**Sing and Rejoice**

**Rev. David Kraemer**

**Part 1:**

Today is Pentecost, the day in Christian history when the Holy Spirit appeared to the disciples. This was after Jesus had been crucified, at a time when his followers were in disarray. But when God comes knocking, you tend to pay attention. So this day is also known as the birthday of the church, the time when the disciples got their act together and began to talk about a time the Kingdom of God would reign on earth.

As Unitarians and Universalists, we have let go of some of the language and the observance of Pentecost. We don’t talk in terms of Kings and Kingdoms. But we do talk about Beloved Community, a time when all people might live in love and justice. Or better, perhaps, when we seek the goal of Beloved Community here and now, in whatever we do.

In the Pentecost story, this is the beginning of the work of the church. When those who were to say they followed Jesus began their journey.

One thing we hold on to from our Christian roots is that the work of bringing in Beloved Community is work that belongs to us. It is our hands that do this work. Our minds and hearts that still small voice within that lead the way.

We are a non-creedal church, which means we do not take any statements or beliefs for granted. We don’t bow to authority inside or outside our churches. But we do honor the authenticity of each one of us.

We do say that we are covenantal, that we decide for ourselves how we will be in relationship, how we will be together, working toward Beloved Community. A covenant is not so much like a list of ground rules, more like expectations. How is it we WANT to be?

We have a covenant here in this church. It is printed on the back of your order of service. We don’t often speak these words, but they are there for you to see every week.

We’re going to pay some extra attention to this covenant today because we will consider a proposal to add some lines to this covenant at our annual meeting intended to acknowledge a commitment to anti-racism.

Whatever you decide at the meeting, the covenant as it is written here is a good thing to review. In thinking about what I would say today, and in my own review, it occurs to me that a lot of the things we have said we would be we actually lived in to this year. Almost like we had planned it that way.

Here it is:

*As a congregation, we:*

*Encourage children,*

*Preserve the environment,*

*Nurture spiritual enrichment,*

*Embrace authentic relationships,*

*And serve each other and the larger community.*

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First thing is, as a congregation, we will invest in children. What a good day to introduce Dennis Reynolds (DRE) and the new summer program.

More than that, I think you might know that we launched a youth group this year. Even with busy schedules, we managed to meet at least once each month, and sometimes more, with a group of about eight youth. Meg Whaley and I have co-led. It’s been a great experience.

Most of the time, we’ve let the kids take their own lead in activities. But we’ve gone on a nighttime owl hike at Lapham Peak, we’ve fallen into each other’s arms, for real, we’ve talked about trust and school and friendship and the craziest vacations we’ve ever taken.

Second point: we preserve the environment. This year our solar panels started producing. The system we installed over the summer in 2018 was hooked up to the grid on Aug. 24 and in this way we have been living in to our seventh principle, respect for the interconnected web of existence of which we are a part, and in to this part of our covenant.

We also have benefitted financially. Over the year, our treasurer, Paul Bergmann, reports that we have saved just over $800 in energy costs over 8 months, which is on target for what we budgeted, and it looks like we will probably exceed that over the year because we are just now heading in to summer, and sometimes, the sun actually shines. And in April, for the first time, we actually produced more electricity than we used. 65 Kw. Because WE Energies buys back electricity when that happens, we made a little money -- $2.17.

Third point: We nurture spiritual enrichment. Since the September, a small group tending specifically to Exploring Spirituality has met here each month. Our soul matters groups have continued. And I am personally so proud and pleased with our Sunday worship facilitators, who have done a fantastic job this year of offering original, personal calls to worship, as we just hear from Gilles.

At the same time, a few of our facilitators have cycled in, and out, of service. If you think this is something you might be interested in, let’s talk.

Fourth point: We embrace honest relationships. Of course we do, here in this close community. It’s kind of hard to not be honest when we know so much about each other.

But more than that, this congregation has embraced honest conversation, honest relationship building, in much deeper ways. Early in the year, you know, we began setting the stage for a series of lectures on the long history, and continuing presence, of racism in our society. We helped in the planning, and grant administration, that allowed Reggie Jackson and Fran Kaplan bring us the “Do Black Lives Matter?” series. And several of you participated in the deeper dives that followed the lectures, diving deeper into how racism is manifest even in our own faith.

From that series, a group of folks have taken up the mantle of continuing this work of moving this congregation into greater self-understanding, greater understanding of the other, deeper work of moving our selves and our society toward a place of justice. It is their proposal to add to our covenant that you will hear about at the annual meeting. It is just a part of what they have in mind for us. Indeed, they have already caused me to reshape what I do, here on a Sunday, or elsewhere in the ministry of this church.

That’s real honesty in relationships.

Last, we serve each other and the larger community. From coffee and conversation after worship, to circle suppers and field trips to the zoo. From coats and shoes collected for area homeless shelters to the meals we have served here in Waukesha, and now into Milwaukee. This faith community lives in to its values.

As we end this year, I am so gladdened by all that we have done, all that we are becoming. We have many reasons to sing and rejoice.

**Part 2:**

Pentecost came as a mighty wind. Winds blew through this congregation this year, as well. Some here struggled, with life, relationships. Some of us lost loved ones. Parents. Siblings. An adult child.

In January, after a half a year of hospitals and care and finally hospice, Herb Lundin died. He had been a very visible and influential member in the time he was here. Over the months that he struggled with a diagnosis of Alzheimer’s Disease, followed by a fall that further injured his head and his cognition, we saw this congregation come together in a network of support. That network kept Herb going. It kept his wife, Dona, going. And Dona’s family. In the end, it put a smile back on Herb’s face, just as he died.

This is what is all about for us. About the connection and the love. Here we say that to live in hearts that love is not to die. Here we have hearts that love.

Here in this church, where we hold many views of God and the holy, many views even of what happens to us when we die, we agree that the worth and dignity of each one in this life is holy, we agree that to care for each other in ways both small and large is what we are called to do.

I often say this is how I think of God. As the connection. The tie that binds. Wherever you have two, gathered together, you have three. You have the one, you have the other, and you have the space between them.

**Part 3:**

Pentecost is also the time when it is said that the disciples spoke in many languages. We might see this as a celebration of the diversity of early church. It was important for early Christians to embrace people of other cultures as they distinguished themselves from their Jewish roots. It is important for us to embrace people other cultures as we seek to establish our identity in a rich and diverse world.

A thing we might learn yet is to speak another language.

I’m not necessarily talking about learning Spanish or French, though it would do us all some good if we did. But more broadly, learning to think and do in new ways, to communicate with each other. Diversity plays into this. To come to new understanding, whether we are talking relationships, or ideas, or world views, takes some bumping up against ideas and experience different than our own.

Even our own language evolves. Terms we use come to carry new meaning, we dig deeper into how the words we use fall on other ears.

This is near the close of my third year here. The first year was glorious. What a honeymoon. The second year brought a little more consternation. We made some big decisions. You called me as your settled minister. We all let our hair down a little. And we let our frustrations show. That was probably healthy, even if it was not always comfortable.

But this third year, from my perspective, has been a blessed new course. Our Sunday attendance has not exploded, but it has grown steadily. Our systems are on track for greater effectiveness. We are more organized, more disciplined, more open in our communications. And we are growing in to a new expression of this congregation in this new home. I thank the board for much of this. And I want to lift up two individuals in particular who have stepped in to leadership roles.

The first is Ellen Poplawski, who has chaired our Social Action Committee for two years now. We have talked often about the “Three Legged Stool” of social justice work – the legs of action, education and advocacy. You know we do service really well here, providing clothes and shoes and meals, gifts and financial support. And we have been pretty good about keeping ourselves educated, up to date on the language. Ellen is helping us move even deeper into advocacy, stepping in to a role on the board of SOPHIA, leading us downtown to the McCanon Brown shelter, always strong in her own beliefs but always asking questions, always seeking to learn more.

The second is Marcia Romashko, who has gifted us the beautiful artwork that graces these walls, but more than that, who has been lit on fire by the racial justice work we have engaged. Marcia has talked often of her own revelations and learning, and her leadership of a small group working to sustain change here is inspiring.

As we look forward to the coming year, I’m really excited for our possibilities: For Dennis Reynolds and the gifts he brings to our childrens’ religious education program, for our increasingly relevant and necessary justice work, for our internal tasks of understanding who we are and how we are in the world.

This congregation has so much going right now, more than we can keep track of. It’s a good problem to have. We should sing, and rejoice.