

Circling Back

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

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One of the realities of this past year, is that many of us have had to spend more time online. Be it for work, socializing, church, or perhaps because there may have simply been more available time, the internet has likely taken an even bigger space in our lives than in previous years.

With more time online, it is also easier to fall into many of the proverbial “rabbit holes” where finding something of interest leads to even more interesting material, in the vast online space.

For me, one of the rabbit holes that I’ve fallen into is the space of virtual choirs. Of course, virtual choirs have been around since before the pandemic. People have been apart from each other at all times in history, and as soon as the internet enhanced options for connection, people have been using it to stay connected, while apart.

For several years, virtual choirs have allowed diverse groups, sometimes at opposite sides of the globe, to sing together. Until

recently, this was a relatively niche phenomenon, as the tech requirements, skills, and editing time needed for it meant that most people simply preferred to sing live, with those who were physically nearby.

For about a year now, the virtual option has been the most viable, safest, and responsible way for people to hear new arrangements and voice combinations – for those who have been able to do it. Their popularity has therefore taken off among audiences that can watch these online, and I'm sure I'm far from the only one to have fallen into the rabbit hole that is listening to these.

Now, I have to *share* that listening to some of these choirs, particularly the ones created by essential workers, has had a deeper impact on me than I'd expected. It has been while listening and watching these that I've found myself... more open to expressing the emotional toll that the pandemic represents for me and those around us. It is when listening to these voices, that I've found it easiest to allow the tears to flow down, and the deep sinking feelings of sorrow that come when acknowledging that – even if hasn't been all that bad in my personal situation – it really *has* been that bad in the life that I share with others.

Now I'm saying that I'm *sharing* this with you – I am not “admitting” or “confessing” that I've cried when listening to these choirs. I am *sharing* that I have. Because there is no shame, or guilt, or... any wrongdoing to “admit” about this. These artistic expressions of our shared experience are witnesses to our collective sense of the sadness, grief, perhaps anger, or even boredom, that can come with the rollercoaster that this past year has brought to so many of us, and that we have seen among our neighbours and communities.

The fact is – even those among us who have been fortunate – have experienced loss at this time, and for many of us, this time has represented very deep losses.

I tend to avoid speaking in general, universal statements, but I feel quite confident in saying that *everyone* in this community has been touched by the illness and death related to Covid-19. Some of you have been directly affected by the disease... all of us know of someone who's had it. And all of our lives have been affected. The spaces in which we engage in our church life today are testaments to that.

Indeed, as of tomorrow, it will have been a full year since we had the option of gathering at the pews of our church building. By noon tomorrow, it will have been 525,600 minutes since any of you saw me speak from the wooden pulpit on the chancel at Olinda Side Road.

Some of the losses we feel are momentous, and others *may* seem minor... all of them matter. As we measure this extra-ordinary time in the unit of years, we recognize that it has been a significant time.

We have spoken about how this church program year is bookended by two major anniversaries for our church. 140 years since the founding of our church, last November, and 140 years since the foundations of our building this coming September.

In between those bookends, we find this unexpected anniversary, of one year, together while apart. And we mark it, acknowledging that in the cycles of human life, a year is significant.

One of the... "minor" celebrations on this day is Pi Day, since March 14 can be written down as 3.14 – a "close-enough" approximation of the number pi, which has given us deeper insight toward our understanding of circles and other areas of math and science. Indeed, circles are among nature's favourite shapes, as given witness by the shapes of many fundamental structures in our lives (including pies!).

And it's not just the physical structures in our lives, but the mental and spiritual aspects of our lives that also have a cyclical dimension that is represented by the circle.

My friends, while a year is, in some ways, an arbitrary measure of time, it remains significant, because, on our planet, it is intrinsically linked to the cycles of our lives. And so, we mark this time, recognizing it as a landmark that can help us navigate the uncertainty of times that remain strange, even as we've gotten somewhat familiar with them.

And in the cyclical nature that years have on our planet, we can circle back to the expectation toward the beginning of spring next week, as we prepare to see another round of renewed life, recognizing the ever-present possibility of brighter days on our horizon.

My friends, we mark this time, this anniversary, not just to measure the time, but to confront it, to appreciate it, to *feel* it – to give due to the real pain that has come with it, and to offer each other the comfort of our community through it, and beyond it. To envision the life of our community, in love, toward the next time this anniversary rolls around.

So may it be,
In Solidarity and Love,
Amen

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Suggested Hymns:

Opening Hymn #360 Here We Have Gathered

~)-| Words: Alicia S. Carpenter, 1930- , © 1979 Alicia S. Carpenter

Music: Genevan psalter, 1543

OLD 124TH

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