

Claire Feingold Thoryn  
February 2, 2020  
Worship Theme: Loyalty  
Musical Guest: Melanie Demore

**Music for Gathering**  
**Congregational Sing: This Little Light of Mine**  
**Welcome and Announcements: Howie**  
**Widening the Welcome**

**Call to Worship:**

Good morning! Our worship theme this month is Loyalty. Loyalty has all kinds of secular and religious ties to fidelity, trustworthiness, and mutuality, but today I think many Americans are focusing on a specific type of loyalty—loyalty to a football team.

I have competing loyalties today because it is also Groundhog Day so I'm more committed to watching the movie Groundhog Day than I am to watching football.

But in this hour, let us rest into a this sacred place and reflect on our loyalties, how they came to be, and how we act on them.

May we be loyal listeners to the spirit, and let us worship together.

**Hymn #287 Faith of the Larger Liberty**  
**Chalice Lighting: Kay Lamer**

## **Personal Point: Alison Harvey**

### **Anthem**

### **Intro to Prayer and Meditation**

We come now to the time in our service we set aside for silent, sung, and spoken prayer. Let us join in following Melanie Demore as she leads us in our Centering Hymn, her own “Standing Stone.” After the song, we will join together in silence.

### **Time of Silence**

### **Joys and Sorrows**

We have come to our time of sharing what is our most ultimate concerns and intimate heartbreaks, or what many congregations call the prayers of the people. I’ve shared with you before how the Quakers, who have silence and informal sharing as their main form of worship, have created many good guidelines for how to understand when one *must* speak into silence, and when one should hold back. One of the guidelines reads: “The Spirit may speak through a less familiar voice if our oft-heard Friends refrain from the urge to speak too quickly.” Let’s open our hearts to the Spirit, and listen prayerfully to the voices of our community. If the spirit moves you to speak, raise your hand, wait for the microphone, and share your name.

[...]

We hold all the prayers, spoken and unspoken, in our hearts.

**Prayer:**

Please join me in the spirit of prayer.

You may wish to adjust your body before you receive the prayer.

Ground your feet flat on the floor, rest your hands comfortably—I like to place my hands, palms up, on my legs, but you may find that a prayerful position is with your palms down, or together, or with your hands on your heart.

Roll your neck and find a gentle resting position for your head, perhaps bowed, or lifted up, or simply straight ahead.

Let's take a breath.

Spirit of Love in which we live and move and have our being,  
We call on you to wrap your love around this hurting world.  
Spirit, be with the lost, the broken, the hurting, the hungry.  
Be with all those imprisoned, enslaved, detained.  
Spirit we confess and mourn humanity's cruelty to humanity.  
Bring comfort to all who suffer  
    and compassion to all who cause harm.  
Spirit, be with our nation, as we gasp for breath.  
Bring your guiding light to our leaders,  
    embolden our people in the search for justice and truth.  
Bring courage to all who are just,  
    and humility to all who judge.  
Spirit, be with each of us,  
    as we make our way through each day and week.  
You know the unspoken cares and worries of our souls,  
You are with us in the sparks of joy and the moments of peace.  
Spirit, be the strong gentle hands on our shoulders,  
    that we can rest into when we are tired.  
Spirit, be the hands that propel us and pull us forward,  
    brave and ready, for the days to come.  
Spirit, let your love be a resting place  
    and a jumping off place.  
Thank you for this moment, this day, this life,  
    the one we have been given.  
May your holy love guide us in all ways.  
*Amen.*                                      Our mornings offering ...

**Reading:**

Perhaps you hold a frequent flyer loyalty account with an airline or five. If so, perhaps you are familiar with this type of announcement. Simon Armitage is the current poet laureate of the United Kingdom; he describes his work as “no-brow.” Here is his poem, “Thank You for Waiting.”

“Thank You for Waiting” by Simon Armitage

At this moment in time we’d like to invite  
First Class passengers only to board the aircraft.

Thank you for waiting. We now extend our invitation  
to Exclusive, Superior, Privilege and Excelsior members,  
followed by Triple, Double and Single Platinum members,  
followed by Gold and Silver Card members,  
followed by Pearl and Coral Club members.  
Military personnel in uniform may also board at this time.

Thank you for waiting. We now invite  
Bronze Alliance members and passengers enrolled  
in our Rare Earth Metals Points and Reward Scheme  
to come forward, and thank you for waiting.

Thank you for waiting. Accredited Beautiful People  
may now board, plus any gentleman carrying a copy

of this month's Cigar Aficionado magazine, plus subscribers to our Red Diamond, Black Opal or Blue Garnet promotion. We also welcome Sapphire, Ruby and Emerald members at this time, followed by Amethyst, Onyx, Obsidian, Jet, Topaz, and Quartz members. Priority Lane customers, Fast Track customers, Chosen Elite customers, Preferred Access customers, and First Among Equals customers may also now board.

On production of a valid receipt travelers of elegance and style wearing designer and/or hand-tailored clothing to a minimum value of ten thousand U.S. dollars may now board;

passengers in possession of items of jewelry (including wristwatches) with a retail purchase price greater than the average annual salary of a mid-career high school teacher are also welcome to board.

Also welcome at this time are passengers talking loudly into cellphone headsets about recently completed share deals, property acquisitions, and aggressive takeovers, plus hedge fund managers with proven track records in the undermining of small-to-medium-sized ambitions.

Passengers in classes Loam, Chalk, Marl, and Clay may also board. Customers who have purchased our Dignity or Morning Orchid packages may now collect their sanitized shell suits prior to boarding.

Thank you for waiting.

Mediocre passengers are now invited to board, followed by passengers lacking business acumen or genuine leadership potential, followed by people of little or no consequence, followed by people operating at a net fiscal loss as people.

Those holding tickets for zones Rust, Mulch, Cardboard, Puddle, and Sand might now want to begin gathering their tissues and crumbs prior to embarkation.

Passengers either partially or wholly dependent on welfare or kindness: please have your travel coupons validated at the Quarantine Desk.

Sweat, Dust, Shoddy, Scurf, Feces, Chaff, Remnant, Ash, Pus, Sludge, Clinker, Splinter, and Soot: all you people are now free to board.

## **Sermon: “Show Your Loyalty Cards”**

All you people.

That poem gets to the heart of how loyalty these days is often a euphemism for drawing the line between who’s in, and who’s out.

The haves and the have-nots.

Those in power, and those scuffling for the crumbs of power.

I’ve been told I am a fiercely loyal person.

When someone dares to threaten or even simply frustrate someone I love, I puff up with indignant rage on behalf of my loved one, whether they want me to or not.

When Ben complains to me about someone who was slightly rude to him at work, they become my sworn enemy.

Just this morning he said it was like having an attack terrier.

On the one hand I’d like to think it makes me a good friend.

But on the other hand, it can make me closed off to complexity, or a little more prone to tribal behavior than I’d like to admit.

Loyalty has historically been seen as a good thing, a virtue.

Being faithful and true to a value, person, or institution shows strength of character, decisiveness, trustworthiness.

In Confucianism, loyalty is one of the seven highest virtues.

Loyalty is a word and an idea that unites religion

and the secular world of politics  
in theory and practice.

Even the etymology of loyalty links the roots that bring us  
“law” “fealty” “fidelity” and “piety.”

Being loyal, obedient, faithful, and pious are virtues that are  
linked together in our language and in our minds.

How do we decide where to place our loyalty?  
How do we decide to change our loyalties?  
And why?

Humans have always had conflicting loyalties, and had to figure  
out where their priorities lie.

Competing or dual loyalties are both the basis for pretty much  
all the ancient Greek tragedies, most Oscar-winning movies, and  
some of Jesus’ most famous teachings.

In Matthew 6:24, Jesus states,

“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one  
and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and  
despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

And because Jesus always wanted to keep folks on their toes,  
he also said (Matthew 22:21),

“Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s,  
and unto God the things that are God’s.”

Some scholars think this shows Jesus understood the possibility of conflict between secular and religious loyalties, but believe that what he meant was that if loyalty to human systems of authority conflict with loyalty to God's authority, God always wins.

In 1908 philosopher Josiah Royce named loyalty not just as a virtue, but as the primary virtue, quote

“the heart of all the virtues,  
the central duty amongst all the duties.”

Philosophers can go on, so I won't give you all of his definition of loyalty, but in brief, he defines loyalty as

“the willing and practical and thoroughgoing  
devotion of a person to a cause.”

Loyalty isn't casual. Loyalty is whole-hearted, passionate, and unwavering in feeling and practice.

From that stance, Royce argues that loyalty is *the basic moral principle* from which all other principles can be derived.

Because after all, if you have a principle—or say, seven principles—yet you are not loyal to them, then what actual value or power do those principles have?

It is our loyalty to our principles, as seen in our actions, that makes any belief matter.

Philosophers have continued to debate the definition and implications of loyalty, including my own favorite philosopher and best friend Daniel Koltonski, whose dissertation on the meaning of loyalty in friendship is titled:

“A Good Friend Will Help You Move a Body:  
The Problem of Moral Disagreement.”

As the saying goes, a friend will help you move, but a good friend will help you move a body. He’s my best friend, so let’s just say I know where the bodies are buried.

Daniel points out that in that old joke, we seem to acknowledge that there are no moral limits to what friends are willing to do for one another—and therefore friendship has an inherent tendency to lead you in “moral danger.”

Loyalty should be something we give with as much care as love. Loyalty implies unconditional approval.

Handing over of your free will, to another agent who you allow to make choices for you.

Ride or die.

We have seen the shadow side of that kind of ride or die, morally dangerous loyalty this week, in the impeachment trial.

The purpose of a trial in America is supposed to be the pursuit of truth and justice: there should be jurors who are open to new

knowledge and understanding; witnesses who can share first person accounts; truth, and nothing but the truth.

Loyalty, or rather demand for loyalty, has been a defining trait of our current President.

He demands it, but doesn't give it, and loyalty only works when it is mutual. And so as one reporter put it, "John Bolton is only the latest of many former Trump advisers who seemingly expect[ed] to be betrayed by the president at some point — and behave[d] accordingly." Now "John the Backstabber" joins quite a large club of other disloyal men and women who once professed fealty, while simultaneously making their recordings and taking their notes for the day they fell from grace and could make some money on their betrayal.

None of them seem to be loyal to the patriotic ideals our nation was founded on.

Their primary loyalty seems is to money and power, hanging on with white knuckles to their First Class Elite Diamond status and not falling into the depths of Chalk, Rust, Cardboard and Sludge with the rest of us.

"No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve God and wealth."

The capacity for loyalty we are born with is a virtue, and the risk is that we can place that precious loyalty in people and institutions that are both worthy and unworthy of that loyalty.

This is true in patriotic loyalty, familial or friendly loyalty, romantic loyalty: all kinds of loyalties can cause us to unselfishly and whole-heartedly support policies that are immoral and people who are cruel. Loyalty is a double-bladed sword.

And even though loyalty is understood as a virtue of consistency, in reality, our loyalties are always necessarily shifting, changing, re-prioritizing.

When you have a kid, you gain a new and higher loyalty. When a romantic partner betrays you, your loyalties change. When a friend asks you to move a body, you may have to ask how far your loyalties go.

Our reading described the type of loyalties that institutions offer us, and that we literally line up for, hands outstretched, holding our loyalty cards, offering our phone numbers, email addresses, GPS locations, and Social Security numbers.

In my research I discovered there are some independent coffee shops in the UK that have started offering “disloyalty cards”—you get benefits based on how many different independent shops you frequent.

But that’s not what I’m going to offer you today.

Today, I offer you a new loyalty card.

Some of you might have one already, especially if you came to our Fellowship dinner last night.

It can coexist in your wallet right next to your CVS card and your Fruitee yogurt card.

The benefits of membership include:

A faith of the larger liberty, a faith that has room for you, your wonderings and your doubts.

A faith that cares more about how you behave than what you believe.

A set of seven principles to guide your life.

Six sources of spirituality for a deep well of wisdom to draw from.

A community to hold you in accountability, compassion, and casseroles.

Companions in a journey towards spiritual maturity, truth, and meaning.

A sanctuary, a sacred place of joy, worship, fellowship and song.

A place to grow, to lead, to practice being human even when it's hard.

Membership is good at locations all over North America, but your home membership comes with

all this, plus voting rights, and 20% off of rentals.

Plus I'll marry you and bury you for free.

Our membership book is always open for you to sign.

And whether or not you are in our register,

I'm offering you a Unitarian Universalist loyalty card.

In fact, I have 100s of them right here for those that don't already have them.

These little guys will fit in your wallet and remind you of our principles and sources whenever you need.

It can co-exist with many other loyalties, but it asks for a higher loyalty.

A loyalty to our shared values of love, justice, humility, and respect.

A loyalty to not simply professing your values, but to living them out, even when it is hard.

This card is heavier than it looks.

May we carry it wisely.

*Amen.*