



NEIGHBORHOOD UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

Clear Blue Day

AJ Blackwood, Ministerial Intern
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301 N. Orange Grove Blvd. Pasadena, CA 91103 (626) 449-3470 information@neighborhooduu.org

Happy New Year and welcome to 2017. I know many of us definitely were ready to say “adios” and “Goodbye Felicia” to 2016. 2016 saw bombings in Brussels and Libya, mass shootings in Paris, and Orlando and much more loss of life. We saw the fall of Aleppo and slaughter of an entire city. We saw deaths of more than we can name of black men and other people of color killed at the hands of police, including Reginald Thomas and three others here in SoCal in one weekend. By the first week of November, it seemed that everywhere you looked and every conversation to be had had some undertone or feeling of 2016 really needs to end. I don’t know if that time frame corresponds to anything. Oh who am I kidding, of course it does - The Presidential Election! On top of all this, to see the people that “The Donald” is putting into power is just sickening because so many of them stand against just about everything we as Unitarian Universalists feel is being on the right side of history and justice. I know that I have posted more than one time on Facebook these last few weeks “I’m ready to say goodbye to 2016 already.”

As we closed out 2016, many were not only disheartened and saddened by these events and the election results but also a whole series of celebrity deaths including John Glenn, George Michael, Carrie Fisher, and Debbie Reynolds, which reminded us of earlier 2016 deaths of Harper Lee, Nancy Reagan, Prince, Muhammad Ali, David Bowie, Patty Duke, and Gene Wilder. I mean, heck, in “The Walking Dead” world they even killed Glenn aka me.

I’m not trying to portray celebrity lives or deaths as any more or less meaningful or impactful to the world than any other lives or deaths but I will say 2016 has been a year that was hit pretty hard with deaths of celebrities that aimed to inspire people and change the world through their talent and community work. If you are on Facebook you probably have seen memes with sayings on them such as “2016 - you took Our Prince, Our Princess, and Our Democracy.” One person even started a GoFundMe campaign to keep Betty White alive until today. I even saw a meme that read “2016 if you come for Betty White, we will riot.” The campaign is tongue in cheek of course, but it has raised almost \$10,000 for community theater in Spartanburg, SC.

I am happy to report that at 94 years old Betty White did make it to 2017, and yes we are able to say today “everything’s gonna be all right, it’s gonna be okay” as Dolly Parton so eloquently put it in her 1977 song “Light of a Clear Blue Morning”.

I am not sure how many of you are familiar with this song by Dolly Parton. Anyone? When I thought about this discussion today, I immediately thought about this song. The song is said to be a personal reflection on her career to that point. In 1975, she left The Porter Wagoner Show, where she was not well received by the audience, and by 1977 she had her own show Dolly! and her first self-produced album, New Harvest ... First Gathering. Neither the album nor the song did very well but it was the first time she felt that she was on her own, independent and not beholden to anyone else or the past.

So why Dolly and this song? The song, like most of Dolly's work in the entertainment industry and her local community, inspires me today as it always has. I grew up listening to her music, dancing to it with my mother, and singing along with it with my children. She, like her music, is an inspiration to those around her. Her life is a story of a poor child who struggles to endure and achieves great success both professionally and personally. Today at 70 years old she reminds us that we need to endure and that it is through endurance we find the light of the clear blue day. She roots that endurance in love, faith, and charity. She reminds us that the clear blue morning rises with the dawn, but seeing that dawn is not simply handed to us on a silver platter.

How is she doing this in 2017? She is doing this by re-releasing her children's book, Coat of Many Colors this time with a downloadable song "Making Fun Ain't Funny" which is a children's song with an anti-bullying message and proceeds of which are going to Imagination Library to provide books the children of the Appalachia Mountains where they are mailing 1 million books every month to children to encourage reading and education. Under her direction The Dollywood foundation has pledged \$1000 per month to each of the families who lost their homes in the Nov 27/28 Great Smoky Mountain National Park and surrounding area fires where up to 14,000 people may have lost their homes. Something that most of us may not even have heard about due the continual and basically sole news coverage of post-election results since November 8th.

Now I'm not trying to hold her up on some pedestal of greatness but what I do want to talk about is how the type of work she is doing can make change. I don't know that any of us here directly have the celebrity or political clout to make these types of community contributions, but what I do know is that we have the spirit for making it happen. We have the spirit to endure and see 2017 as the bright new, clear blue day. Today, January 1, 2017 is simply the morning, the dawn of that day.

I want to propose that today we view, January 1, 2017 as that clear blue morning that she is suggesting in her song after what many see as having a very dark year in 2016. My proposal is that "everything's gonna be all right, It's going to be okay." Many are already calling 2017 a year of unity. It will be a year when people across the country and around the world come together breaking boundaries of race, gender, sexual orientation, creed, and more It will be a year when we come together as a nation and local communities. One community that we will gather together in is this beloved community of Neighborhood UU Church. This community that is making great change in the world by starting here in Pasadena.

I know that we are making lots of plans here at Neighborhood UU Church for local change. I will ask that you make sure to watch the weekly newsletters for some exciting happenings in the next few weeks beginning with Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend, and extending through to January 22. This week is just the beginning - we will be seeing new conversations about cooperation, shared justice work and education, and activism both here at Neighborhood UU Church and also in the local community throughout 2017.

I believe all of this outward action will be built on our UU foundation and identity. Our sense of hope for the world. Our faith in humanity to bend the moral arc of the universe toward justice. This faith is rooted in a long history of personal spirituality and faith exploration. A faith that is singular to our individualism but also shared in this beloved community. This community that celebrates the lives and personal spiritual journeys of each and every individual. If you were here last week, you might remember my words: "You are a miracle!"

For this next year. I have great hope that we will remember that we are not only miracles but also, as Dolly suggests, eagles eager for the sky. Not eagles soaring or in a passive state but eagles eager, wanting, desiring, striving, struggling to reach the sky. This community, as do our families and friends, gives us roots but it is within each of us individually that we find the endurance to reach the sky. It is within us to seek out a new day. There is no more waiting for the morning. The morning is here. The day is dawning.

I know that for myself am no longer willing to be a captured eagle. I am going to taste freedom in 2017. The freedom that rests in my soul and the freedom that each and every one of you empower me to have to grow and become even stronger and more hopeful about the year to come.

I am realistic that 2017 might not be the year we all want it to be and that many are fearful of what will happen in this country and community after January 20th. I don't like to prescribe that we do anything from the pulpit but I will prescribe today that we must hold on to the message of this song so that freedom and hope carry us through this new day. The lyrics speak of going through a long night of darkness and fighting a long hard fight. They also remind us that we have to wait for the morning and look forward to a new dawn and day. Again I say that morning is here. The question I want to raise to you is how will you recognize and celebrate and bask in this new year, this new clear blue morning?

What will be your commitments to yourself, this community, your family, your faith and spirituality? Will it be to pray, meditate and reflect more? Will it be to become healthier in mind, body or spirit? Will it be to be more loving and compassionate with your co-workers or to the server having a tough day bringing your food? Will it be attending a class - shameless plug - I will be facilitating in February on exploring your own personal theology and combining that with art? Will it be volunteering and speaking out?

What will make 2017 the dawn of a clear blue day for you?

"If you want a Rainbow, you have to put up with the rain."