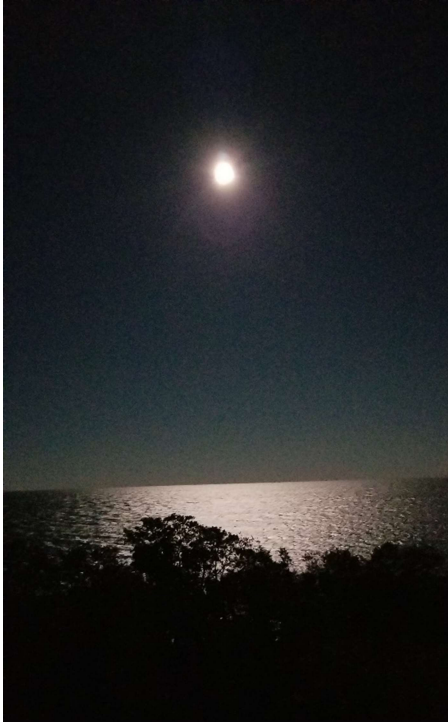


RIP (Rest in Power)

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

Rev. Rodrigo Emilio Solano-Quesnel

1 November, 2020



*Blue Moon on Hallowe'en
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My friends, it's been that kind of year...

Death has been more present in our minds, in our lives, and in our communities, than what seems usual – it's an unusual year.

In addition to a number of deaths in our congregation, and in the families of our members, the global manifestation of death has been especially present as we look at the daily mounting numbers of Covid-19 cases and deaths, as attested by health authorities around the world.

It's been that kind of year, when mortality feels closer to our lives than we might be used to – when the risk of death feels less hypothetical, and the reality of death seems to be literally outside our doors.

Many of us count among those who are called *mourners*, and some of us are also contemplating when mourning may once again be an immediate part of our lives.

It's been that kind of year.

In our larger local community, we've also seen how certain systems may put some people at more risk than others. Folks who live and work in long term care, for instance, have been more prone to being infected with, and dying from, Covid-19.

Similarly, the way some shared accommodations are set up for some of the migrant workers in our community, also put them at higher risk of infection, and in at least three cases, dying from this pandemic's virus.

It's been that kind of year.

Alongside the deaths in our immediate community, as well as the deaths we see mounting each day around the world, we have seen some notable deaths that have drawn greater attention to current realities of systemic oppression.

Over the summer, we saw the violent killing of George Floyd at the hands of police, which renewed attention to the Black Lives Matter movement. His has not been the only such killing, though it was one of the more graphically and clearly documented ones, exposing very powerfully a reality of systemic racism, which we have also seen in Canada, and around the world.

Also over the summer, we learned that US Senator John Lewis died, and he was one of the leaders of the civil rights movement, alongside Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., reminding us that the fight against systemic oppression has been going on for a long time.

Upon the deaths of George Floyd and Senator John Lewis, there is a phrase that is often seen alongside their names – *Rest in Power*.

Rest in Power – a variation of Rest in Peace, that highlights the power struggles involved in their lives and deaths. This phrase has been around in the public record for about 20 years, and is used particularly in tribute to those who have lived and died surrounded by systemic oppression. In addition to people of colour, it is also common to hear it among LGBTQ+ folks, and particularly in remembering trans people, who have died a premature death.

Now, it is not my place to... police, how one uses this phrase. I should, however, make note of some etiquette that goes along with the phrase *Rest in Power*. And by “etiquette”, I mean more than simply being *polite* for the sake of social acceptance, but more powerfully, as a way of being respectful to the roots and origins of a practice that is borne from oppression. So, to be clear, I am not inviting you to replace, *Rest in Peace* with *Rest in Power*, but rather to consider that someone’s life’s struggles, particularly when facing systemic oppression, allow us to see a different dimension to someone’s life.

I am also mindful that systemic oppression takes many forms – some of which have often been, and are, invisible.

More broadly, I find a certain truth in the phrasing of “rest in power”, as a reminder that the dead leave a powerful legacy for the living.

And not all of these legacies are powerful in the positive sense of the word – many lives gone before can leave scars that take time to heal, even beyond someone’s death... perhaps an oppressive power that the living need to struggle to overcome.

And yet, my friends, many other lives leave a powerful inspiration for the living, offering an example of ways to overcome adversity. Often, this power was clearly visible during a person’s life and endures profoundly after their death.

Also quite often, my friends, this power only becomes clear after their death, and perhaps even in ways they might not have anticipated.

My friends, we may not always know how our actions will impact – hopefully benefit – others, and yet, with a commitment of mindful intentionality and an openness to ongoing learning and growth, we may well find hidden power in our lives, and quite likely beyond death.

My friends, our lives become legacy, often whether we mean to or not. And today, we remember those whose legacies endure in our lives.

From whom we've inherited powerful inspiration, and even opportunities for struggle and growth.

May all who have struggled against power,
 who have found power,
 who have offered power,
 Rest in Power

May all who have sought peace,
 Rest in Peace

Peace on the dead
 Peace on the living
 Peace on all mourners
 Peace on all of us

In Solidarity,
 With the living and the dead,
 Amen

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Suggested Hymns:

Opening Hymn #322 Thanks Be for These

~)| Words: Richard Seward Gilbert, 1936- , and

~)| Joyce Timmerman Gilbert, 1936 , © 1992 Unitarian Universalist Association

Music: Hungarian Melody, 16th cent.,

~)| arr. by Robert L. Sanders, 1906-

TRANSYLVANIA

Hymn #196 Singer of Life

Words: From a Texcoco Nahuatl poem

Music: Native American melody, harmony by Richard Proulx, 1937- ,

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LACQUIPARLE

Closing Hymn #411 Part in Peace

~)| Words: Sarah Flower Adams

Music: From *The Southern Harmony*, 1825, harmony by Alastair Cassels-Brown, b. 1927, © 1982 The Church Pension Fund

CHARLESTON