

'Beloved Becoming' – Rev. Lane Cobb – FUSW Summer Service 7/25/21

Good morning Everyone. It's an honor to be with you this morning. I'd like to begin by sharing a poem. The poet's name is Kristyn Lee. The poem is Untitled.

*A full moon*

*So bright and heavy.*

*I could hold it in the*

*Palm of my hand.*

*The weight of it*

*Pulling on bodies of water*

*Both ocean and human.*

*Do you ever feel so alive*

*It breaks your heart into a million*

*Gorgeous little pieces?*

*We are the Moon – Both whole and always becoming.*

I'd like to reflect a moment on the last line where the poet says "We are the moon – Both whole and always becoming." This morning, I'll invite us to feel into that a bit.

Wholeness, is the state of being unbroken or undamaged. It could be said that when something or someone is whole, they are complete. On the other hand, the word, *becoming*, is defined as the process of coming to be or passing into a particular state of being. Transitions are states of becoming. Growth is a state of becoming.

Transformation is a state of becoming.

So, when the poet says we are whole and always becoming, she is saying that we are complete and also transforming.

As I am speaking this morning, I invite you to be thinking about how you experience wholeness. What does being whole feel like to you and where are you experiencing wholeness in your life?

You may also consider, what the word "becoming" means to you. Where and how have you experienced the process of becoming?

Ultimately, can you relate to the poet's assertion that we are always whole and becoming at the same time?

True confessions, I haven't felt all that whole in the past couple of years. I've had some experiences I would rather have skipped. I got COVID. I moved in with my parents. I lost my income. I know other people who have gone through similar things in their lives. I suspect you do as well. The great awakening is upon us and we are all being tested. Whether we are aware of it or not – we are all in a process of becoming.

You should be proud of the work that you do to nurture yourselves and each other. As we speak, there are churches who are failing in their efforts to remain whole as they necessarily transform. I appreciate the invitation to contribute to your journey of wholeness and becoming. Fair warning, I am going to meander a bit.

Many of you know that I have a weekly talk show about race. I'm gratified that some of you have joined our Wednesday afternoons forums. We are grateful for and humbled by your support of our platform and your enthusiasm for our weekly discussions. My journey of becoming is made possible in part because of your love.

My cohost is also an ordained minister. He is Mild mannered and meticulous. We have been at it now for a year. Until the murder of our brother George Floyd, neither of us had been vocal about racial or social justice. Like so many others whose voices are now active, we knew at that point, we could no longer be silent. Our tag line, Your Voice Matters, speaks to the fact that we are all in this together.

I can tell you that creating Race Talk with Lane & Eugene every week is an exercise in becoming. I can't speak for him, but for me I am noticing how badly I want this all to go viral. How badly I want people to stop hurting each other. How badly I want to be front and center in the conversation, but how timid I am in the moment. Sometimes I don't want to be diplomatic. Sometimes I want to be loud and bold and that makes me uncomfortable. And sometimes I get mad at myself for not being more militant.

Just days ago, I noticed how protective of white people I can be. I don't like that. I've notice that I don't feel whole in the matter of my race. I am embarrassed by that. I'm embarrassed that it's taken me so long to get active in this work. But, I'm not stopping the action, and that's different for me. This work makes me hopeful. I find it encouraging that I can be myself as I am – unsure and a little embarrassed - and allow myself to become a bold, proud black woman with a talk show, regardless of how inadequate I feel sometimes. Whole and Becoming.

Several weeks ago, Race Talk hosted the renowned industrial psychologist Dr. Edwin J. Nichols. Dr. Nichols is known for creating a paradigm called The Philosophical Aspects of Cultural Difference. The paradigm is a model that provides a framework for cultural anthropologists to classify people of various ethnicities based on their worldview.

Among the distinctions he uses are how people reason, how they assign value and how that affects their relationship to self and other. Nichols maintains that Anglo-Europeans historically view the world from an either/or perspective. He calls it Dichotomous Logic. Given our Anglo-European roots, that perspective has become the norm in this country – despite the fact that life, as we know, is rarely either/or. If you are curious about cultural differences and have never seen Dr. Nichols' work, I think you'll find it worthwhile. It helped me connect quite a few dots. (You can see the replay on YouTube – Race Talk Recordings)

Cultural norms and values are rooted in our ancestry. It is natural to assess the value of an object by its characteristics. But, is it natural to classify the value of something as complex and precious as a person in that manner? Is it even humane to do that? Yet, it's done all the time, and not just in America or by Anglo-Europeans or people who identify as white. We all assign value to ourselves and each other by how and with whom we identify. The preference to have things clearly defined is a survival trait. Right or wrong. Black or white. You or me. Us or them. And since the true nature of life really isn't either/or as we said, we may struggle to figure out what's real, and what's important, and where we fit in.

The opposite of either/or is Both/And. The Both/and perspective is how Dr. Nichols describes the worldview of people of African and South-American descent. Traditionally, BIPOC culture is more inclusive than Anglo culture. Many people of color are multi-ethnic and multi-racial. In other words, we are this AND that. People of color don't fit easily into a box and some of us resent being asked to check one.

And, historically, checking the box hasn't served us well. Race and ethnicity data are easily manipulated. There are people of color who identify as white on the US census because they are either confused by the question or think it's going to benefit them in some way to do so. And some who eschew the census all together because they don't trust how their information will be used. I say all this to say that wholeness can be a challenge depending on whose definition you are using. Those who base their measurement on someone else's rubric will often come up short.

We, here in the United States are *becoming* something, though I don't think we what that something is yet. If asked, I believe most Americans would say that they want a more just society and a less divided country. I certainly want that, but I don't see it. And, because I don't see it, I have my doubts. That is also how I relate to my own personal process of becoming. Moving forward, with doubt in tow.

From week to week, I find myself covering the same ground over and over. Cold calls to speakers. Pre-interview conversations. Moderator notes. Graphics and social media posts. Emails to the audience. Knowing this effort is making a difference for people, but not exactly sure if it's the right thing for me to be doing. Shouldn't I be concentrating on

making money or looking for someplace else to live? Shouldn't our audience be growing faster? In other words, am I whole enough to do this?

In the process of becoming there are always questions and concerns. There is always the thought that we don't have enough or know enough to do the job we started. And yet, I've learned to trust that something good and important and transformational is happening, not just in my life. But also in the life of this country and in the world. *Becoming* is often uncomfortable. And sometimes it can be just uncomfortable enough to make us doubt our own wholeness.

In my youth, my history teachers described the United States as a melting pot. It was something to be proud of. A nation that started out as one thing and morphed into another by virtue of our open door policy and opportunities for financial security. And now, it would appear that some Americans are mad that we have indeed melted together and *become* something other than what we once were and perhaps something other than what was envisioned.

Have you ever melted something by accident and tried to fix it? Maybe left something on the radiator or too close to the stove and tried to restore it to its original form? Isn't there always something a little off about that thing after that? How about this? Is it possible to separate two or more elements after they have melted together? Isn't that a waste of time?

Let's face it, folks. Our American DNA has been permanently altered and it isn't going to go back to the way it was. For people to think it possible to hold back the tide of our genetic alteration is just plain crazy. I'm sorry if that sounds harsh. Forgive me please if I am offending anyone here. But, at this point, if you were born in North America and to some extent South America, you likely have a little bit of Black in you and a little bit of white in you. I'm sorry that comes as such bad news to some folks. The truth is, it's just too late.

We are all being melted. Individually as well as collectively. This melting, this transformation we are experiencing is uncomfortable for sure, unwelcomed, perhaps, but it's really not all that unfamiliar to many of us. Injustice and unrest are not new. The actor Matthew McConaughey says America is going through the growing pains of puberty. I got it Matthew. It sucks and nobody likes it. At least I didn't like it. I didn't like when I was going through it and I didn't like it when my foster daughter was going through it. The process of becoming an adult can be painful and confusing.

The work is to keep pushing the heat up instead of trying to turn it down. The work is to realize that we absolutely will not emerge from this process unchanged. The work is to consider that change is not only necessary but desirable – especially if it means the result will be a world that works for everyone. A fully adult experience for us and a

whole and complete United States doesn't mean the end of change. We will always be in the process of *becoming*. Either/Or. Both/And. Black/White. Us/Them. You/Me. We are all *be-coming* together.

So, hopefully, you're still with me here. I know who I'm speaking to. My UU family, I'm likely preaching to the choir. But liberal ideals notwithstanding, we are still human beings. We still don't like forced change, and we still don't like being uncomfortable. So how do we embrace this work? How do we be whole while we are *becoming* something else?

Well, earlier I mentioned trust. We have to trust the process. Trust that we are becoming something that is going to be better, stronger and more resilient than we are right now. Trust that there is a divine intention at work and remember that above all, our job is to love ourselves and each other through the process. Because Love, as we know, provides the platform for wholeness and healing. Ours and everybody else's. This work we do is a labor of love. If not, we would never attempt it. We must daily reconstitute ourselves as both whole and becoming if we are to succeed.

Whole, because that is who we are as divine beings. Becoming, because we are both fragile and resilient. Whole, because we are a combination of mind, body and spirit. Becoming, because we can experience fragmentation and integrity at the same time. We are never all of something and none of something else. That just isn't how we are made. The work is to feel into the flow of a benevolent universe and trust that we are alright.

And, if that sounds silly to you, I get it. I have struggled with trust issues all my life. But what I have discovered is that the more I trust in my own capacity for growth, the easier it is for me to grow. The more intentional I am about experiencing myself as whole, the more energy I can bring to the process of becoming and the less likely I am to feel like I am broken and struggling to get somewhere. I believe the more trust we bring to the process of affecting change the easier it will be to keep doing the work. Love is a natural byproduct of trust and viceversa.

It's not unusual for us human beings to doubt ourselves. Or doubt others. Or doubt the process. It's hard to have faith in things that we cannot see. Wholeness is a concept that we can and should embrace, even in the process of becoming and especially if we don't know what the outcome of that process will be. Beloved Becoming is a process that allows for grace and forgiveness and peace of mind and powerful self-creation. Bringing wholeness to the process gives us strength to continue doing the work.

I'll close now with another reading:

Rachel Rooney

## Advice from a Caterpillar

When I was egg, I too, clung onto leaf  
in shaded safety, hidden underside.  
And fastened by a pinprick of belief  
I dared to dream I was a butterfly.

A hunger hatched. I ate the home I knew  
then inched along the disappearing green.  
In shedding every skin that I outgrew,  
became a hundred times the size I'd been.

And now I'm spinning silk to fix my spot.  
Outside remains. Inside I'm changing things.  
This caterpillar's planning on the lot;  
proboscis and antennae, four bright wings.

So keep on clinging on, my ovoid one.  
For who you are has only just begun.

**Rachel Rooney writes:**

I wrote this poem after reading *Alice in Wonderland*, by Lewis Carroll. In the book, a talking caterpillar gives his advice to Alice – but in my poem the caterpillar is talking to its younger self, a tiny caterpillar egg. It's a poem that offers hope to those who might be struggling or wanting their life to change. It is written in sonnet form.