

Unitarian Universalist Church of the Desert

Sermon by Lauren N. Nile

September 22, 2019

Good morning friends, I'm delighted to be here with you today. I'm actually THRILLED to be speaking with you. I'm thrilled ANYTIME I have an opportunity to share with others, the message that I'm going to deliver to you this morning. It is a message about which I feel PASSIONATELY. It is a message that as I've said many times, feels as if the Creator, when I was inside my mother's womb, took an index finger and etched onto my tiny little heart, gave it three good slow pats, then smiled. It is a message that, using what is for SOME, more traditionally RELIGIOUS language, I feel CALLED to share, and TO which I have indeed committed my life.

So what IS that message? It is simple, yet profound, straightforward, yet complex. That message, is that ALL of humanity is INTRICATELY inter-related. And even MORE profound, the astounding LITERAL truth is that all of humanity is one very large family.

But what does that mean, really? After all, we've heard that SAME message many times before, said in a myriad of ways....."We're more alike than we are different. There's more that unites us than divides us. We all bleed red. We're all the same on the inside." Most, if not all of us, have heard those sayings both so much AND so long, that they now almost seem trite. Dr. King, in his CHARACTERISTIC eloquence, said it this way, and in sharing his words, I'll admittedly take license to put them into gender neutral terms. Dr. King said in part that, "In a real sense all life is inter-related. All men and women are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one DIRECTLY all INDIRECTLY..... This is the inter-related structure of reality."

In a few minutes, I'm going to do a brief, deep dive into what it TRULY means to say that we are all the same, but before doing so, let's look at why it is important, indeed why it is ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL that AS A SPECIES, AROUND THE ENTIRE WORLD, we KNOW about our oneness, we truly UNDERSTAND it, we APPRECIATE it, and as a result and most importantly, we begin, SOON, to live consistently WITH it....to live as ONE on this beautiful planet of ours. In my view, there are three reasons why it is so critical that we do so.

First, our living in IGNORANCE of our profound oneness has resulted in our "otherizing" those whom we perceive to be different from ourselves, and THAT has resulted, CENTURY AFTER CENTURY, in COUNTLESS, spiritually bankrupt, immoral and indeed EVIL acts of inhumanity toward our fellow human beings, causing

IMMEASURABLE pain and DEVASTATING suffering, including murder, rape, torture, generational human enslavement and even genocide.

And now, as has been the case for roughly the past 75 years, we have the capability to kill each other LITERALLY BY THE MILLIONS with the drop of one bomb.....a singular nuclear warhead. The mere EXISTENCE of such weaponry is the result of our utter blindness to our human oneness. They have been used only once thus far, during the second World War, resulting in the loss of TWO-HUNDRED-TWENTY-FIVE-THOUSAND human lives, but with the CONTINUED existence of such weaponry, it is not a matter of IF, it is only a matter of WHEN that instrument of death will be used yet again.

Second, around the planet, the food that we eat, the water that we drink, and the air that we breath, are ALL in utter peril. Climate change puts EACH AND EVERY ONE OF US at risk, making the future of our children and grandchildren uncertain, at best. Climate change is an existential threat to our very existence, and SOLVING it will require that we come together as human beings, to work on it COLLECTIVELY around the planet. We need both the best MINDS, AND THE COOPERATION of China, and India, and Nigeria, and Saudi Arabia, and Argentina, and Greenland, and the Earth's island populations. We cannot clean the air, the water, and the soil of only OUR clan, OUR group, OUR nation. If we are to solve this existential threat to our existence, we MUST realize that we all breathe the SAME air, drink the SAME water, and grow our food from the SAME soil. It requires that we see each other as equal residents of the Earth, with equal rights to both exist, AND to share in its bounty. In this context, we must TRULY understand the wisdom of the old adage that the world is a round place, and what GOES around, COMES around.

Third, we must understand our oneness because now, in present day, have a president who consciously attempts to gain political advantage by appealing to the racism, the anti-Semitism, the sexism and misogyny, indeed to the overall xenophobia of our shadow sides. And to SOME extent, indeed to a FRIGHTENING extent, it is working for millions of people not only in the United States, but around the world. The rise of anti-Semitic, racist, anti-immigrant, and isolationist sentiments and the authoritarian political movements which spawn them are growing in the United States, and in countries around the planet. It is for that reason that now, at LEAST as much as at any other time in our history, those of us who long for a world in which LOVE reigns supreme, MUST understand our human oneness. We must commit ourselves to not only being NON anti-Semitic, NON-racist, NON-sexist, NON-homophobic, or disparaging of anyone based upon a physical, mental or emotional disability, we must be ANTI-racist, ANTI-sexist, ANTI-homophobic, ANTI-ableist. We must be ACTIVELY non-anti-Semitic. Our NOT doing so, our sitting idly by, runs the catastrophic risk of allowing the world to slip down that very slippery slope into the darkness that the world frighteningly witnessed not so long ago, during the second World War.

My friends, those are three reasons why we MUST understand our oneness, so now let's take that brief, deep dive into exactly what is REALLY meant by the proclamation that as human beings, we are one.

I've done a rather significant amount of research, over many years now, on our human species, looking at what DNA experts, molecular biologists, and the Human Genome Project all tell us about who we are as human beings, and WITHOUT QUESTION, the conclusion is incontrovertible.....As a species, we are all very, very intricately inter-related in both many predictable, and also many very surprising ways. It IS amazing, but through our DNA, we are all linked to each other as one very large family of cousins. Our family tree began in southern Africa and then somewhere between 90 and 180 thousand years ago, FULLY-formed, modern day African human beings began walking north out of Africa and spreading out around the planet to the four corners of the Earth. Then, over approximately 5,000 years, i.e., in roughly 2,000 generations, gradually, generation after generation, they physically adapted to their new climates, ultimately becoming what we refer to today as the "races" of humanity.

The amazing story of our human origin and our migration out of Africa to the ENTIRE rest of the world is right there in our DNA. It is in the DNA of each and every one of us. And what that DNA UNEQUIVOCALLY tells us, is that we are all members of the same species. And what THAT means, is that we are all exact genetic matches to one another. Let me say that again, all we are ALL, ALL PEOPLE AROUND THE GLOBE, are exact genetic matches to one another. Now, that doesn't mean, of course, that we all have the SAME DNA. If we DID, we'd all LOOK the same. But what it DOES mean, is that we all have the same, the EXACT same, KIND of DNA. Perhaps THE most powerful truth that illustrates that profound fact is that human beings OF EVERY RACE ON EARTH, can procreate together, and create a fully human, human being. Now, a horse and a donkey CAN procreate together. They ARE genetically similar enough to do that. Together, a horse and a donkey, produce a mule. But because the chromosomes of horses and donkeys do not match up PRECISELY, in other words, because they are not an EXACT genetic match, the animal that they produce, a mule, has no sex chromosomes, is thus incapable of reproducing itself, and for that reason, is not a biologically viable organism. The same is true of procreation between lions and tigers, who are of the same GENUS, but a different SPECIES. Together, a lion and a tiger produce a liger, an animal that is neither lion nor tiger. And those are far from the only two examples of such pairings. There is a full HOST of hybrid animals throughout the non-human animal kingdom, the majority of which, are NOT biologically viable. **BUT WITH US**, with human BEINGS, it is QUITE a different story. An Aboriginal Australian woman and an Asian man can have a perfectly human, biologically viable child together. So can a Middle Eastern MAN and a woman from India, a Native American WOMAN, and a man from any of the world's islands, and a Pygmy woman from southern Africa and a Scandinavian man from Norway. ALL of those pairs of human beings can have A PERFECTLY HUMAN, BIOLOGICALLY VIABLE CHILD. And why is that? It is because all human beings are PERFECT genetic matches to each other. We LOOK different, sometimes VASTLY different, but it is simply because we have physically adapted to different, and often VASTLY different climates. Our physical differences are a matter of ADAPTATION, simple CLIMATIC adaptation, NOT of some of us having EVOLVED higher than others of us. AND, if today, we were to suddenly change climates with any group that looks different from our own, in just five thousand years, our group would look like the other group, and that group would look like our group. It takes only five thousand years for skin color to change.

My friends, the science of our oneness is both fascinating and compelling. If we had more time, I'd get into a lot more of the weeds of our AMAZING story, of our FANTASTIC journey out of Africa around the globe to become who we are today. In the time that we have this morning, however, suffice it to say that on this one, the jury is in and the doubt is out.....as a species, irrespective of our race, our color, our hair texture, our sex, our religion, regardless of the abilities or disabilities we may have, no matter our gender identity, our sexual orientation, our gender expression, notwithstanding our age, our national origin, and yes, though in our current time, it can be difficult to acknowledge, EVEN IRRESPECTIVE OF OUR POLITICAL ORIENTATION, we truly ARE one. People of EVERY race, EVERY nationality, EVERY culture THE WORLD OVER, are EXACT genetic matches, no matter HOW different we look on the outside.

But not only are we one PHYSICALLY, we are also one both mentally and emotionally. Scientific research has shown time and again that human intelligence follows no race, sex or any other pattern. OUR BRAINS ARE THE SAME. Unlike skin color, brain size, which is an important determinant of intelligence, takes MILLIONS of years to change, and since leaving Africa, we simply haven't been separated long enough from one another for THAT kind of change to have occurred among us. Human emotions ALSO follow no race, no sex or other pattern. Our HEARTS are also the same. The neurological research that supports our INTELLECTUAL equality, and the social scientific research that supports our EMOTIONAL sameness, are as compelling as the DNA evidence that incontrovertibly supports our PHYSICAL sameness.

Now, earlier in my remarks, I gave three reasons why we MUST come to an understanding of our human oneness, but I believe that there are actually four. We must come to understand and value our oneness NOT ONLY to avoid nuclear obliteration, NOT ONLY to avoid environmental catastrophe, NOT ONLY to escape a fatal slide down the slippery slope toward Nazi-like, authoritarian regimes around the world, but we must do so because as human beings, we have within us, the absolutely AMAZING potential to be TREMENDOUSLY conscious, and thus, SUPREMELY compassionate toward one another, and in so doing, to have a future which is more positive and more promising than we can even imagine. Sure, we HAVE a shadow side, both collectively as a species, and also individually, as single human beings. We brought ourselves to the very brink of both nuclear disaster and environmental extinction THROUGH our SHADOW side, BUT.....as human beings, we ALSO have a side that, I believe, is NEARLY DIVINE. It is the side of us that's capable of forgiving unconditionally, a child who has hurt us, or a friend who has disappointed us. It's that piece of ourselves that responds with kindness to the stranger who has been rude to us. It's that part of who we are that brings donations to the local homeless shelter, that volunteers our time and energy at the local food bank, or hospital, and that writes a check to Habitat for Humanity. It's that tender part of all of us that cannot help but smile at the sight of a laughing baby. It's the potential of ALL of us to be moved by a poem, inspired by a story, or stirred by a symphony. It's that piece of us that, in total awe, looks up at the starry night sky, or that stands and looks out from a peak of the Rocky Mountains. It is that part of ALL of us that exists alongside, SIDE-BY-SIDE, WITH our shadow side. I DO think of it as our divine side. YOU may like to think of it as our higher consciousness, or our more highly evolved nature. HOWEVER you think

of it, however you REFER to it, it is THAT part of ourselves that gives us AS A SPECIES, the potential for a future that is brighter than we may even be capable of imagining, and it is only in our FULL realization that that divine side is present in EVERY one of us, regardless of how we look, that will allow us to live on the Earth in peace and love for ourselves and others. It is only THAT awareness that will allow us to live out our potential to create a world in which compassion is the norm.

Among other things, living our lives in this way, requires that we interrupt verbal expressions of bigotry, division and hatred toward any member of our family of humanity. But beyond just interrupting bigoted verbal expressions toward our fellow human beings, creating a new future ALSO requires that we do the following three things:

First, we must acknowledge without guilt, shame or blame, our own unconscious bias, and we must EARNESTLY work to purge it, to every extent possible, from our minds and our hearts. The Waking Up White group here at UUCOD has been a WONDERFUL either first or ongoing step for members of this congregation.

Second, we must educate ourselves about groups that we consider to be different from ourselves. We must read articles and books about the contributions to society, in science, math, technology, education, the arts and in other areas that have been made by women, and by LGBTQ, people, by Jewish, disabled, Hispanic, Native, African and Asian, Americans. We must watch PBS documentaries and movies on those subjects. We must do our own research of the history of DISCRIMINATION against those groups. And perhaps most important of all, we must LISTEN to members of those groups when they describe their experiences. In doing so, we almost always discover that although we THOUGHT we knew, we actually didn't know what we didn't know.

Third, we must form relationships, friendships with people whom we consider to be different from ourselves. WE MUST GET TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER. If we had more time, I'd give some specific suggestions of how we both CAN and SHOULD NOT do so.

No matter who we are, we all entered this world in the EXACT same way.....We were all born in these bodies, in these identities. We just FOUND ourselves in them. NONE of us asked to be members of our race, our religion, our sex. NONE of us chose any of that. For that, among a host of other reasons, some of which we've discussed this morning, all of the isms,----- racism, sexism, classism, ageism, anti-Semitism, heterosexism, prejudice against people with disabilities, in other words, ALL forms of xenophobia, must now join the host of historical relics that have been relegated to the dust bin, the ash heap of human folly.

Friends, I close with this thought: As a species, we CAN save ourselves from nuclear annihilation, environmental destruction, and now, the threat of worldwide authoritarianism. We CAN, consistent with what I believe is our divine human potential, create a BRILLIANT future. Doing so, however, demands that as human beings, around the planet, we unite, and begin to see each other as the sisters and brothers, or at least as the COUSINS that we truly are to one another. THAT is our clarion call. It

is what we **MUST** do if we are to survive, and then to heal, to mature, to save our beautiful planet, and to make this world anew.