Today marks the beginning of our Faith and Film Series, which opens with the Disney movie, Moana 2. Moana, who lives on the fictional island of Motunui, spends her days exploring other islands near her home, hoping to find signs of people and communities other than her own. With the help of her sidekick, a rooster named Hei Hei, she finds one day a broken clay vessel carved with an image of a mountain and people. It's a piece of pottery made by the Lapita navigators, the ancestors of modern Polynesians dating back to somewhere between 1500 and 500 BCE. This discovery fills her with hope that there are ancestors whose names and stories she doesn't know, people whom she hasn't yet found or met who are related to her through their connection to the ocean. The history of broken pottery, family trees with holes and maps with tears comes from a history of violence.

And the history of the Pacific Islands is certainly one marked by such violence, of colonial rulers, and in the story of Moana, angry gods who use separation to gain power and control and to destroy the connections between people that give them strength. The words of our reading today that Reverend Erin shared come from Queen Lili'uokalani, who was the first queen of the Kingdom of Hawaii and the last Hawaiian monarch. She ruled from 1891 to 1893 when the Indigenous government was overthrown by businessmen and landowners, mostly American citizens who lived in the kingdom. And yes, the overthrowers included some Unitarians. The new provisional government, which became the Republic of Hawaii, placed the former queen under house arrest at the palace in a bedroom upstairs from where they plotted to take over and annex the islands to the United States. The queen was a musician, writer and quilter, and all of these crafts helped her pass time for the two years that she remained imprisoned in the palace. It wasn't until 1895 that she abdicated the throne in return for the release of her imprisoned supporters.

She lived out the remainder of her days as a private citizen. This history is painful. Even United States President Grover Cleveland after the annexation of Hawaii wrote, "As I look back upon the first steps in this miserable business, and as I contemplate the means used to complete the outrage, I am ashamed of the whole affair." Queen Lili'uokalani spent her life working to bridge cultures while preserving and strengthening Indigenous ideas, art and culture. She walked the razor's edge, the blade of pilly grass between being inflexible and too flexible. From this, she learned as she wrote to her daughter shortly before her death, "To gain the kingdom of heaven is to hear what is not said, to see what cannot be seen and to know the unknowable, that is aloha." Now, aloha is a word that most of us know as a Hawaiian greeting, but it has a deeper spiritual significance and meaning. It is a word shared by many Polynesian languages that means love, peace, compassion, the force that holds together existence.

The spirit of aloha embodied by Queen Lili'uokalani is one that brings people to and strives for peace, and it is the call of aloha that Moana follows in the movie Moana 2. After restoring the heart of Te Fiti, the beautiful goddess of life in the first movie and saving her island, Moana is once again called to serve her people. After returning to her island with the Lapita clay vessel, Moana has a vision in which her ancestor, Tautai Vasa tells her why the people of the ocean are no longer connected. There was once an island, Motufetu where many channels came together connecting the people of the entire ocean. But the power-hungry storm god, Nalo, cursed the island and sunk it, and it remains at the bottom of the ocean thousands of years later. Just like the invaders of Hawaii, the power-hungry god tried to destroy the people by separating them. In Moana's vision, Tautai Vasa warns that the people of Moana's Island, Motunui, will not survive unless she can find a way to break the curse, raise Motufetu from the depths of the ocean, restore the channels and reconnect the people.

No one knows how far down the island is. It's farther than the last Tautai was able to go. Moana's community, those present and ancestors there in spirit gather around her, hopeful that she can show them the way and go beyond where anyone has gone before. Moana's work of bringing her people together begins with assembling a crew for her boat, including a craftswoman, a historian, and a grumpy old farmer, and of course, her pet pig and rooster, an unlikely assemblage of creatures. But as Moana's mother reminds her, "Our people will rise if you let them." Just as a group of wise men followed the star of Bethlehem, just as enslaved Africans followed the North Star to freedom, just as people have done for thousands of years all over the globe, Moana and her crew follow the path of a comet across the ocean toward Motufetu. In Moana's case, she is carrying on the tradition of wayfinding, part of her heritage.

Many Pacific Islands were first discovered and the islands remained connected to one another because the Indigenous people of the islands used wayfinding techniques such as following stars, observing birds, ocean swells, wind patterns and drawing on extensive oral tradition. The people of each small island, none of which had all the resources needed to sustain its residents would travel to other islands in order to share resources and sustain one another. Although we don't know of an actual island being sunk by a storm god, what did happen is that more islands became occupied and national borders grew in their importance. It was no longer possible for the people to travel freely

from one island to another, sharing precious resources. And so they found themselves in the same situation as Moana's fictional island, Motunui in danger of extinction because their island alone could not support its people. The people of the different islands and communities needed each other. There is a lesson here for us in both the fictional story of Moana and in the history of the Pacific Islands. We need each other to survive.

When the powers that be separate us, the power of our interdependence is endangered. We see this happening across the world today in war zones, and it sometimes happens in our personal relationships, in our families, and certainly in our relationship to the earth and the rest of creation. People and communities cannot survive and thrive alone on a real or metaphorical island. And when we do find ourselves stuck in a storm, lost or isolated, we need wayfinding techniques to find the way out, to find each other, perhaps to find another way that's never been found before. Along her harrowing journey, Moana encounters Matangi, a bat-like woman who serves the god Nalo begrudgingly. And so she gives Moana some valuable advice, "You think you can only get somewhere if you know the way?" She says to Moana. "The whole point of wayfinding is to find your way to what's never been found. You can't break Nalo's curse if you play it safe. There's always another way. You just have to think differently. Again, the call of aloha.

As Queen Lili'uokalani said, to gain the kingdom of heaven is to hear what is not said, to see what cannot be seen and to know the unknowable, that is aloha. As I watched Moana 2 for the first time and listened to the catchy song in which Matangi encourages Moana to get lost, the theological meaning-making channels in my brain were lighting up, "This sounds a lot like womanist process theology," I thought. Womanist process theology is a form of wayfinding embraced by Black women such as Dr. Monica Coleman, who wrote the book, Making a Way Out of No Way. Rooted in the philosophy of mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, process Theology says that everything that happens is a product of the past that we inherit, what's presently possible and what we choose to do with those things. Those present possibilities for our world are offered by a God who urges us to choose paths that lead to the common good. And then that same God takes in the events of the world as they unfold into what God is, making them available to inform future possibilities.

Four of the characteristics of this theology are God's offering up unforeseen possibilities, the power of human agency, the goals of survival, quality of life, justice and liberation, and challenging the existing order. The phrase, "making a way out of no way," Does not mean that the way comes out of nowhere or nothing, but that the way forward is not found in the past alone. "A way forward," says Coleman," a way toward life comes from another source. It comes from unforeseen possibilities. They incorporate the past, but we cannot look solely to the past to what has been done before to find our way forward." Womanist theologians also talk a lot about the wilderness, the place where we meet God and strengthen our sense of identity. And this sounds a lot like getting lost to find your way. Process theology has always made sense to my Unitarian Universalist mind and heart. We believe that new truths, new wisdom, new ways of life and ways to the holy are always being revealed or found.

Our experiences influence who we are, how we see the world and what we do. What we do, and the choices we make influence those around us. And for some of us, we take it a step further to say that

this also influences God and how God relates to the world. It's a worldview characterized by mutuality and interdependence. So what wisdom do Moana, Queen Lili'uokalani, womanist process theology and Unitarian Universalism have for us today? I would imagine that all of us have some experience of that feeling of being stuck or lost or isolated, whether in our personal lives or when it comes to the social and political situation in our country and our world. Those times when it seems like there's no way out, no way forward, or at least no good way forward, and we don't know how to navigate toward surviving and thriving, toward justice and liberation, toward a vision of peace and an end to violence.

As the children's story about the bear hunt, do you know that one, wisely concludes, "We can't go over it, we can't go under it and we can't go around it. We have to go through it." So how do we make a way out of no way? First, we must know where we come from and be guided by the traditions and wisdom of our ancestors. This could be our familial ancestors, our cultural ancestors or religious ancestors. I'm acutely aware that as a white woman preaching from these sources, Pacific Island cultures, a Hawaiian monarch and Black Christian womanist theologies that their ancestors are not mine. As Aurora Levins Morales, our recent guest minister reminded those of us attending her midweek reading, whiteness and colonialism, the same powers that divided cultures in the Pacific Islands have also alienated my white ancestors from our connection to our own lands.

Many white people grieve this loss and don't know how to do so in a healthy way, instead, projecting this grief onto Indigenous people and movements. The white impulse toward cultural misappropriation often comes out of this grief. So when I myself look to where I come from, it includes all of this and it includes our Unitarian Universalist ancestors who over and over again cast out in new theological and spiritual directions, challenged dominant narratives and sided with justice and love. And it also includes Unitarian Universalist ancestors who colonized and enslaved. And the more we know about that history, the less likely we are to repeat it in any form. We make a way out of no way by knowing where we come from and second, by knowing who we are and what we can do. In the first movie, Moana's grandmother sings to her:

The people you love will change you. The things you have learned will guide you. And nothing on Earth can silence the quiet voice still inside you. And when that voice starts to whisper. "Moana, you've come so far. Moana, listen. Do you know who you are?"

In reply, Moana sings:

Who am I? I am the girl who loves my island. I am the girl who loves the sea. It calls me. I am the daughter of the village chief. We are descended from voyagers who found their way across the world. They call me. I've delivered us to where we are. I have journeyed farther. I am everything I've learned and more. Still, it calls me. And the call isn't out there at all. It's inside me. It's like the tide, always falling and rising. I will carry you here in my heart. You'll remind me. Come what may, I know the way. I am Moana!

Moana's people wanted her to lead their tribe there on the island of Motunui, but she knew who she

was and the persistent call inside of her toward the ocean. The name Moana does mean ocean after all. The events of the past and the ways of the voyagers from whom she's descended inform the possibilities available to her. But she is making them her own and charting her own path, not through uncharted waters, but through places that have been torn apart by violence and in need of healing. Third, to make a way out of no way, we must be keen observers. This is the practice of wayfinders. When we're able to hear what is not said aloud, to see what cannot be seen to the naked eye, to discern the possibilities being offered to us, when we can track changes big and small and take advantage of those movements to open up new ways, then we are making a way out of no way. Observation and discernment are critical leadership practices, by the way, and ones that are not often embraced by traditional leaders who understand their role as that of decider and doer and demander.

And fourth, to make a way out of no way, we must touch the ground. In Moana's case, this meant literally swimming to the bottom of the ocean to touch the island Motufetu in order to raise it and reconnect the people of the ocean. For us, we must be in touch with the ground of being, the ground upon which all beings exist, what theologian Paul Tillich called God, "For it is this ground of being, this spirit of aloha, this kingdom of heaven, this beloved community, this harmony with the divine that moves us out of isolation, out of stuckness, off our island and into connection with something beyond ourselves that brings together all that is past and all the possibilities in the present toward the common good, toward compassion and kindness, peace and justice. There's always another way. You just have to think differently." May we, may our communities and may the leaders who represent us all rise to this challenge. Amen.