

Confession

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Our last session's topic of confession was inspired both by the recent occurrence of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement and one of the High Holy Days in the Jewish tradition, and of the visit that author and UU minister Rev. Nancy McDonald Ladd paid to Unity Church last Sunday. Nancy recently published a book called *After the Good News* that critiques aspects of liberal religion for its tendency toward liberal optimism, centering of whiteness, and progressivist view of history. She advocates for taking time for lamentation and atonement – a sort of “confession” in the original sense of that word – of admitting or acknowledging the painful truths in our lives.

I was reminded of the Young Adult Group's practice of confession recently at a meeting of the White Affinity Group at my school. Our facilitator started with a retelling of the story of humanity. When early humans first arrived, all people were connected to the Earth. They moved around and formed groups. Then came the disconnect. Some acquired more resources and hoarded things for themselves. Others were left with very little. And everyone else reacted in some way. Some were angry. Some were sad. Some were frozen. Some took action. Some ran away. And this continued. Those with resources desired even more. In their abundance, they feared scarcity. They removed other humans from their homes and communities against their will and forced them to work. Though some laws changed, the disconnect still largely persists. And some of us are angry. Some are sad. Some are frozen. Others take action. And others run away.

We then shared – confessed, if you will – where we saw ourselves and our ancestors in the story. I know little about my own ancestors. They emigrated from Germany to America sometime before WWII. I do not know what drove them here, how they were treated in the land they left or the one they came to, nor how they treated people in return. But I imagine that they must have had some way of recording their thoughts and hopes and confessions. And either they didn't or these were lost. It strikes me as such a waste and a loss and a sign of my family's privilege to just let stories and wisdom go when so many others had to do so much to hang on to and pass on their stories.

As Halloween approaches, I think of the pain I know my ancestors and I have caused. I think of the pain that I heard voiced at Young Adult Group during our last meeting about the impacts of racism and of feelings of disconnection and isolation. Can I really celebrate my biological ancestors? I long for my ancestors to be a source of comfort

and pride and strength. Yet lamenting the things I imagine they must have done feels much more authentic to me than praising the few things I know they did.

Atonement means bringing about harmony. If you break the word apart, you see the definition: "at-one-meant." The story of humans I heard this week tells of disconnection. How do we bring about reconnection? Can we find atonement for our disconnected ancestors as well as ourselves?

Perhaps Rev. Theresa I. Soto has identified the first step in her poem *Bring Your Broken Hallelujah Here*:

Bring your broken hallelujah here.

Bring the large one that is beyond repair. Bring the small one that's

Too soft to share. Bring your broken

Hallelujah here. I know that people

Have told you that before you can give

You have to get yourself together. They

Overstated the value of perfection

By a lot. Or they forgot. You are the gift.

We all bring some broken things, songs

And dreams, and long lost hopes. But

Here, together, we reach within.

As a community we begin again. And

From the pieces we will build something new.

There is work that only you can do. We

Wait for you.

We we find space this season to lament. May our lamentation not drive us into deeper disconnection and isolation but allow us to find our broken and small hallelujahs. Come. Share your broken hallelujahs here.