

## How Then Shall We Live Rev. Michael Crumpler

### Suggested Elements:

#### Chalice Lighting:

*The Element of Fire Represents Passion, Veracity, Authenticity, and Vitality*

By [Sarah Lammert](#)

The element of fire represents passion, veracity, authenticity, and vitality.

If the chalice is the supporting structure of Unitarian Universalism, then we are the flame.

We are the flame, fanned strong by our passion for freedom, our yearning for truth-telling,

our daring to be authentic with one another, and the vitality we sustain in our meeting together.

In all of this there is love.

#### First Reading:

*Let Us Make this Earth a Heaven* By [Tess Baumberger](#)

Let us make this earth a heaven, right here, right now.

Who knows what existences death will bring?

Let us create a heaven here on earth  
where love and truth and justice reign.

Let us welcome all at our Pearly Gates, our Freedom Table,  
amid singing and great rejoicing,

with all our lovely colors,

straight, gay, transgender, bisexual, and all the ways  
of loving each other's bodies.

Young, old, fat, thin, variously-abled, gentle, cranky, joyous, sorrowing.

Let no one feel excluded, let no one feel alone.

May the rich let loose their wealth to rain upon the poor.

May the poor share their riches with those too used to money.

May we come to venerate the Earth, our mother,  
and tend her with wisdom and compassion.

May we make our earth an Eden, a paradise.

May no one wish to leave her.

May hate and warfare cease to clash in causes

too old and tired to name; religion, nationalism,

the false false god of gold, deep-rooted ethnic hatreds.

May these all disperse and wane, may we see each others' true selves.

May we all dwell together in peace and joy and understanding.

Let us make a heaven here on earth, before it is too late.  
Let us make this earth a heaven, for each others' sake.

## **2nd Reading (this reading is the start of the video)**

“This innocent country set you down in a ghetto in which, in fact, it intended that you should perish. Let me spell out precisely what I mean by that, for the heart of the matter is here, and the root of my dispute with my country. You were born where you were born and faced the future that you faced because you were black and for no other reason. The limits of your ambition were, thus, expected to be set forever. You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being. You were not expected to aspire to excellence: you were expected to make peace with mediocrity. Wherever you have turned, James, in your short time on this earth, you have been told where you could go and what you could do (and how you could do it) and where you could live and whom you could marry. I know your countrymen do not agree with me about this, and I hear them saying, “You exaggerate.” “The details and symbols of your life have been deliberately constructed to make you believe what white people say about you. Please try to remember that what they believe, as well as what they do and cause you to endure, does not testify to your inferiority but to their inhumanity and fear.”

*“The Fire Next Time”*  
By James Baldwin

## **Closing Reading (this reading is the end of the video):**

“There is no reason for you to try to become like THEM and there is no basis whatever for their impertinent assumption that they must accept you. The really terrible thing, old buddy, is that you must accept them. And I mean that very seriously. You must accept them and accept them with love. For these innocent people have no other hope. They are, in effect, still trapped in a history which they do not understand; and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it.”

*Adapted from “The Fire Next Time”*  
By James Baldwin

## **Chalice Extinguishing:**

### ***Daring Vision***

By [Maureen Killoran](#)

We extinguish this chalice flame,  
daring to carry forward the vision of this free faith,  
that freedom, reason and justice  
will one day prevail in this nation and across the earth.

**Recommended Hymns:** - 126 - Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing

## Transcript of the sermon

Good morning our second reading, which just left my phone screen

is from James Baldwin, James Baldwin's great work, a Fire Next Time. This innocent country set you down in a ghetto, which you, in fact, it intended that you should perish. Let me spell out precisely what I mean by that. For the heart of the matter is here, and the root of my dispute with my country. You were born, where you were born and faced the future that you faced, because you were black, and for no other reason. The limits of your ambition were thus expected to be set forever. You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible that you were a worthless human being. You are not expected to aspire to excellence, you were expected to make peace with mediocrity. Wherever you have turned James, in your short time on this earth, you have been told where you could go and what you could do, and how you could do it. And where you could live, and whom you could marry. I know your countrymen do not agree with me about this. And I hear them say, you exaggerate, the details and symbols of your life have been deliberately constructed to make you believe what white people say about you. Please try to remember that what they believe as well as what they do and cause you to endure, do not testify to your inferiority, but to their humanity and fear. The Fire Next Time by James Baldwin. Ashae.

Good morning again, thank you so much for inviting me to this peaceful place to worship with you together. I've been here before and it is a privilege to be back. Thank you for the beautiful, beautiful music, the amazing, amazing centering, grounding words that you brought to us Iris and, and to all of you who are joining us, both here in person and online and navigating the storms that happen nowadays. And the technology. Thank you. Thank you all. Please pray with me. May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart be acceptable. Amen.

If you are anything like me, I know that many of you woke up this morning. Well, not as many as typical, right? Because there was no power, but woke up this morning, rolled over to check your Facebook, your Twitter, your email, perhaps complete your Wordle, which I have not done yet, or respond to those early morning text alerts. As such, you may find it odd to hear me say to you that the internet is officially broken. No, don't pull out your phones right now for proof of what I am saying. But trust me when I tell you the internet is broke and has been broke since last Sunday, August 6 of 2023. And for those of you who are unfamiliar with this jargon, I don't mean literally broke. I'll leave it to you to look up the phrase later today. But yes, all this week the internet has been broke because of of a conspicuous incident that took place on Saturday, August 5 in Montgomery, Alabama. If you haven't heard about it, let me enlighten you. On Saturday, August 5, at approximately seven o'clock pm central time, a very disturbing incident took place at the 200 block of Kusa Street in Montgomery, Alabama also known as the Montgomery riverboat. I'm sorry Riverwalk, I'm getting ahead of myself. When the Harriet Two river boat returned from its evening tour, a small pontoon boat was blocking its designated spot reserved for the Harriet Two river boat, forcing the

Harriet Two riverboat, with its 200 passengers aboard, to wait more than 30 minutes before they could exit the boat. Forcing a Harriet Two riverboat black staff member to move the small pontoon boat that was owned by a white family just a few feet so that the 200 Harriet Two riverboat passengers could exit the river boat. After which a fight ensued. The white platoon owners began attacking the black Harriet Tubman Two staff member causing an all out racial melee that would have had that would have made Malcolm X blush and thus causing the Internet to break its neck. The brochure of the Harriet Two riverboat reads, travel back in time, to the days of historic paddle wheel boats meandering along the scenic Alabama River. Montgomery's own Harriet Two now offers you the opportunity to take the incomparable, take in the incomparable sights, sounds, and magical atmosphere of days gone by. Our themed and custom cruises are the newest most unique way to spend quality time with family, friends and business associates while enjoying the unforgettable experience of the water. Days gone by. In preparation for this summer, the sermon I scoured the internet to find a tour itinerary for the Harriet Two hoping to discover exactly what was said on this historic tour of days gone by. You see, what I was hoping to discover was that the 200 guests aboard the Harriet Two were getting a historic tour similar to the deep cultural excursion that I experienced when I had visited Montgomery, Alabama earlier this spring in March. Actually was April, soon after hosting the annual Finding Our Way home retreat for Unitarian Universalist religious professionals of color. When a colleague and I took the two, two and a half hour drive from Atlanta, to Montgomery, to visit the National Museum for Peace and Justice, formally, informally known as the National Lynching Memorial. The National Museum of Peace and Justice traces the history of white terrorism from enslavement to mass incarceration, and it's curated by Bryan Stevenson, the founder and executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative, a human rights organization in Montgomery, Alabama. If you haven't been I highly recommend it. For it is like the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington DC. It brings to life the horrors of the of American history with the kind of vividness that textbooks, encyclopedias, and even web browsers fail to produce. The kind of vividness that leaves me with a tinge of anxiety after exiting the threshold of these epic spaces.

When you enter the National Museum of Peace and Justice, you become teleported across time and space. The museum staff politely and stoically take away took away our belongings, especially our cell phones and any other distractive devices, forcing us to be fully present as we move from 1619 to 2023. From enslavement to enslavement. Via narrations and holograms and videographies and artifacts that moved me to tears and bring to surface the levels of cellular trauma that I was unaware that I even, that even existed. Only two hours empty us out into the imposing sunlight and suffocating humidity that is Montgomery, Alabama. That same heat I felt after exiting the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC when I visited there in August of 2019. For me, the heat and the humidity conspires together with the deep, disturbing feelings of resentment and powerlessness and rage that clashes with all the subtle annoyances of the white and black adjacencies that happen on the sidewalks and in the streets and at the mall, where whiteness and blackness are forced to get along. You know, those small infractions that come with exiting with existing in a

multicultural, multiracial democracy. Those things that most of us have become numb to due to their abundance because addressing them is just too inconvenient. The honk of the horn, the glance in a store, the clutch of the pearls, the bump of a passerby, a door not held open, all the things that are major enough to mean more than what they actually are, but minor enough to be absorbed just for a day. But post black history museum tour, makes my skin crawl and makes me want to fight, makes me want to brawl.

Which is why I was eager to know, avail to find out what this Harriet Two riverboat tour was all about. Because those 200 predominantly black Harriet Two riverboat passengers was like not today, Satan, not today. The fury and vitriol with which fists were, flying chairs were swinging, and crocs went well crocking, you'll you'll have to search Twitter to understand that one, made August 5th not just another day in postmodern Alabama, where underneath the modern beauty of the Montgomery Riverwalk, new amphitheater and train station and boat tours and events and outdoor concerts lies a deep dark history of racialized human trafficking, cotton, and violence. And lynching and fire hoses and dogs and water fountains and church bombings, all of which would make for a very dramatic and traumatic riverboat tour on the Harriet Two where passengers are promised the opportunity to take in the incomparable sights, sounds and magical atmosphere of days gone by. And I don't know. Maybe that's just what the tour is. I guess I'll have to travel back to Montgomery and take the tour myself. But for now, I'll have to just assume that it was not a tour that triggered these seething, that triggered the seething crowd aboard the Harriet Two who were forced to wait 30 minutes to unboard their riverboat and this rallying and this route and thus rallying the entire internet to erupt and applause, admiration and adulation with epic memes and arousing reenactments that have become a cultural clap back to the hit song, country, the country hit song by Jason Aldean called Try that in a Small Town. An anthem that pretty much captures the dystopian nightmare that we have all been living in America post 2016. And by we I mean trans people being outlawed in small and large towns and whole states across America. And pregnant people being forced to give birth against their will in small towns and large towns and whole states across America. And elementary classrooms where children are practicing mass shooting drills in small and large towns and whole states across America. And where fires and heat and floods and winds are ravaging habitat in small towns. Small and large towns and whole states across America. Yes, the brawl that ensued on Saturday, August 5th, the jubilation that has followed was more than a break of the internet, but a break in the fever that is modern day America.

But while the memes are funny, and good enough for Comic Relief, and many other kinds of relief, our ancestors have much deeper message have a much deeper message for our times, one that is slightly more sophisticated. Love. James Baldwin was neither an artist nor politician, but a prophet. I'm not sure if Brother Baldwin would have would have retweeted a Montgomery meme or posted swinging chairs to his Facebook Timeline. But in his letter to his namesake nephew, also known as a Fire Next Time, he intended for him to know the exact nature of white supremacy, which I recommend everyone read. For it is that medicine that I need, as even as I exit the

threshold of spaces, like the National Museum of Peace and Justice and the National Museum of African American History and Culture. Yes, The Fire Next Time is that Balm of Gilead medicine, that more than any old fashioned brawl reminds me of why white pontoon voters don't move, and why white country singers sing and why white Alabama senators and white Moms for Liberty won't move out the way. And even though it may feel good to see them get what they deserve. Occasionally, Brother Baldwin writes, There is no reason for you to try to become like white people. And there's no basis whatsoever for their impertinent assumption that they must accept you. The real the really terrible thing old buddy is that you must accept them. And I mean that very seriously. You must accept them and accept them with love. For these innocent people have no other hope. They are in fact, still trapped in a history which they do not understand. And until they understand it, they cannot be released from it. Amen. Ashae. May it be so.