

Frankenstein: The Story of Our Lives

By

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Prelude: *"The Spark of Life"* | Frankenstein: the Musical by BlueGreenHum

View and listen here: [The Spark of Life](#)



Welcome and Greeting

Good morning and welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Spokane, where we join together to create a nourishing liberal religious home and to champion justice, diversity, and environmental stewardship in the wider world. Or, as we say in short, to create community, find meaning, and work for justice.

Welcome to everyone, to our visitors, to those here in person, and to those joining online. We embrace all that you come with, all of your unique beliefs, lifestyle, experiences, differences, and all that makes you who you are is welcome here this morning.

These welcoming words are especially appropriate this morning as we reflect throughout our service on Unitarianism's foundation, the inherent worth and dignity of every person, through the lens of Mary Shelley's classic 1818 gothic story of *Frankenstein*, the mad scientist whom she also called "The Modern Prometheus," because he steals fire from the gods to bring his unnatural creature to life.

Today, I have stolen fire from the gods to help bring this story to life, using AI generated music and imagery that will accompany my own reflections on this enduring tale, including the song we just heard, "The Spark of Life," an interpretation of the moment Frankenstein

brings his creature to life; performed by my AI record label, BlueGreenHum, from the album, "Frankenstein: The Musical."

Our historic church may not be as old as the Frankenstein novel, but it is from the same century and has remained a liberal presence and influence in our community and world since 1887, thanks to the great generosity of our friends and members, past and present. So, before we continue, let's listen to this week's Generosity moment.

Chalice Lighting

As I said, today's service is different. The music is different. The format is different, and, since fire and lightning are such significant imagery in the Frankenstein story, the words to our chalice lighting are also different.

We light our chalice this morning as a symbol of all that fire and light means and symbolizes for us, the spark of life, the spark of creation, warmth, a place around the hearth, the firelight, a place to be truly seen and included by others, even when the same light casts our shadow behind, beside, and sometime before us. May we be mindful of our own shadow when scrutinizing those of others and strive to make ours a place of life and light and warmth for all.



Act I

Like many, my first introduction to the story of Frankenstein was the 1931 film starring Boris Karloff as Frankenstein's creature, a dumb, brutish being pieced together from corpses and brought to life by a thunderstorm. But when I first read the novel in my twenties, I was surprised to find a creature that was far more intelligent than any person I've ever heard of; a genius who learned to speak and read merely by observing and listening to others while hiding unseen in cold shadows.

Until then, I had considered *Frankenstein* a parable about the dangers of unconstrained science which was, indeed, leading to an unprecedented number of discoveries, technologies, and dramatic social changes when the novel was written in the early 1800s, causing a lot of fear and uncertainty; just as AI is causing today—a technology that is truly far more intelligent than any person I've ever heard of.

But upon reading the novel, I saw no such parable. Instead, I discovered a beautiful, intelligent, loving being who longed for nothing more than to be included and loved by others. It is only after it is utterly rejected by its creator and its society—with no hope of ever finding a morsel of acceptance or companionship—that it becomes the vengeful monster everyone considers it.

Frankenstein is, thus, a human tragedy, which is why I consider it the story of our lives. For each of us, to lesser or greater degrees, experiences rejection from those we love, from those who are supposed to love us—our family, our friends, and our society.

Last week for example, I saw a group perform on America's Got Talent. It was made up of five young women who had wanted to be ballerinas since childhood but, as one of them explained, "Most professional ballet companies, they want everyone to look the same. Being an African American woman with hips, with thighs; in dance it was never really accepted." Another, her voice cracking, with tears in her eyes, said that she always thought she was excluded because she wasn't good enough, not realizing it was because she didn't fit the mold. "It makes me sad to think that there are so many people out there that are not still dancing cuz they didn't feel accepted." Indeed, there are lots of people out there who are not living up to their potential, not fully unfolding, because they didn't feel accepted.

Something surprising in Shelley's novel, that's not included in any of its film treatments, is that Frankenstein is so horrified by his creation that he flees the moment of its birth, not having the slightest interaction with it. "I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body," he says ... "I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart."¹

As for the creature, “It was dark when I awoke; I felt cold also, and half-frightened as it were instinctively, finding myself so desolate,” it later explains, while finally confronting Frankenstein. “Before I had quitted your apartment, on a sensation of cold, I had covered myself with some clothes; but these were insufficient to secure me from the dews of night. I was a poor, helpless, miserable wretch; I knew, and could distinguish, nothing; but, feeling pain invade me on all sides, I sat down and wept.”²

Being a student of psychology, I know rejection and exclusion are among the most painful and dreaded of human experiences. Many of us will do almost anything to belong, even if it means hiding who we really are, what we really feel and believe, what we truly want. We hide such truths in the shadows, like Frankenstein’s abandoned creature.

Yet, rather than becoming hopeless and vengeful, as the forlorn creature eventually does, we can respond productively, like the Hiplet Ballerinas who have formed a ballet company in Chicago that focuses on inclusivity, welcoming differences, including different shapes and sizes, and by bravely taking their own different shapes, sizes, hips, and thighs onto the world’s largest stage to be seen by millions.

Everyone here have experienced our own painful Frankenstein moments in life, feeling rejection from others, often from those who are supposed to have loved us most. I invite you to consider your own such experiences as we listen to this next song, reflecting the misery of Frankenstein’s rejected creature not long after it first awakens.

Musical Reflection: “*Who am I?*” by BlueGreenHum

View and listen here: [Who Am I?](#)



Act II

After reading Frankenstein for the first time, I found myself so astonished and filled with empathy for this brilliant, loving entity with so much potential and genius to offer—that I wanted others to understand the story’s greater meaning. So, I wrote a screenplay I hoped would be the pilot for a Frankenstein TV series. That was in 1989, when I was 25 years old. In it, the creature’s frozen body has recently been discovered and is being delivered to a research scientist at UCLA when the truck carrying it crashes into a utility pole during a thunderstorm, electrifying everything in it, reanimating the creature to find its way anew in our modern world.

Committed to making amends for its vengeful behaviors in the past, it seeks to help those it now encounters, while being pursued by another mad scientist determined to capture and dissect it to discover Frankenstein’s secret for creating life from death. At the end of the episode the creature, whom I’ve named Victor, is weeping over the murdered body of his friend, Elton, a Vietnam veteran whom he first encounters living homeless in the woods. At that moment, Frank Rubenstein, the scientist obsessed with capturing Victor, takes aim with a tranquilizer gun. But a Sheriff on the scene points the gun barrel to the ground.

“What are you doing?” Rubenstein protests. “I told you, that thing’s not human.”

“It’s not a monster either,” The Sheriff says. “You’ve been a scientist too long Professor. Monsters don’t cry.”

This is another valuable insight into Shelley’s original tale; she doesn’t make it clear who the real monster is, the creature or Frankenstein himself. “How can I move thee?” The creature pleads upon finally confronting his maker. “Will no entreaties cause thee to turn a favourable eye upon thy creature, who implores thy goodness and compassion. Believe me, Frankenstein: I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity: but am I not alone, miserably alone? You, my creator, abhor me; what hope can I gather from your fellow-creatures, who owe me nothing?”³

On the night it’s brought to life, the creature, stumbling about the world unsure, unaware, and hungry, wanders into a cottage, allured by the smell of food. “But I had hardly placed my foot within the door, before the children shrieked, and one of the women fainted. The whole village was roused; some fled, some attacked me, until, grievously bruised by stones and many other kinds of missile weapons, I escaped to the open country, and fearfully took refuge in a low hovel, quite bare, and making a wretched appearance after the palaces I had beheld in the village.”⁴

Perhaps this is the real point of Shelley’s book, that neither the creature nor Frankenstein is the monster, but any society or any one of us who intentionally demonizes or dehumanizes others, including the people of a particular identity, nationality, or ideology. That’s another kind of Frankenstein moment, one we experience, not when we are being excluded or rejected, but when we are the ones treating others in such a way. I invite you to again consider a time when you might have behaved in such a way, as we gather this morning’s offering while listening to “Torches,” another song inspired by the *Frankenstein* story.

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Offertory "*Torches*" by BlueGreenHum

View and listen here: [Torches](#)



Act III

For me, the most moving part of Shelley's novel occurs over several chapters as the creature hides in a hovel outside the cottage belonging to an old blind man and his children, Felix and Agatha. This is where the creature learns to speak and read, while longing to be included within their love and the warmth of their home. It spends the long cold winter secretly providing for many of their needs and eventually decides it will attempt first to introduce itself to the blind man, who will be less likely to judge it by its appearance.

All seems to be going well. But, as the creature later recounts, "At that instant the cottage door was opened ... Felix ... and Agatha entered. Who can describe their horror and consternation on beholding me? Agatha fainted ... Felix darted forward, and with supernatural force tore me from his father, to whose knees I clung: in a transport of fury, he dashed me to the ground, and struck me violently with a stick. I could have torn him limb from limb, as the lion rends the antelope. But my heart sunk within me as with bitter sickness, and I refrained."⁵

This is a major turning point in the story. Utterly broken, rejected by the family it loves, its hopes of belonging, friendship, and kindness dashed forever, Frankenstein's monster finds a new purpose; exacting revenge upon its creator for making such a miserable being. It is also the part of the story that invoked such profound empathy in me more than 35 years ago and that stays with me to this day. It's why I've used AI to tell the story anew in a 90-minute soundtrack, and why it is the subject of today's service.

It's also why I've put a little more production effort on the song you'll hear and see next, "Even the Blind Man Turned Away."

Musical Reflection: *"Even the Blind Man Turned Away"* by BlueGreenHum

View and listen here: [Even the Blind Man Turned Away](#)



Act IV

Having thought about this haunting story a great deal over the years, I have come to believe its main character is neither Frankenstein nor his creature. I believe, rather, that I am the main character, as is anyone who reads it. Shelley's portrayal of us as the everyman, Captain Robert Walton, who, as its narrator, is the only true voice in the novel. It begins with several letters Walton has written to his beloved sister Margaret, whom he has left behind in England, probably forever, because of his own unyielding obsession, his desire to discover a passage across the North Pole.

It is there, his motionless ship locked in ice, he and his men facing almost certain death, that the story begins and ends, and where he encounters Frankenstein, nearly frozen to death, yet no less obsessed with hunting and killing the creature that has destroyed everything and everyone he loved.

"Shall I respect man, when he contemns me?" The creature asks Frankenstein. "Let him live with me in the interchange of kindness, and, instead of injury, I would bestow every benefit upon him with tears of gratitude at his acceptance. But that cannot be; the human senses are insurmountable barriers to our union. Yet mine shall not be the submission of abject slavery. I will revenge my injuries: if I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear; and chiefly towards you my arch-enemy, because my creator, do I swear inextinguishable hatred. Have a care: I will

work at your destruction, nor finish until I desolate your heart, so that you curse the hour of your birth.”⁶

But the entire story is told as it has been heard and written down by Captain Walton, who received it directly from Frankenstein’s dying lips. At its end, after it has boarded the ship and discovered its deceased maker, Walton even bears witness to the creature’s words of remorse. “... it is true that I am a wretch. I have murdered the lovely and the helpless; I have strangled the innocent as they slept, and grasped to death his throat who never injured me or any other living thing. I have devoted my creator, the select specimen of all that is worthy of love and admiration among men, to misery; I have pursued him even to that irremediable ruin. There he lies, white and cold in death. You hate me; but your abhorrence cannot equal that with which I regard myself. I look on the hands which executed the deed; I think on the heart in which the imagination of it was conceived, and long for the moment when they will meet my eyes, when it will haunt my thoughts, no more.”⁷

Yet, in the end, having heard Frankenstein’s dreadful tale, having witnessed how his own obsessions destroyed him, and having witnessed the horrifying creature’s regret, Walton does something neither Frankenstein nor his monster could bring themselves to do. Rather than continuing to pursue his own mad obsession, he decides, should they be fortunate to break free from the ice, that he choose life instead of death by returning to England and to those he loves.

And that is what happens and, I presume, is the lesson Shelley has imparted to us all, that we can cease our hateful, vengeful, destructive, obsessive ways. Like Captain Walton, the novel’s personified bookmark, the placeholder for ourselves, we can turn the ship around. It’s not too late for us individuals, as a society, or as a world to love one another.

You can listen to the entire Frankenstein: The Musical album on the streaming platform of your choice, including Spotify, which allows you to do so for free. For now, I leave you with one final song that I think reflects the true moral of this unforgettable parable. It will be followed by our benediction, and our usual closing song, Shalom. But if you want to stick around for a just few more minutes, the album’s Overture will serve as today’s postlude.

Musical Reflection: “*I Will Turn the Ship Around*” by [BlueGreenHum](#)

View and listen here: [I Will Turn the Ship Around](#)



Postlude “Overture” by BlueGreenHum

Listen here: [Overture \(Spark of Genius\) • BlueGreenHum](#)

¹ Shelley, Mary. Frankenstein (The Original 1818 'Uncensored' Edition) (p. 26). e-artnow. Kindle Edition.

² Shelley, Mary. Frankenstein (The Original 1818 'Uncensored' Edition) (pp. 55-56). e-artnow. Kindle Edition.

³ Shelley, Mary. Frankenstein (The Original 1818 'Uncensored' Edition) (p. 54). e-artnow. Kindle Edition.

⁴ Shelley, Mary. Frankenstein (The Original 1818 'Uncensored' Edition) (pp. 57-58). e-artnow. Kindle Edition.

⁵ Shelley, Mary. Frankenstein (The Original 1818 'Uncensored' Edition) (p. 77). e-artnow. Kindle Edition.

⁶ Shelley, Mary. Frankenstein (The Original 1818 'Uncensored' Edition) (pp. 83-84). e-artnow. Kindle Edition.

⁷ Shelley, Mary. Frankenstein (The Original 1818 'Uncensored' Edition) (p. 135). e-artnow. Kindle Edition.