

**“WHAT MAKES US SO SPECIAL?”**

First Universalist Church Unitarian Universalist, Auburn, ME, Rev. Glenn Turner, Sept., 2017

OPENING WORDS & CHALICE LIGHTING

“There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard.”

— Arundhati Roy

“The trouble is that once you see it, you can't unsee it. And once you've seen it, keeping quiet, saying nothing, becomes as political an act as speaking out. There's no innocence. Either way, you're accountable.”

— Arundhati Roy

SILENT REFLECTION

CHECK-IN: (40-50 minutes)

FOCUS: “WHAT MAKES US SO SPECIAL?”

There are issues that never go away; that smolder at times and burst into flames. The catch-phrase now is “**Black Lives Matter**.” No sooner said than countered by the disingenuous “**All Lives Matter**.” Which is a way of saying, in a dominant, straight, white culture, the imperial “we” is what matters. Let’s talk about me, which overrides your social status if you are black, or Latino, or gay, or transgender. The issue arises in “identity politics” of whether we should be pulling together for the whole or speaking up for the parts. Only the whole is white and straight, and the parts are whatever is outside that category.

Stephen Minot wrote an “irreverent” novel called “Surviving the Flood” in 1986. The scene is set on and off Noah’s Ark. Ham, one of Noah’s sons, notes that his family were not the only survivors. People were everywhere to be seen clinging to trees, trying to survive. He begins to question his family’s “specialness” in this reflection on God.

"Yes, he was a great one for classifications. Adam as the first lord of the manor with dominion over the earth, the beasts, and woman; Eve placed under him in a number of ways. And in succeeding generations, the divisions between the highborn and the low, the owners and the owned, the residents of palaces and the palace workers, the habitually overfed and the perpetually overworked, those who plan wars and the who bleed. Then, too, there are those who float and those who are left to drown. A divine predilection for strata.”

And that predilection for strata runs like crack through history - the good and the evil, the saved and the damned, the great white hope and the yellow peril. And, of course, the children of Ham. Ham, in Minot’s story asks the question: “What makes us so special?”

Now as then, this is about “Identity Politics” and since we’re all in the same boat, we need to need to get a handle on how to deal with “different strokes for different folks,” or how we’re ever going to learn to pull together. What will unite us? Are there any common goals?

## DISCUSSION:

1. What is your understanding of identity politics?
2. What privileges do you have or not have due to your identity?
3. Can there ever be a common “We”? What steps might we take as individuals or a nation to approach it?

## LIKES AND WISHES

## GROUP BUSINESS & SCHEDULING & NEW MEMBER/S DISCUSSION

## CLOSING WORDS:

“The only dream worth having is to dream that you will live while you are alive, and die only when you are dead. To love, to be loved. To never forget your own insignificance. To never get used to the unspeakable violence and vulgar disparity of the life around you. To seek joy in the saddest places. To pursue beauty to its lair. To never simplify what is complicated or complicate what is simple. To respect strength, never power. Above all to watch. To try and understand. To never look away. And never, never to forget.”

— Arundhati Roy

Suggested background reading:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/20/opinion/sunday/the-end-of-identity-liberalism.html>

<https://www.thenation.com/article/what-is-the-left-without-identity-politics/>

<https://newrepublic.com/article/144739/liberals-get-wrong-identity-politics>

<http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/09/17/identity-politics-history-mark-lilla-215607>

[https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/10/the-first-white-president-ta-nehisi-coates/537909/?utm\\_source=twb](https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/10/the-first-white-president-ta-nehisi-coates/537909/?utm_source=twb)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/24/opinion/donald-trump-identity-politics.html?mcubz=3>

[https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/10/the-first-white-president-ta-nehisi-coates/537909/?utm\\_source=twb](https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/10/the-first-white-president-ta-nehisi-coates/537909/?utm_source=twb)

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