

**First Parish UU, Bridgewater**  
**Worship Service – Soul Matters Theme: “Beauty”**  
**Sunday, June 16, 2019 10:30am**

**Thought for Contemplation:** “There is nothing more beautiful than someone who goes out of their way to make life beautiful for others.” ~Mandy Hale

**Homily** “Ending with Beauty”, Rev. Paul Sprecher

Two weeks ago, as we started talking about this month’s theme of “Beauty,” we read this Navajo prayer together:

“Beauty is before me, and beauty behind me  
Above me and below me hover the beautiful.  
I am surrounded by it,  
I am immersed in it.

In my youth I am aware of it  
and in my old age I shall walk quietly the beautiful trail.  
In beauty it is begun  
and in beauty it is ended.”

Today we celebrate the beauty in the rainbow of colors we have brought to celebrate our flower communion together. We have created a rainbow.

Every Sunday in our welcoming words we say that “We proudly fly the rainbow flag.”

It hasn’t always been easy! Several of us realized last fall that we didn’t *always* fly the rainbow flag, because we were in fact flying it in rotation with other flags, including our Black Lives Matter flag, the UN flag, the Transgender flag and the US flag. So last fall we put up a second flagpole above that one that was already there so that we could indeed always fly the rainbow flag.

Unfortunately, the wind proved too much for that higher flag and it was knocked down several times. A few weeks ago, I found that the Rainbow flag had fallen

again and that time had become completely intertwined with Transgender flag – a wonderful image, but also a bit of a mess. Thanks to Quent for adding a flag pole on the other side of the front of the church so that we can always fly the Rainbow flag without having it blown down. There may also be other ways of ensuring that we always fly the rainbow flag including perhaps hanging it as a banner from the front of the church. If you have further ideas about the best way for us to display our welcome, please mention them to members of the Parish Committee or the Worship Committee.

The Rainbow flag became symbol of the struggle for gay rights – and of gay pride – after the assassination of Harvey Milk in San Francisco in late 1970’s during the struggle against referendum a California referendum that would have prohibited gays from serving as teachers.

Harvey Milk urged gays and lesbians to come out of the closet and make it clear to friends and families and voters that they were not some “others” to be feared and driven out, but that they were brothers and sisters and relatives and friends of all kinds. This tactic was one of the important factors that led to the defeat of the referendum.

It’s especially appropriate that we celebrate our commitment to equality as symbolized by Rainbow flag in June – Gay Pride month – and more especially this year, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Stonewall Riots. We are celebrating the courage and determination of activists who united a half-century ago to demand respect and safety in places where it was too often. This year New York’s police commissioner apologized for behavior of police 50 years ago – *late*, for sure – but still, an important acknowledgement.

We use an *almost* rainbow banner (6 colors) to spell out our commitments on the front lawn and (sometimes) from the pulpit:

Love is Love

Black Lives Matter

Climate Change is Real

No Human Being is Illegal

Women's Rights are Human Rights

All Genders are Whole, Holy & Good

These flowers we have gathered today symbolize our diversity – all of these rainbows symbolize who we are and what we aspire to be.

Of course, it's also true that rainbows are aspirational – you can't ever quite touch a rainbow. Folk tales say that there may be a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow, but if there it, it will take a very, very long time to get to that end!

Remembering the colors of the rainbow has been one way some of our congregations have helped our kids learn our principles:

Red: **Respect** the importance and value of each person

Orange: **Offer** fair and kind treatment to everyone

Yellow: **Yes** to spiritual growth and learning together

Green: **Grow** by exploring ideas and finding your own truth

Blue: **Believe** in your ideals and voice your vote

Indigo: **Insist** on justice, freedom and peace for all

Violet: **Value** our responsibility in the web of life

We commit ourselves to “affirm and promote” these values because we recognize that, like the rainbow, our principles are aspirational. We strive for them, struggle for them, hope for them – but we recognize that there's work to be done to make them real in our world.

Our recent history has had some high points and low points as our society itself is becoming more inclusive.

I just finished Michelle Obama's memoir *Becoming* in which she describes how she and Malia tried to sneak out of the White House to see the rainbow that was projected against the White House the night the Supreme Court legalized Gay Marriage throughout the land. There were a gauntlet of Secret Service

agents trying to prevent them from joining the crowd– but they finally got out a back door to participate in the wonder of that day, that celebration, that rainbow in that place.

Our embassies were invited by the Obama administration to fly the rainbow flag or to project a rainbow flag against their buildings during Pride Month each year. This year, some of these outposts of these United States were forbidden to follow their practice of previous years. Rainbows are aspirational – there are steps forward and steps back. But in the beauty of the flowers we remember also the beauty of the rainbow we assert that beauty will lead us on through disappointments and setbacks – beauty assures us that the struggle for our values and for the realization of our principles is worth it!

Norbert Capek, the first to create a Flower Ceremony as a symbol of our Unitarian Universalist unity in diversity, affirmed the value of this struggle near the end of his own life. He composed these words in Dresden Prison in 1941, shortly before he was transferred to Dachau, where he was killed:

“It is worthwhile to live and fight courageously for sacred ideals. Even though disappointed a thousand times or fallen in the fight and everything would worthless seem, I have lived amidst eternity -- be grateful, my soul -  
- my life was worth living.”

There is joy in the struggle, there is joy in the beauty of these many rainbows, there is joy in beauty to urge us to follow our highest aspirations. These words by Christopher D. Sims (UU spoken word artist and peace activist) and Rev. David Breeden (UU Parish Minister), celebrate that beauty and that struggle:

Hey, what do you want to talk?

Do you want to talk beauty?

Here’s what I want to talk: Beauty is what I’m gonna talk:

Beauty is . . . Beauty is . . .

Beauty is:

Brown, white, Yellow, red-skinned People acting as kin.

Beauty is within.

Beauty is hymns Holistically reaching us, holding us all.

Beauty is the fall of stereotypes;

Accessing human Rights;

the call for Justice in the day

And in the night.

Beauty is

And beauty does!

Do you want to talk beauty?

Here's what I want to talk:

Beauty is you.

Beauty is us.

Beauty is us together.

Beauty is....

And shuts that hate

Down!

**AMEN**