



JOURNEY

The life of a congregation is a rich community tapestry of people, programs, ministries and worship. We lift up the patterns of this tapestry at Unity Church with the threads of monthly themes woven through our worship and programming. These themes deepen our understanding of our own faith and strengthen our bonds with one another in religious community.

Journey is a word we often use for challenging times when outcomes or even the path toward them is unknown. At its most basic, the dictionary defines it as “an act of traveling from one place to another.” It adds that a journey can also be, “a long and often difficult process of personal change and development.” So we sometimes use the word journey to describe everything from the experience of living with a difficult medical diagnosis, to our lifelong paths seeking spiritual growth, to the challenging passage toward justice in the world.

But the word’s origins point toward something more immediate. Our English word “journey” derives from the French word *ournée*, meaning “day.” In its earliest English usage, journey meant a day’s travel or a day’s work. Which is all we can really take on when the destination is unknown and the route to get there is uncertain. We learn to live and travel and work one day at a time.

Lao Tzu said several millennia ago, “The journey of a thousand miles begins beneath your feet.” Here. Now. Wherever you are, today. It is the only place for any journey to begin. From the ground beneath your feet. Or one might say, the ground of being, which in theology is another name for God or the sacred seed within us all.

In the uncertainties of this time of both pandemic and uprising, we are all asked to join a journey on unfamiliar paths toward unknown destinations. Not only is it a journey that can only be taken a day at a time. It also a journey that cannot be taken alone. Day by day, we are asked to begin from the sacred ground beneath our feet, recognizing that the wellbeing

of each one of us is, and always has been, intricately interwoven with the wellbeing of all of us.

It might be helpful to name, as part of the ground from which many of us begin, that the word journey also conjures up the mythic concept of the Hero’s Journey. Joseph Campbell described this as the circular quest of every human life and story, one in which the hero hears their call, sets out from home, slays the dragon, and returns transformed, bringing the elixir of all they have learned along the way. Campbell and others note that this narrative arc is found in stories from across time and culture. But for decades, feminists have been asking about the heroine’s journey and whether and how it might be different. Others have noted that the hero’s journey feeds the notion that, despite the guides and mentors encountered along the way, heroes fundamentally journey alone. As such, it sends us searching for individual heroes (or striving to become them) even on journeys where collective heroism might more likely be what is needed.

In the journeys of this time, we are experiencing and witnessing many stories of collective heroism. From mask makers and wearers, to collective actions dismantling systemic racial violence, we are living into a new journey guided by collective consciousness and action. We must find a way together. Although we are each, of necessity, starting from a different particular “here and now” (and it is important to notice and name that), the larger Here and Now that we share asks us to journey together. To notice both where we are individually and where we are collectively. And to

ask how we might travel together to where we want and need to be. We are learning again, as Martin Luther King, Jr. put it from the Birmingham jail, that “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” In the double pandemics of COVID and systemic racism, none of us can check in as “safe” until all of us can.

So we begin, every day, by honoring the ground beneath our feet — yours, mine, all of ours — naming the different terrain on which we each stand and the wider landscape that is ours to cross together. Let us collectively hear our call; set out to face the barriers before us, helping one another where needed; let ourselves be changed as we go; and carry with us the elixir of learnings as we find our way to a new home, a new reality as yet to be created and revealed.

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JOURNEY THEME RESOURCES

For further reflection on this theme, a variety of resources including books, poems, videos and audios, are listed in this month’s Chalice Circle packet available online at www.unityunitarian.org/chalice-circles.html.