Wayne County
May 3, 2020
The Rev. Jennie Barrington, Interim Minister
Tim Breiner, Guest Reader
Sharon Delgadillo, Pianist and Music Director

Prelude "When I Breathe In," by Sarah Dan Jones [recording]

Chalice Lighting: By the Rev. Lisa Doege

"Why a flaming chalice?" the question comes.
It's the cup of life, we answer.
A cup of blessings overflowing.
A cup of water to quench our spirits' thirst.
A cup of wine for celebration and dedication.
The flame of truth.
The fire of purification.
Oil for anointing, healing.
Out of chaos, fear, and horror,
thus was the symbol crafted, a generation ago.
So may it be for us,
in these days of uncertainty, sorrow, and rage.
And a light to warm our souls and guide us home.

Opening Words: By the Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker

[Rev. Jennie]

In the midst of a world
marked by tragedy and beauty

there must be those
who bear witness against unnecessary destruction
and who, with faith, rise and lead in freedom,
with grace and power.

There must be those who
speak honestly and do not avoid seeing
what must be seen of sorrow and outrage,
or tenderness, and wonder.

There must be those whose grief troubles the water
while their voices sing and speak refreshed worlds.

There must be those
whose exuberance rises with lovely energy
that articulates earth's joys...

There must be those
who gather with the congregation
of remembrance and compassion
draw water from old wells,
and walk the simple path
of love for neighbor.

And, There must be communities of people
who seek to do justice
love kindness and walk humbly with God,
who call on the strength of soul-force to heal,
transform, and bless life.
There must be religious witness.

Sharing of Joys and Concerns

Offering

Our commitment to this community is spiritual in its essence. Yet we are physical beings, also. Our bodies and our minds require the support of our finances and our skills, to make this a place of growth, practice, and nurture. People contribute financially to our Fellowship in a variety of ways. At this time, we encourage you to mail a check to the Fellowship, or to go to the Fellowship's website, under the "Support" and "Donate" tabs, and consider making a donation. In grateful appreciation of our shared hopes and dreams, the morning offering will now be honored and observed.

[Rev. Jennie]: "Our special music this morning is Neil Young's, 'Ohio,' performed by the Toronto band called, "The Birds of Bellwoods."

Commemorative Photographs

Rev. Jennie: Remarks on the commemorative photographs:

- This is what it looked like that day on the Kent State campus, a few minutes before the unarmed students were shot;
- This is the photograph which was so riveting to me when I was a young child. I recall seeing it in the Boston Globe. But it was also on the cover of Newsweek. At first people assumed the woman was a college student. But she was actually a 14 year old runaway from Florida. Some Kent State students had let her stay with them on campus. Her name is Mary Ann Vecchio. And the slain student she is kneeling over is Jeffrey Miller. This photograph was taken by John Paul Filo and, for it, he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize.
- These are the four students who were killed that day: William Knox

Schroeder, Allison Krause, Jeffrey Miller, and Sandra Lee Scheuer. Nine other students were wounded.

- This photograph is from Denise Bostdorff. This is the original memorial to the four students who were killed. Coincidentally, three of the four were Jewish. This monument was given by Bnai Brith Hillel. Denise said that, for a very long time, it was the only memorial to the slain students on campus.
- This is a sculpture on the Kent State campus by Don Drumm. [Next slide please.] During the shootings fifty years ago, a bullet damaged the sculpture. The Administration of Kent State asked Don Drumm to fix the sculpture and get rid of the bullet hole. Don Drumm refused to repair it.
- This "Ohio Historical Marker" was placed on the campus of Kent State in 2007. It has writing on both sides. This side begins by stating that the student unrest on the campus that weekend was a protest of President Richard Nixon's declaration on April 30th that the United States would invade Cambodia. [Next slide, please.]
- This is the other side of the historical marker which ends with the conclusion of the Report of the President's Commission on Campus Unrest that the shootings were: "unnecessary, unwarranted, and inexcusable." In January of 2017, the site of the May 4th shootings received designation as a National Historic Landmark. [Next slide, please.]
- This photo is also from Denise; it is the Visitor's Center on the Kent State campus which is part of preserving the history of that day and time fifty years ago. Denise said that, for a lot of years, the university's administration did not want to talk about the shooting, and did not want to do anything about it. The Visitor's Center was finally opened in October of 2012. Denise said that, while small, opening it was a big step forward. [Next slide.]
- This is one of four memorials in the parking lot for the students who died. [Next slide, please.]
- Denise and Dan took this photograph a year ago in April. It is the memorial of the May 4th shootings. Denise offers the daffodils to us as a visual form of hope and renewal.

Rev. Jennie: Our guest reader, Tim Breiner, will share with us our first reading which is by Canadian poet Gary Geddes, called, "Sandra Lee Scheuer."

First Reading: "Sandra Lee Scheuer," by Gary Geddes [From, *The Acid Test*, 1980]

(Killed at Kent State University, May 4, 1970 by the Ohio National Guard)

'You might have met her on a Saturday night,
cutting precise circles, clockwise, at the Moon-Glo
Roller Rink, or walking with quick step

between the campus and a green two-storey house,
where the room was always tidy, the bed made,
the books in confraternity on the shelves.

She did not throw stones, major in philosophy
or set fire to buildings, though acquaintances say
she hated war, had heard of Cambodia.

In truth she wore a modicum of make-up, a brassiere,
and could no doubt more easily have married a guardsman
than cursed or put a flower in his rifle barrel.

While the armouries burned, she studied,
bent low over notes, speech therapy books, pages
open at sections on impairment, physiology.

And while they milled and shouted on the commons,
she helped a boy named Billy with his lisp, saying
Hiss, Billy, like a snake. That's it, SSSSSSSS,

tongue well up and back behind your teeth.
Now buzz, Billy, like a bee. Feel the air
vibrating in my windpipe as I breathe?

As she walked in sunlight through the parking-lot
at noon, feeling the world a passing lovely place,
a young guardsman, who had his sights on her,

was going down on one knee, as if he might propose.
His declaration, unmistakable, articulate,
flowered within her, passed through her neck,

severed her trachea, taking her breath away.
Now who will burn the midnight oil for Billy,
ensure the perilous freedom of his speech;

and who will see her skating at the Moon-Glo
Roller Rink, the eight small wooden wheels
making their countless revolutions on the floor?

Second Reading: from the essay, "Power of the Powerless," by Vaclav Havel
[Read by Rev. Jennie]

The singular, explosive, incalculable political power of living within the truth resides in the fact that living openly within the truth has an ally, invisible, to be sure, but omnipresent: this hidden sphere. It is from this sphere that life lived openly in the truth grows; it is to this sphere that it speaks, and in it that it finds understanding. This is where the potential for communication exists.....

The hidden movements it gives rise to there, however, can issue forth... in something visible: a real political act or event, a social movement, a sudden explosion of civil unrest, a sharp conflict inside an apparently monolithic power structure, or simply an irrepressible transformation in the social and intellectual climate.....

When I speak of living within the truth, I naturally do not have in mind only products of conceptual thought, such as a protest or a letter written by a group of

intellectuals. It can be any means by which a person or a group revolts against manipulation: anything from a letter by intellectuals, to a workers strike, from a rock concert to a student demonstration, from refusing to vote in the farcical elections, to making an open speech at some official congress, or even a hunger strike, for instance.....

The Prague Spring is usually understood as a clash between two groups on the level of real power: those who wanted to maintain the system as it was, and those who wanted to reform it. It is frequently forgotten, however, that this encounter was merely the final act and the inevitable consequence of a long drama originally played out chiefly in the theatre of the spirit and the conscience of society. And that somewhere at the beginning of this drama, there were individuals who were willing to live within the truth, even when things were at their worst. These people had no access to real power, nor did they aspire to it. The sphere in which they were living the truth was not necessarily even that of political thought. They could equally have been poets, painters, musicians, or simply ordinary citizens who were able to maintain their human dignity. Today, it is naturally difficult to pinpoint when and through which hidden, winding channel a certain action or attitude influenced a given milieu, and to trace the virus of truth as it slowly spread through the tissue of the life of lies, gradually causing it to disintegrate. One thing, however, seems clear: the attempt at political reform was not the cause of society's reawakening, but rather [the attempt at political reform was] the final outcome of that reawakening.

[Rev Jennie: Our third reading, read by Tim Breiner, is from the novel for young readers by W.F. Reed, called, Kent State - Andy and Mark and the Time Machine.]

The bearded guy in the worn army jacket stood up.

“John,” he began, looking at the ROTC man, “that’s a fine theory you’ve got there. And maybe you’re right. Maybe if the U.S. pulled out the troops tomorrow, Vietnam would fall, and thirty years from now Comrade Lenin’s picture will be here in this dining commons.”

“And, Julie,” he continued, “South Vietnam’s government is corrupt, and maybe we’re exploiting the people and forcing our will upon them, and we should just stop.” He looked around at the whole table as he continued. “Those are nice ideas. But they don’t address the reality of the situation.” He paused to make sure he had our full attention.

“We, the American people, simply don’t have the will to win this war..... It’s not that we’re weak. I’m not saying that at all. It’s just that most of us don’t buy it. This isn’t the same type of war our fathers fought. Back then, Hitler, Mussolini, and Hirohito were running amok and threatening everyone’s freedom. Ho Chi Minh is no such thing. He’s not going to land on Long Island, [nor] invade California, or bomb Pearl Harbor. We can’t win because we can’t rally ourselves to commit our full energy to this fight. We can’t rally because we know that a communist Vietnam is no threat to America.

“We’ve been escalating this war for nearly a decade and the Communists can still hold us off because they are fighting invaders. Before us, the French tried to beat them and failed. At least they had the good sense to get out. I want to do the same, to stop the killing and end the war now! It’s a waste of men and resources. It’s tearing the country apart, and it’s a lost cause!” He slammed his fist down on the table as he made his last point.

Sermon: “The Day the War Came Home”

[Rev. Jennie]

In the novel for young readers that Tim Breiner read to us from this morning, Andy Royce, Mark Walton, and their adventurous friend, Amy, are teenagers in contemporary times in suburban Boston. What is fantastical about them is that Andy and his father have built a time machine, and Mark, Amy, and even Andy’s mother, are in on the secret. The novel’s author, W.F. Reed, vividly recalls the events on the Kent State campus when he was a young adult, fifty years ago. In his novel, he passionately tries, and he achieves, honest evocation of the events and emotions of that period of days which left our nation violated

and changed, and which also compelled so many people to discern how we can live better than that-- indeed, how we can dwell together in peace.

In the novel, Andy and Mark's friend, Amy, has a report to research and write, on an aspect of contemporary American history. Secretly, she decides to use the time machine to go back in time to the campus of Kent State, shortly before the shooting began on May 4th. When Andy and Mark suspect what she has done, they do some of their own research about that shooting. And they read that ten young people were wounded, rather than nine. Andy and Mark then go back in time themselves, desperately trying to find Amy, back in Kent in 1970, to save her from being shot, and to bring her safely back home to the twenty-first century. I will leave it to you to discover whether or not they are successful in their noble mission. I bought the novel through Amazon, in March. During this time of the coronavirus, when I cannot go to a bookstore nor a library, the ordering and arrival of my copy of the book felt a bit like time travel in its own way. And in these past several weeks, the earnest journey of this novel's author and characters, toward understanding, reconciliation, and healing, has been a comfort to me, and a source of hope. They have tried to understand the events that led up to the shooting, and what it was like to be in all of those people's shoes, and how we can be a bigger person than to simply find some people to blame, and stop our contemplation there. That the people of this novel care so much is what has been so heartening to me.

In the fifty years since that day, so many people have cared enough to express their protest at the injustice, despite the obstacles that have been put up in attempts to prevent those expressions. And even still today, so many people still care, and are continuing to, "inquire, learn, and reflect," as the engraving on the memorial plaza's stone threshold implores us to do.

Many of those people are my Unitarian Universalist minister colleagues. We have a list called the UU ministers' chat. Several weeks ago, I wrote a post saying that on May 3rd, I would be preaching about the shootings at Kent State, since it is the 50th anniversary, and since I am in Ohio now. I asked if anyone else would be doing so, and asked for their suggestions for the sermon and service. I did not expect much in reply. But to my grateful surprise, there was an outpouring of support and encouragement. Ministers posted information, resources, and testimonials. Two colleagues who are friends of mine were moved to each write an essay, which they have submitted for publication by the University of Chicago Divinity School. One is the Rev. Gordon Gibson, who founded the Living Legacy

tour, to continue to teach newer generations about the history of the Civil Rights Movement in the South. He wrote about the killing by police of two black students at Jackson State, Phillip Lafayette Gibbs and James Earl Green, ten days after the Kent State shootings. And the other is the Rev. Barbara Child, who I became friends with in 2010. Barbara was an English professor at Kent State on May 4th, 1970. She has recommended books and other resources for me to read. And she speaks publically of the trauma of that day, and the confusingly inadequate outcomes of efforts, in the following years, to seek truth and justice for those who were killed or harmed. I saw Barbara last November, and I told her that on May 3rd, I was going to preach about Kent State. She thanked me, and said that she hoped that many clergy would do so. But she added that she further hoped that they would not do so in a way that sidestepped the fact that that tragedy was political. "How could people commemorate the shootings as if they were not political? [I asked myself] The students were gathered to protest. Richard Nixon, having promised, in order to get reelected, to end the war in Vietnam, then announced, on April 30th, that the United States would be invading neutral Cambodia. The students were protesting a war that was unjust and unauthorized." I said to Barbara, "Well, I will be addressing the ways the shootings were political. I promise you," I said.

Another person who still cares deeply about the shootings at Kent State is my brother, David. Since he is older than I am, I often ask him about national events from when we were young, which he has a clearer memory of. I called him up and asked him what he would emphasize. He said, "You have to look at the experience of the National Guardsmen. Many of them were the same age as the students were. They did not have the training, experience, nor leadership to handle that conflict on the campus. They were put in a position that was unfair. You have to try to present what it was also like for the guardsmen, because the college students are easier to sympathize with now. It was a tragedy on both sides," my brother said. In looking into what the National guardsmen experienced that weekend, I can see that my brother was right. They had just come from trying to keep order during a truckers' strike in Richfield, Ohio, which was violent. The guardsmen were exhausted. They had hardly eaten nor slept. And there was rioting in the streets of Kent on Friday and Saturday. Their equipment and uniforms were outdated and ill-fitting. There were helicopters flying over the students' dorms. Tear gas and projectiles were being thrown back and forth. Ohio's then governor, James Rhodes, was saying incendiary things against the college students publically. When conflict between two groups is that high, there is no short and simple way to reverse or quell it. Many of the college students and

guardsmen had become polarized, and blind to things they actually had in common. In an anonymous letter published the following summer in the Akron Beacon Journal, a guardsman wrote:

"Guardsmen are no more than a representative cross-section of the society in which they live. We share the same prejudices, resentments, life styles, philosophies, neuroses, and politics as our non-uniformed peers. We are minimally trained in military proficiency and virtually untrained in the discipline and personal restraint so necessary for critical civil duty. Guardsmen share one common denominator-- We have successfully avoided real military duty-- and the wearing of a Guard uniform does not insure rational action any more than the wearing of bell bottoms, beads, and peace buttons insures irrational action. [He went on to write] I sincerely hope that our sword of 'justice' is not single-edged, operating only on behalf of the State, and that the American Civil Liberties Union is successful in pursuing the truth. For only when armed with the truth can we hope to avoid future Kent States and Jackson States." [end of quote]

I also listened to and read the transcript of an anonymous National guardsman's oral history in Kent State's special collections and archives. He was on the campus that day, behind the line of soldiers who shot the students. I learned that if the guardsmen talked back to their commanding officers, or even if their hair was too long, or they had missed too many drills, they received "unsats," which meant "unsatisfactories." If one of them had five unsatisfactories, they would be sent to active duty, in Vietnam, where soldiers had already died, and where they could die. As I have looked back into this explosive period in our nation in the 1970s, I kept hearing and reading people saying, "Peace! We want peace!" For them, "peace" was not a platitude. Their friends, family, and neighbors had died and more were in danger of dying. The polarization and conflict were higher than they had been in decades. But that milieu also gave our predecessors a sense of purpose, increasingly, as more and more of them could no longer, in good conscience, stay silent on the sidelines.

The person closest to home who still cares so much about the Kent State shootings is our own Denise Bostdorff, Professor and Chair of the Department of Communication Studies at the College of Wooster, who has taught their first year seminar in critical inquiry on the Rhetoric and History of the Vietnam War. I called her a few weeks ago, we talked for a long time, she sent me photographs and other resources, and my remarks this morning are greatly enriched by her knowledge and insights. When I told her I was going to preach about the Kent

State shootings, I asked her what she would most emphasize. The first thing she said was, "human beings' tendency to demonize groups of people." I appreciate that insight so much, in what we can apply from it to how we live our lives as Unitarian Universalists. I have been a Unitarian Universalist my whole life. And I think that our biggest growing edge has been categorizing groups of people as though they are unilaterally not "one of us" or "on our team;" as though there would be nothing we could learn from them. And I think that Unitarian Universalists are at our best when we look to the larger context of an event, and look below the surface of initial appearances, and when we do not separate people into superficial categories. We are at our best when we look at how our lives could be richer if we listen to and learn from people we think we have nothing in common with.

Denise also said that sometimes people ask why the students at Kent State organized in such large numbers to protest the war. She said that those students grew up with labor unions, they stood on picket lines with their parents and families, they learned from early in their lives about protesting. I imagine that many of those students were also aware of the unrest in Czechoslovakia and the Prague Spring of 1968. Vaclav Havel writes about that attempt at political reform in his essay, "Power of the Powerless." In a time in our nation when vulnerable and marginalized people have been persecuted, deported, or left to suffer or die, I have frequently looked to the writings of Vaclav Havel. And each time I look, his refrain comes back to me so clearly: We must speak the truth, and live within the truth, even when we will not see the results of our having done so in our lifetime. To Havel, that which is true, when we are in a milieu of lies and manipulation, is still a real, if invisible thing. He is asking us to stretch our imaginations. He is asking us to live as if all others who are or have previously been speaking the truth do, collaboratively, bring the ways of the world around toward greater truth and justice. And he says that those who live in the truth can be "poets, painters, musicians, or simply ordinary citizens who are able to maintain their human dignity." How, then, do we follow that higher call of his? The answer is right under our noses, here in Ohio, in the engraving on the memorial on the campus of Kent State: "Inquire, Learn, and Reflect," those who hallow the memory of all who were killed or harmed that day implore us. And our journeys to inquire, learn, and reflect are always richer when we undertake them collaboratively together.

During these several months when I've been serving as your interim minister, I have wanted to go to the campus of Kent State, to see the memorials in person; to inquire, learn, and reflect; and to say a prayer, for everyone who was

an actual or honorary Ohioan then, and for all of us who are Ohio, now. I even wrote it in my datebook several times: figure out a day to go up to Kent State. But then the coronavirus hit, and the governor imposed shelter in place orders and travel restrictions, orders and restrictions which I respect and appreciate. I still really wanted to go up to the KSU campus anyway. But I discerned instead that, after the orders and restrictions are lifted, and it is safe to do so, what I want is for us to go up there together. We could go to the memorials and the visitor's center; we could talk while we are there, and for a long time afterward. Together, we could discuss what that tragedy, fifty years ago, still has to say to us today, and we could envision how we can work for an end to war, and for conflict resolution, mediation, reconciliation, healing, and peace. That National guardsman I quoted earlier followed a call to become a mediator for labor relations and workers rights. And the commemoration that was to take place tomorrow at Kent State had been planned, for the first time, by a collaboration of students, teachers, administrators, and survivors. Our efforts to create peace in our world, our nation, and our Buckeye state, are richer and more enriching when we undertake them together. When our present time of anxiety and insecurity has passed, let us go up to Kent. On that new day, I will say again this prayer I lift up today:

Spirit of Life and Love, of Healing and Reconciliation,

Please know the good intentions within each of us, and please harken to our dreams for inclusiveness, understanding, and justice for all.

This is a time in our nation when people are divided into so many disparate categories, grouped under distinctly different labels. May we be the people who continue to believe that the individuals in these groups can achieve understanding with each other.

May we remember that this is not the only time in our history when our nation has been in heated conflict. And yet our nation has survived, mended, and healed, before, and we can do so again. Help us to hold fast to our faith in that America. Though it can be so hard to see it through the fog of warring factions, that America is here, now. People who are working for peace, unity, and equal rights are still here, too. They always have been, they always will be, and liberal and progressive congregations and organizations are all part of a movement toward a more fair, unified, and compassionate world.

As we continue to hold out this vision of a more united and loving America, may we remember that we are not alone, that we are stronger together, and that we need one another for solace, support, and inspiration. With thanks for That Greater Love that surrounds us all our days we say, Amen.

Let us sing. Our closing song is called, 'Give Light,' by the group, 'Magpie.' We invite you to please sing along as Sharon leads us.

Closing words by Sandy Dahl

[Rev. Jennie]

"Even the smallest act of service, the simplest act of kindness, is a way to honor those we lost...." "If we learn nothing else from this tragedy, we learn that life is short and there is no time for hate."

Postlude "The Times They are A' Changing," by Bob Dylan

[CHIME]

[Virtual Coffee Hour]