

Homily: What A Time It Is To Be Alive

Rev. Leslie Kee 01.10.21

We shall be known by the company we keep
 by the ones who circle round to tend these fires.
 We shall be known by the ones who sow and reap
 the seeds of change from deep within the earth.
 It is time now. It is time now that we thrive
 It is time we lead ourselves into the well.
 It is time now, and what a time to be alive,
 in this great turning we shall learn to lead in love
 in this great turning we shall learn to lead in love

This beautiful and inspiring song was written and first performed by Sara Nutting and Karisha Longaker – their group is called MaMuse; and thankfully, they have gifted it not just to UUs but to all persons who share a deep belief in how essential it is for human beings to lead in love.

As Unitarian Universalists, we are a community of people who have chosen to believe human beings are capable of figuring out for themselves a source of ultimate meaning, that which is holy or divine or of-god – those qualities and values which make up our own personal moral compass. We are a religious/spiritual tradition which elevates the value of the human heart and the integrity of each person's being. We are thinking, feeling, intuiting beings who have chosen a set of principles – of shared affirmations – to be our life's guideposts instead of a set of right-or-wrong answers in the form of a doctrine.

We are a community of believers who are proud to be known by the company we keep; who count ourselves among those who sow and reap the seeds of change from deep within the earth, and, I would add, from the right-relationships we strive to establish and nourish every single day.

When we chose this month's theme, *Good Things ARE Happening*, it came from a deep longing for a *great turning* to be real. A turning in which we will once again, draw strength from that *soul-deep knowing* that it is time now that we thrive... that we can and will lead ourselves into the well... because *what a time it is* to be alive!

Because we are involving ourselves in a ritual of transformation today, not only are we intentionally letting go, many of us are drawing strength from our belief that transformation is an essential part of a meaningful spiritual practice. It is why the actual burning of words which embody the suffering and pain, frustrations and disappointments from the past, is so powerful.

Smoke is the archetypal symbol of the spirit and so when it rises into the universe, I believe, it blends with natural elements and energies which are the invisible forces animating the cycles of life, death and rebirth. Earth, air, fire and water – that well to which we must lead ourselves in order to give and receive the gifts which serve the flourishing of life.

Unlike many other religious traditions, Unitarian Universalism is not organized around a deity, and so it is very important for each of us to understand what is at the heart of our tradition: if a deity isn't our organizing principle, then what is?

I call it a covenant of right-relationship. Some call it beloved community. Some call it social justice. Some call it love. But no matter how we describe it, it is based on Unitarian Universalism's first principle: belief in the inherent worth, dignity, and capability of every human being. And this is why we must not shy away from events in the world which demand our moral attention and response.

So much of what has happened in our civic community over the past four years has been associated with the volatile flash point located in the office of the President of the United States. Too many times over the past four years, the moral underpinnings of social justice conversations in our own congregations have been minimized and conversations which are tied to our belief in the moral-rightness of the democratic process have been conflated with the 'P' word – politics.

I agree churches should not be in the business of politics, but churches should be in the business of justice. There is a difference between justice-work and politics. Let me be clear: there is a difference between justice-work and politics

One of the growing edges we have been witnessing within local and national UU denominations is the growing understanding of the difference between justice-work and politics. Justice work – be it social, environmental, economic, gender or racial -- is synonymous with morality. The moral-rightness of an issue may be elusive in the present, but it is that condition which is judged by history, hence that saying, 'history will be the judge.'

And so when a movement such as Black Lives Matter comes to the forefront of the national conversation, it must be made known it is not about politics. It is about morality, and the salient question within Black Lives Matter is: is the legacy of slavery and the institutionalized discrimination it spawned and which still exerts power over many Americans in 2021 -- morally right? It's not a political question, it's a moral question.

Today in Wyoming, a transgender person can be fired from their job because they do not conform with an employer's belief about gender. When the laws of a land do not embody justice and equality for everyone, then those laws, or the absence of them, perpetuate injustice.

Injustice is, in Buddhist understanding, a form of suffering. In the Christian tradition, those who believe in the teaching of Jesus, believe he died for the redemption of every person's suffering. Today, I believe there are many many more people who believe it is immoral to, intentionally or unintentionally, cause the suffering of another human being than there are who believe to create suffering is a good thing. Moral and spiritual discernment of what constitutes true suffering is every human's greatest challenge because, for example, attachment to superficial cultural beliefs about the differences between human beings is still causing terrible things like the legacy of slavery and other terribly wrong ideas to survive.

As the esteemed Eleanor Roosevelt said, "... the fundamental thing which we must all have is the spiritual force which the life of Christ exemplifies. We might well find it in the life of Buddha, but as long as it translates itself into something tangible in aspirations for ourselves and love for our neighbors, we should be content, for then we know that human nature is struggling toward an ideal."

Today is the fourth day after the horrific events of January 6, the day a joint session of Congress had convened to carry out the constitutionally mandated receiving and certification of the electoral college votes. As we all know, the out-going President of the United States incited a violent insurgence which resulted in the death of five citizens and the breaking of laws which exist to protect not just the historic building, the symbolic seat of American democracy, but also protect those persons we elected to conduct the business of the American people.

Over the past few days, reactions to this event have been running the gamut – from anger, to shock, disappointment, fear, and cynicism, all blended together with a pervasive and aching stream of sadness. Those who invaded the capitol brought with them Confederate flags, wore tee shirts some of which read ‘Camp Auschwitz’ and “SMWE (Six Million Weren’t Enough)”;

Elect Jesus, and ‘Stop the Steal.’ There were pipe bombs, Molotov cocktails, a hanging platform with a dangling noose, and handguns with ammunition enough to kill everyone. The intentional ignorance, the selfishness, the hatred, and the white privilege that were on display were symptoms of a festering wound which can only be healed when Love is seen by everyone as a strength not a weakness to be laughed at and demeaned – it could have been so much worse.

And so we who are hurting, like so many of our fellow Americans, have gathered this morning to seek the comfort of our beloved community because there is comfort to be found when we are reminded of that which is right and good. When we affirm those values which ground us and inspire us. When we witness each other’s grief. When we name the faith we have in Love to dispel hate. When we are reminded that reason, common sense, informed intelligence and compassion are the ideals which will continue to motivate the struggle for justice.

It’s not about politics, it’s about what is morally right and worthy of putting our love of justice and fairness into action.

Eleanor Roosevelt reminded us, “We live under a Democracy, under a form of government which above all other forms should make us conscious of the need we all have for (a) spiritual, moral awakening.”

As the song proclaims, ‘It is time now, It is time now; and what a time it is to be alive ... in this great turning we shall learn to lead in love.’

And as the promise we make to each other as liberal religionists proclaims, ‘Love is the spirit of this church and service is its call. This is our great covenant, to dwell together in peace, to seek truth in love, and to help one another.’

May it be so.

