**Women Wondering**

Service to be celebrated at the First Unitarian Church of South Bend, on 08 October 2017

Rev. Chip Roush

08 Oct ’17 family chalice? pronounce Siwon

# OPENING WORDS

Sometimes, when a person compliments me on something I’ve done,

I thank them,

and then point out some of the ways

that I could have done it better.

I am going to try to do less of that.

Perfectionism a tool of the racist, capitalist heteropatriarchy.

Let us not allow the perfect

to be the enemy of the good.

Feminist but not feminist enough?

Feminist, but not intersectional (anti-racist, pro-LGBTQ, etc) enough?

It is important to continue to strive for greater inclusivity

and it is important

to recognize the progress we are making

This morning, and every morning,

may we be more aware

of the evolving Spirit of Life

manifesting good things through and among us

So may we be.

# **FIRST READING**

Kele Ivey was born in 1975, in northwest Indiana

I think it says something about being a woman in general.

How often we are told "You can't do this. You can't do that."

And then to see a strong woman

throw off the costumes required by men to "fit in"

and take charge

was filled with symbolism for most of us."

# SECOND READING

Chicago actress, director and producer Elizabeth Laidlaw,

who runs the Lakeside Shakespeare Theatre in Frankfort, Michigan,

saw the film with her son on opening weekend.

She wrote the following on Facebook:

“I'd like to offer Patty Jenkins praise

on a subtler aspect of her work on the film.

I think what thrilled me most about the movie,

as I step away from the sheer badassery

[of Wonder Woman] and her Amazon sisters,

is how Jenkins was able to create

heroic men alongside Wonder Woman.

She showed men that were flawed and human,

but who were capable of bravery and great sacrifice and,

after their initial amazement…

said, ‘Uh, yeah. Sure, ma'am. We'll just follow you.’

And their manhood, their value,

their worth was never in question.

They had enough confidence and strength of purpose to fight at her side.

It's a great example of real manhood.

Not being reduced or ‘emasculated’

by a strong woman and her leadership,

but being invigorated, galvanized and

challenged to be their best selves …

I'm pretty sure my son got that message."

# THIRD READING

from *The Deadly Innocence of ‘Wonder Woman’*

Carlton Elliot Smith was born in Holly Springs, Mississippi, in 1964.

As entertained as I was

by the Patty Jenkins/Gal Gadot take on Wonder Woman,

there were things that didn't settle well with me.

One was that the essence of the original character s

hifted dramatically from 76 years ago,

and even as recently as the Lynda Carter era.

Rather than pursuing peaceful means

toward peaceful (or at least less violent) ends,

this version shows that she can be just as [violent]

as most of today's male superheroes…

I see this story-line as propaganda

symptomatic of the atrocities that happen

all over this country…in the name of 'justice' and 'law and order'.

It doesn't matter that Wonder Woman was \*wrong\* to kill,

when, as the strongest person on the planet,

she had several other options to de-escalate the situation –

Only her good \*intentions\* mattered.

It doesn't matter that she didn't do her homework

to accurately assess where the real danger was:

Because of her gender, her whiteness,

her good looks and her inexperience,

we the viewers are supposed to write this off as a 'youthful mistake'…

We are supposed to identify with Diana as judge, jury and -- oopsie! -- executioner,

who will never be held to account…

This is a dangerous message to subliminally feed children

who want to be superheroes when they grow up,

and who might end up in some police department or neighborhood watch program.

Ask the families of Philando Castile, Treyvon Martin,

Eric Garner, Jamar Clark, Tamir Rice

and far, far too many others.

It does, however, satiate our national bloodlust,

and our belief that the impact of what we do

matters less than what we meant to achieve by killing.

That in itself is remarkable consistent

with the Jim Crow-era lynchings of 76 years ago,

when Wonder Woman came to be.

# SERMON

How many of you have seen the recent movie *Wonder Woman*?

How many have ever owned a *Wonder Woman* comic book?

How many think comic books and/or superhero movies can be legitimate forms

of art and social commentary?

It probably won’t surprise many of you

that I DO think

that comic books

and graphic novels (what we call the “good” comic books, these days)

can be legitimate forms of art and social commentary.

College courses on comic books / graphic novels / superhero movies

X-Men as allegory for oppression (race, bgltq) since 1963

1950 poster

Superman: “And remember, boys and girls, your school—

like our country—

is made up of Americans of many different races,

religions and national origins, so…”

caption of comic: “…if YOU hear anybody

talk against a schoolmate or anyone else

because of his religion, race or national origin—

don’t wait: tell him

THAT KIND OF TALK IS UN-AMERICAN.

http://www.openculture.com/2016/11/the-1950-superman-poster-that-urged-kids-to-stick-up-for-all-americans.html

less superhero, more real life:

Harvey Pekar (b. 78 years ago today) graphic novel / comic autobiography

Every bit as nuanced, gritty, heartbreaking and occasionally uplifting

as any other literature

WW good

Wonder Woman movie - feminist and anti-xenophobic

unknown: “I love that Wonder Woman's source of strength is love.

I love that men were inspired by her.

I love that rather than protecting her,

the men gave her space to fight.”

Alicia Lutes: "it moved me beyond words

to see a woman so confident in her gifts and skills,

in her mission and her purpose and her moral code.

To watch her stand up against an oft-heard sentiment from men—

you can’t do that"

http://nerdist.com/wonder-woman-no-mans-land-scene/

it was more inclusive than many films

we saw amazon women with many different skin colors

soldiers in turbans, other multicultural headgear

https://indiancountrymedianetwork.com/culture/arts-entertainment/film-review-eugene-brave-rock-speaks-blackfoot-wonder-woman-dcs-best-film-ever/

not just on-screen:

the way that Patty Jenkins

and many other women,

in many off-screen roles,

supported each other

as they created this film

is a different way of making movies

Ebeth: Kevin and I watched Wonder Woman. Kevin's first, my 3rd showing. In case you were wondering, you can find most of the sermons I would have written about this movie in the special features, and there was a section where they basically describe the set being MHC. So yeah. Women support each other all over the place.

WW could be better

Even though the film did include

some racial, religious and cultural diversity,

all of the lead roles were white people.

There were several supporting roles

which featured men—and one woman—of color,

but none of the lead roles

appeared anything but white.

one friend pointed out,

“If you like Wonder Woman,

you better also praise

[the movie about the African superhero,] Black Panther”

As Carlton Elliot Smith wrote,

In our third reading,

this film was as just about as violent

as most other superhero movies.

We do see Wonder Woman

try to stop

to help heal a wounded soldier;

and her compassion

for the suffering townspeople

is the reason

that she climbs out of the trenches

and leads the British

to vanquish the German machine guns.

And virtually the rest of the film

celebrates the many ways

that Wonder Woman

can kick, punch, stab, lasso

and otherwise violently subdue

her enemies—

usually in passionate slow motion.

The film claims to be feminist,

but the way it celebrates violence

is in no way counter

to the prevailing toxic cultural norms.

Christina Cauterucci, writing for slate.com:

“I Wish *Wonder Woman* Were as Feminist

As It Thinks It Is”

prevailing occupation with the titular heroine’s sex appeal

http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx\_factor/2017/06/02/i\_wish\_wonder\_woman\_were\_as\_feminist\_as\_it\_thinks\_it\_is.html

at least a dozen times,

somebody remarks on how beautiful Wonder Woman is.

They mention that Steve is “above average” twice,

but they have whole scenes around people reacting to Wonder Woman’s physical beauty

Similarly,

the evil Nazi scientist is disfigured

Beauty is conflated with moral purity,

and ugliness is a sign of evil

And there is the matter

of the skimpy outfit

that Wonder Woman wears.

It is true

that the filmmakers tried to make her costume

at least a little bit less ridiculous.

They did do some work

to make it *plausible*

as battle armor.

And…even though it was not as blatantly sexist

as the tiny costume

that Lynda Carter wore on television,

it is still more about

making her appear sexually attractive

than it is about making her powerful.

Look, sex and feminism are not incompatible.

Feminism is about women having choices;

and most feminists I know

are sex-positive.

And a warrior

from a long line of female warriors

who’ve spent centuries

perfecting their battle armor

would probably have outfits

that covered and protected

a little more

than do most swim suits.

Even the United Nations noticed:

Gadot, fellow Wonder Woman actress Lynda Carter, DC Entertainment President Diane Nelson, Wonder Woman director Patty Jenkins and U.N. Under-Secretary General Cristina Gallach appeared at the United Nations on October 21, 2016, the 75th anniversary of the first appearance of Wonder Woman, to mark the character's designation by the United Nations as its "Honorary Ambassador for the Empowerment of Women and Girls".

The gesture was intended to raise awareness of UN Sustainable Development Goal No. 5, which seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by 2030.

The decision was met with protests from UN staff members who stated in their petition to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon that the character is "not culturally encompassing or sensitive", and served to objectify women. As a result, the character was stripped of the designation, and the project ended Dec. 16

//wikipedia

So: the *Wonder Woman* movie was not perfect,

by any means—

and it was still more feminist than most big-budget movies.

I do think

that it is advancing the conversation about women in the world.

Remember: perfectionism is a tool

of the racist capitalist heteropatriarchy.

Those in power want us

to spend our time and energy

on debates

and arguments

instead of making large, good-enough, challenges to the status quo.

speaking of the status quo:

Let us examine the current challenges

that women face day in and day out:

pay gap

glass ceiling (black ceiling)

control over their own bodies

recent WH policy allowing more corporations to decline birth control insurance coverage

language (even my UU colleagues use “he” as the default, often)

ideas not heard until “hepeated.”

men outnumber women 3-1 on TED talks, political analysts on TV

PayPal recent panel on gender equality – all men on panel

World Economic Forum at Davos, panel on “When Women Thrive” – all men

this last week,

candidate to be one of two U.S. Senators for the state of Missouri,

Courtland Sykes

was asked “Do you favor women’s rights?”

“Chanel (Rion), my fiancee,

has given me orders to favor these rights,

so I’d better,” he said.

“But Chanel knows that my obedience comes with a small price

that she loves to pay anyway —

I want to come home to a home-cooked dinner at six every night,

one that she fixes.

“It’s exactly the kind of family dinner

that I expect one day

my future daughters will learn to make

after they too become traditional homemakers and family wives —

think Norman Rockwell here —

and Gloria Steinham (sic) be damned.”

https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2017/10/7/1704995/-Missouri-Republican-announces-plan-to-Women-Belong-in-the-Kitchen-Platform

Again, homemaking is an honorable path,

and I support anyone who chooses it.

When it is not a choice,

and when you damn a feminist icon

as part of your expectations for your daughters,

you are telling me not to vote for you.

Michigan serial rapist of underage girls given parental rights of child born of his rape,

without mother’s knowledge, much less consent:

https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2017/10/7/1705108/-Michigan-Rapist-Gets-Joint-Custody-of-Child

Jessica Kirkland

suburban Atlanta mother

about a year ago,

about the Duggar family,

who was the star of a reality TV program

called “19 Kids and Counting.”

One of the older sons in the family, Josh,

was found to have cheated on his wife, Anna.

"I know everybody is laughing about this Josh Duggar story. Oh, a DUGGAR on Ashley Madison, it's so rich! I wish more people would talk about Anna. I normally keep things light on Facebook, but let's talk about Anna. Let me tell you: Anna Duggar is in the worst position she could possibly be in right now. Anna Duggar was crippled by her parents by receiving no education, having no work experience (or life experience, for that matter) and then was shackled to this loser because his family was famous in their religious circle. Anna Duggar was taught that her sole purpose in life, the most meaningful thing she could do, was to be chaste and proper, a devout wife, and a mother. Anna Duggar did that! Anna Duggar followed the rules that were imposed on her from the get-go and this is what she got in reward- a husband who she found out, in the span of six months, not only molested his own sisters, but was unfaithful to her in the most humiliating way possible. While she was fulfilling her "duty" of providing him with four children and raising them. She lived up to the standard that men set for her of being chaste and Godly and in return, the man who demanded this of her sought women who were the opposite. "Be this," they told her. She was. It wasn't enough…

As a mother of daughters, this makes me ill. Parents, WE MUST DO BETTER BY OUR DAUGHTERS. Boys, men, are born with power. Girls have to command it for themselves. They aren't given it. They assume it and take it. But you have to teach them to do it, that they can do it. We HAVE to teach our daughters that they are not beholden to men like this. …Educate them. Empower them. Give them the tools they need to survive, on their own if they must.

Josh Duggar should be cowering in fear of Anna Duggar right now. Cowering. He isn't, but he should be. He should be quaking in fear that the house might fall down around them if he's in the same room as she. Please, instill your daughters with the resolve to make a man cower if he must. To say "I don't deserve this, and my children don't deserve this." I wish someone had ever, just once, told Anna she was capable of this. That she knew she is.

As for my girls, I'll raise them to think they breathe fire.”

http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3210868/Georgia-mother-pens-open-letter-devout-wife-Anna-Duggar-s-raising-daughters-breathe-fire.html

So may we be.

# CLOSING WORDS

Sometime this week,

as you find yourself criticizing yourself or others

for not being entirely, 100% perfect,

may we stop and celebrate

the parts that are good enough,

and then look for ways

to improve in the future.

So may we be.