

UUA 32-3 March 23, 2019

Hello I'm Liz Bear. My pronouns are she, her hers. My journey with this congregation is about Growing a Beloved Community. Before I share my story, a little background setting. Jeff's Dad was part of the Black Unitarians for Radical Reform (BURR). You may know about the group because they dreamt of a more inclusive UU religion with an ideal racial equality. Or you may know them as part of the Black Caucus that famously walked out of Boston GA back in 1969. My religious upbringing was limited to visiting grandma and grandpa's Baptist church on holidays. As newlyweds, Jeff and I created a marriage vision that included "worshipping regularly in a spiritual community." We were exploring what that meant when we bought our home right here in Lake Forest in 1995. Back then y'all were a church in the box at a school and we had a tough time finding the physical location. Eventually, we walked into the first wee Obrero space.

Ok, done with context setting, back to Growing a Beloved **Community**: I began to understand what **community** felt like as I participated in adult learning classes and the Women's Circle. At one of my first meetings with these unknown women the topic was "transitions". At the time, I was having a bit of a pity party for myself because we hadn't been able to get pregnant, I was struggling in a new job and Jeff was contemplating a return to college. I was overwhelmed and worried. After I had my turn sharing, I passed the talking stick to Nancy Knipe. "Death", she said. "Death, that'll be my next big transition." At the break I learned that she did not have a life threatening illness, she was just thinking big—**really**

big . I was fortunate enough to have many more of those mind opening conversations before she made that transition.

Growing Beloved Community: Growing happens in so many ways. Growing happens physically—One summer we created a church camp at a place off Ortega highway- I grew big with Noah in my belly and I learned how to organize food for lots of people. There's financial growth, right? When the Semelroths, The Kinnears and John Alcorn shared their vision of increasing our budget to rent more space at Obrero, Jeff and I were both out of work, but we loved the RE program and sermons, so we took a leap of faith and pledged a tad more. But the real growth surfaced that summer as I watched Penny Kinnear help tiny baby Grayson feel comfortable in that giant blue pool at the camp. Our relationships had grown significantly.

What makes something **beloved**? Is it tradition? I loved it when my work friend matt got married at Tapestry. Because after years of activism, it was FINALLY legal for him to marry Eric. Is something beloved because of Passage of Time or Shared celebrations? Sheila Raymond and Linda Yeargin hosted baby showers for my kids (oh yeah, all of them were dedicated at Obrero and by 3 different religious professionals). Is it comfort Food? When Abigail was 2 months old, Jeff had a heart attack and Charlotte Clark shows up at my door with a giant crock of barley soup. To this day, I have no idea how the caring committee found out what was going on in order to work their helping magic.

Or does beloved mean being able to have deep conversations about love and you guessed it- sex. Let's talk about Our Whole Lives (or OWL) , an age appropriate human

sexuality course. Because we were a small congregation, we joined up with others for OWL. While I initially moaned about driving to the congregations in long beach and orange coast, we grew to love it because our children met youth and adults in the broader UU community. I thought I was enrolling my kids so **they** would have better understanding about their bodies and respecting others. Yeah, well **I too** learned a whole lot. I am convinced that OWL helped our family create the open dialogues we've been able to have as they have become adults.

In addition to sexuality, there are other spiritual practices I am learning about.

Meditation, how to deeply engage with others, what a covenant is and how to create a sacred place. Last weekend, the high schoolers from our district had their spring youth CON. It was the first time Jeff and I had served as adult advisors. What gives me such great hope about our future is our youth. Amber, Ryan, Jesse and Abigail were part of this community that sprung up and held each other in a sacred space as they explored the district's social action theme of economic justice. In less than 48 hours, these extraordinary youth defined what their convent would be for the weekend, created a schedule (that encouraged self care), held workshops, gathered for worship, and established kitchen prep and clean-up crews who feed the more than 50 attendees. When the planned social justice action for the homeless did not work out, they created a learning event and talked about the issues contributing to people who have become unhoused. The youth shared with one another what their congregations are doing around homelessness, learned about how to connect with their elected representatives and

then closed the session with individuals reflection on what they were going to do when they got home. I was awed and inspired by what the youth did.

So, I'm going to wrap up with a few big questions. It's been 50 years since that Black caucus walked out; how are we doing on racism, oppression, equity and privilege? Are we creating a space where a variety of spiritual practices are explored? How is Tapestry helping immigrants and the unhoused? OWL teaches about gender identities- are we making progress on being a welcoming place where non-binary people feel comfortable? Is this type of work ever completed? No. But I can tell you ,here in my third decade of being involved with Tapestry, our congregation has been engaged with addressing these issues for a very long time.

You are the people with whom I want to do this work. . I am proud Tapestry is part of my story. And I'm glad to be part of **Growing THIS Beloved Community**.