

September Theme 2021: HOMECOMING

“The ache for home lives in all of us. The safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned.” – Maya Angelou

Our longing to return
to our beloved UUAC community,
to be together in the physical, sacred space
where we,
and many others before us,
have rested
and wrestled with life,
poignantly reminds of the core need
we all share
for a spot where we can be authentic,
we can simply
Be.

As we dig into the word homecoming, down to its deepest roots, we find its archaic Proto-Indo-European meaning is “to settle, to dwell, to abide, to be home.” In that reentry to our individual and collective dwelling and abiding, can arise gladness, excitement, anxiety, confusion, and sadness. Wisely, we welcome and make room for them all. As a congregation, we are each other’s safe place, we are each other’s invitation to return, changed but still whole.

For me, homecoming began to take on significance once I left for college. Having never gone to summer camp, it was the first time I really left home for any length of time. Even though it had only been a few months, everything felt a little different when I came back, I felt a little different. Since then, there have been hundreds of homecomings, holidays and camps, children trying on their wings, moving across the world, reunions, weddings, funerals and on it goes. And with every return, we each are a little altered, even with the chorus of “you haven’t changed a bit!” As humans, our life’s adventures and trials can lift us up and bring us to our knees. When we come home again, sometimes we get right back into it with each other, like we never left. But often, there is a temporary awkwardness as we struggle to relate in a new way to our changed selves and those around us. When novelist Thomas Wolfe wrote, “*You Can’t Go Home Again*”, he was referring to this very fact. Wolfe equally reminds us that “the human mind is an instrument of adaptation, and in nothing is this more clearly shown than in its mysterious powers of resilience, self-protection and self-healing.”

As Americans with our particular penchant for nostalgia, we most often think of homecoming as hot cider and football, prom queens and the good old days. And there is some truth in that. Yet homecoming also includes returning from conflict, returning from war, with flags in doorways and yellow ribbons around trees, returning from death and loss. How complicated and varied homecomings can be. Do we look forward or dread the ones that come round every year? As we return after 17 months of pandemic and climate crises and general discord (and the list goes on and on), what does the experience of homecoming mean for you right now?

As we come home to our sanctuary, let us call to mind our 6th principle of our Unitarian Universalist faith which broadly includes the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all. This planet is home to each of us and we who inhabit it are each other's "traveling companions." We have seen the very opposite of this principle played out in neon for some time now- hard to hear, hard to watch, and hard to experience. Yet as the Sufi Rumi and many other wisdom traditions have entreated, "Don't turn your head..." May we remember all refugees who cannot come home. At the end of 2020 (and it is growing), there will have been 82.4 million forcibly displaced people in the world (UN High Commission for Refugees). Let us not forget.

In the coming weeks, you will decide whether you will hug your neighbor, give them an elbow bump, or wave from a distance. Whatever you decide to do, we hold our blessed homecoming, as we do with all of life, the 10,000 joys and 10,000 sorrows - with excitement and gratitude, with trepidation and trauma - and everything in between.

This month's theme was written by Katherine McHugh and the Worship Associates.

Our worship associates are: Susan Barrett, Jennie Breault, Jeff Brown, Jen Ryan-Brown, Alan Cantor, Aimee Dalrymple, Jess Jonas, Nora Kempner and Katherine McHugh (chair).

Quotes:

One of the oldest human needs is having someone to wonder where you are when you don't come home at night. - Margaret Mead

When you don't cling to anything, there is nowhere to go- all boats have been abandoned, you cannot go anywhere; all paths have been dropped, you cannot go anywhere; all dreams and desires have disappeared, there is no way to move. Relaxation happens of its own accord. Just think of the word relax. Be, settle, you have come home. Rajneesh

From secrecy and deception in high places, come home, America. From military spending so wasteful that it weakens our nation; come home, America. From the entrenchment of special privileges in tax favoritism; from the waste of idle lands to the joy of useful labor; from the prejudice based on race and sex; from the loneliness of the aging poor and the despair of the neglected sick- come home, America. – George McGovern

Whatever is happening, whatever is changing, whatever is going or not going according to my plans- I release my hold on all of it. I leave behind who I think I am, who I want to be, what I want the world to be. I come home to the great peace of the present moment.
- Elizabeth Lesser

Child, child, have patience and belief, for life is many days, and each present hour will pass away. Son, son, you have been mad and drunken, furious and wild, filled with hatred and despair, and all the dark confusions of the soul - but so have we... You have stumbled on in

darkness, you have been pulled in opposite directions, you have faltered, you have missed the way, but, child, this is the chronicle of the earth. And now, because you have known madness and despair...we who have stormed the ramparts of the furious earth and been hurled back, we who have been maddened by the unknowable and bitter mystery of love, we who have hungered after fame and savored all of life, the tumult, pain, and frenzy, and now sit quietly by our windows watching all that henceforth never more shall touch us - we call upon you to take heart, for we can swear to you that these things pass. – Thomas Wolfe

Nobody has seen the trekking birds take their way towards such warmer spheres as do not exist, or rivers break their course through rocks and plains to run into an ocean which is not to be found. For God does not create a longing or a hope without having a fulfilling reality ready for them. But our longing is our pledge, and blessed are the homesick, for they shall come home. – Isak Dinesen

Feels like home to me, feels like I'm all the way back where I belong. - Chantal Kreviazuk

A genuine act of kindness makes me feel like I really am where you cut underneath anything external, and you become what a human being can really be. It's like coming home when you give kindness. Kindness changes us, as human beings. - Catherine Ryan Hyde

Home is a place you grow up wanting to leave and grow old wanting to get back to. - John Ed Pearce

Homecoming is really an emotional welcoming of somebody. - Anonymous

Questions:

How would you describe or explain notions of homecoming? Does one feel truer than another for you?

When does homecoming bring joyful anticipation? When does it bring anxiety or dread?

Where does welcome enter our thoughts and feelings around homecoming?

What does it mean to abide and dwell beyond simply the physical manifestations of place?

Where do you go where you feel totally accepted and understood?

What sources and people sustain you? Where can you garner a sense of home?

How might you participate in this uncharted territory of returning to the sanctuary this fall?

When have you experienced being accepted and fully listened to, just as you are? Where were you? Who were you with?

For more on this month's theme go to: <http://uuac.org/worship/themes-for-spiritual-practice/>