

October Chalice Circle: Care for Difference

UU Value: Pluralism

Opening Words and Chalice Lighting

We are all capable
In different ways
With various strengths and talents.

We are all holy
Part of the universe
And the interdependent web.

We light this chalice
Cherishing our differences
And holding each other in sacredness. ~Cindy Fesgen

Check-in: Without crosstalk or interruption, briefly describe where you are in your life now, and notice what needs to be shared in order to be fully present in our circle.

Song to listen to: "Crooked Tree" by Molly Tuttle Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9x4rCPWtsRM>

Two trees in the forest, one was crooked, one was straight
Crimson bark and emerald needles growing day by day
And though they looked so different
They enjoyed the rain the same side by side
A chickadee told them of a darkness on the land
Spinning blades that came to visit, carried by a man
And every other tree would see them cut down
Where they stand by and by

Oh, can't you see a crooked tree won't fit into the mill machine?
They're left to grow wild and free
Oh, I'd rather be a crooked tree

Perfect trees were driven down the mountain to the mill
They turned them into toothpicks and 20 dollar bills
It seemed the more the people took
The more they needed still in the end
The crooked trees were left there after all the work was done
Now they go for weeks and never witness anyone
No one left to tell them if they're growing right or wrong
But whispering wind

Oh, can't you see a crooked tree won't fit into the mill machine?
They're left to grow wild and free
I'd rather be a crooked tree

People say I'm different and my way of life seems strange
I took the road less traveled, twists and turns along the way
But like the crooked tree

I'm growing stronger day by day as the clouds roll by
A river never wonders why it flows around the bend
A mountain doesn't question how it rose up from the land
So who am I to wish I wasn't just the way I am? Who am I?

Song to Sing: #188 from *Singing the Living Tradition* "Come, Come, Whoever You Are"

Come, come, whoever you are,
wanderer, worshiper, lover of leaving.
Ours is no caravan of despair.
Come, yet again come.

Poem "My Grandmother Washes Her Feet in the Sink of the Bathroom at Sears" by [Mohja Kahf](#)

My grandmother puts her feet in the sink
of the bathroom at Sears
to wash them in the ritual washing for prayer,
wudu,
because she has to pray in the store or miss
the mandatory prayer time for Muslims
She does it with great poise, balancing
herself with one plump matronly arm
against the automated hot-air hand dryer,
after having removed her support knee-highs
and laid them aside, folded in thirds,
and given me her purse and her packages to hold
so she can accomplish this august ritual
and get back to the ritual of shopping for housewares

Respectable Sears matrons shake their heads and frown
as they notice what my grandmother is doing,
an affront to American porcelain,
a contamination of American Standards
by something foreign and unhygienic
requiring civic action and possible use of disinfectant spray
They fluster about and flutter their hands and I can see
a clash of civilizations brewing in the Sears bathroom

My grandmother, though she speaks no English,
catches their meaning and her look in the mirror says,
*I have washed my feet over Iznik tile in Istanbul
with water from the world's ancient irrigation systems
I have washed my feet in the bathhouses of Damascus
over painted bowls imported from China
among the best families of Aleppo
And if you Americans knew anything
about civilization and cleanliness,
you'd make wider washbins, anyway*
My grandmother knows one culture—the right one,

as do these matrons of the Middle West. For them,

my grandmother might as well have been squatting
in the mud over a rusty tin in vaguely tropical squalor,
Mexican or Middle Eastern, it doesn't matter which,
when she lifts her well-groomed foot and puts it over the edge.
"You can't do that," one of the women protests,
turning to me, "Tell her she can't do that."
"We wash our feet five times a day,"
my grandmother declares hotly in Arabic.
"My feet are cleaner than their sink.
Worried about their sink, are they? I
should worry about my feet!"
My grandmother nudges me, "Go on, tell them."

Standing between the door and the mirror, I can see
at multiple angles, my grandmother and the other shoppers,
all of them decent and goodhearted women, diligent
in cleanliness, grooming, and decorum
Even now my grandmother, not to be rushed,
is delicately drying her pumps with tissues from her purse
For my grandmother always wears well-turned pumps
that match her purse, I think in case someone
from one of the best families of Aleppo
should run into her—here, in front of the Kenmore display

I smile at the midwestern women
as if my grandmother has just said something lovely about them
and shrug at my grandmother as if they
had just apologized through me
No one is fooled, but I

hold the door open for everyone
and we all emerge on the sales floor
and lose ourselves in the great common ground
of housewares on markdown.

Questions to Consider

1. What do you think of the poem? What does it describe that you connect with? What does the poem describe that's different from your prior experience?
2. What does it mean to "care for difference"?
3. Think of a time when you were misunderstood. What differences stood between you and others?
4. Is there ever a time to minimize difference? Why do some of us have the impulse to do so?
5. How does a UU value of care for difference interact with another UU value of unity?

Sitting in Silence: We will sit in silence for 3-5 minutes. Take this time to reflect on the readings, questions, and theme. Center yourself and consider what you want to share with the group.

Sharing/Deep Listening: Please share your own experiences and thoughts about the topic and readings with no crosstalk or interruption. Please ensure everyone gets an equal opportunity to share.

Additional Thoughts/Crosstalk: As time allows, after listening to others, do you have additional thoughts to share?

Checkout: What are you taking with you as you leave the circle? OR How can we support you in the month ahead?

Closing Words/Extinguishing the Chalice

We have a calling in this world:

We are called to honor diversity,

To respect differences with dignity,

And to challenge those who would forbid it.

We are people of a wide path.

Let us be wide in affection

And go our way in peace. ~[Jean M Rickard](#)