



*The Unitarian Church in Westport*

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## **SERMON TRANSCRIPT:**

### ***Creating Beloved Community***

***By the Rev. Dr. John Morehouse***

***Sunday, February 7, 2021***

I have been in the community building business for over three decades. Early on in my ministry I had spent some time with a few monks at an abbey where I had gone to retreat. The oldest abbot there was Brother Sid. Sid was a classic mendicant, brown robe, rope for a belt, sandals even though it was 30 degrees in rural Indiana. (Mt. St. Francis) . I met Brother Sid in the lunch room. We started talking. He asked me what I did, I told him I was minister. “I see. So how is it finding God in the world?” What a bombshell! Immediately my intellectual machinery started to whiz away in my mind. What does he mean, I thought? I wasn’t even sure about the God part. The best answer I could muster was something like “I find God in the community I serve”. “Oh” he laughed (never a good sign) “But what about the God that is in here” as he pounded his chest. What ensued was a long conversation on the nature of God, salvation and community. Brother Sid was certain that in order for a community to become beloved, that is ruled by love, one has to give themselves up to God. Was this what MLK meant by Beloved Community?

Creating Beloved Community is not as simple as all of us virtually holding hands and singing kumbaya.

In a very technical sense, Beloved Community means a community of the Beloved, which means everyone who is beloved by God or one another. It means being loved across differences as in love thy neighbor, neigh meaning near, bor meaning dwelling. In other words, that which is of God, of a divine presence among a group of people, “God infused” is what Brother Sid called it. King took the idea a step further. Beloved community is infused with the Holy of God’s love AND is dedicated to coming to the promised land, a vision of what will be. In that way the civil rights movement was beloved. In that way liberation communities in Central America were a beloved community. In that way **we** are a beloved community.

But the beloved community can also mean the Black Power movement of Malcolm X, because foundational to his demands was his faith in Allah. I would contend that the Black Lives Matter movement is also a Beloved Community even though the use of religious language is scant.

Such an understanding of Beloved Community as divinely inspired action is the foundation of the work we have to do as allies to communities of color; to work across differences. Our

work is not to “save” black and brown people, our work is to act out of our divine inspiration, the principles of inherent worth and interconnection, that call us onward from our spiritual center out into our enlarging civic circumference.

But it is very important to remember that the Beloved Community we seek for ourselves and our world is grounded in our own spiritual center. Owning your own faith, Building Your Own Theology is a start but it is not the end. Otherwise we are some sort of social club. No, the beloved in community implies we start out in here (pound chest) and move to out there (sweep of hand) first in this congregation and then in the communities that surround us. It’s a spiral dance from the center out.

Sharon Salzberg, an American Buddhist writes, ‘Throughout our lives we long to love ourselves more deeply and to feel connected with others. Instead, we often contract, fear intimacy and suffer a bewildering sense of separation. We crave love and yet we our lonely. Our delusion of being separate from one another, of being apart from all that is around us, gives rise to all of this pain. I would posit that the extent to which we contribute to our community - connect with others- is inextricably linked to the extent to which we can truly give to ourselves- to love ourselves. I would further posit that this great love of self and connection to others requires great strength and great courage.’ (Quoted in Lois Pereira sermon “Community” PUC 2010) .”

This is what Brother Sid was asking me. “You can’t find the community you seek out there until you find yourself in here.” And I have been working towards that community ever since. Transforming and Longing.

Longing “is the transfiguration of loneliness,” poet and philosopher David Whyte wrote...“like a comet’s passing tail, glimpsed only for a moment but making us willing to give up our perfect house for a better world...” (In Brainpickings.com 2018)

On the last day of the retreat Brother Sid asked me what I was going to do next. I had been at my first church in South Bend for three and a half years and we didn’t seem to have a clear sense of where we were going together. “I need to be more in touch with the beloved, the spiritual side of who I am, and then see if I am serving the right community” I told him.

“Good” he said.

It was then that I re-engaged with my meditation practice. And it was a few weeks later that I got a call from someone at the UUA who asked if I wanted to serve a small but committed congregation that wanted to grow in Frederick, MD. Two months later we were packing up our house and moving to Maryland. Francis and I would spend 11 years transforming that small group of die-hard atheists into the vibrant and beloved community they have become.

What I learned most of all is that to create the beloved community that serves the needs of others, we must first create a beloved community of the soul within ourselves. And then to let it radiate outward like the rays of the sun. I also learned that it is adversity that often fans the flames of transformation. When George Floyd's murder went viral on social media, something sparked in millions of us. Suddenly Dr. King's injunction became all the more urgent. "But the end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the beloved community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opposers into friends."

Brother Sid was right: we start here (pound chest) before God calls us to go out there (sweep of arms) Friends, thank you for being a part of this transformation, made all the more urgent in our time. I hope you will stay on this zoom meeting and immerse yourselves in the work we are about to become, the Journey Towards Inclusion that the women of our congregation have led us to. In the new book by our own UU Beacon Press with the new title Begin Again: James Baldwin's America and Its Urgent Message for Our America, author Eddie Glaude reminds us that "The Fires Last Time are The Fires This Time"

(<https://www.beaconbroadside.com/broadside/2020/12/james-baldwin-warned-us-the-fires-last-time-are-the-fires-this-time.html>),

In Baldwin's words "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced." To which I can only say AMEN!