

Hope-filled
Rev. Carol Allman-Morton
UUMSB
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Song: "More Waters" Written by Saro Lynch of Asheville, NC (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWLzAIADVY>)

Sermon:

Tadd and I are hoping to level up in our gardening quest and are going to be starting a lot of our seedlings indoors this year. We have never done that before because our cat Leon loves eating greens, and previous cats would definitely have run amok on shelving. However, this Christmas we received a closed bookcase with clear sides that will become a tiny greenhouse in our living room. I assembled it last weekend when I was home sick, and then planted a few seeds to see how it would work with the wood heat and the light in the room. One week later, and we have sprouts. I know this is the smallest of victories, but I have to say that it was a win that I really appreciated. Some teeny tiny shoots that we are going to eat in a few months, are growing in a box on my table. Having space outside to grow things, and space inside to store them is such a gift, and when I am down, I hold up my gratitude for these things and it feeds my hope.

There is a lot in the world that is a challenge to hope. There are always situations of horror and despair, almost always from human hands, either directly or indirectly. Whether in the news, or in your own life, there are likely things that challenge your hope. Hope is the flame inside us, that helps us move forward when we are stuck, that fuels our love and compassion. Hope is bigger than wishes and chance. It is the spark that pushes us toward connection with others, when we may be feeling *hopeless*. In a tradition like Unitarian Universalism, with no singular vision for the afterlife, why we are here, the organizing principles of the universe, and so on, there is no one text or dogma or story that we can go to, to kindle hope. Love may move mountains and inspire us to great works. It may be the hardest thing we ever do to hold those whom we struggle to like or even tolerate with love in our hearts, *and* we need hope to push us to try. There is no promised land where people will always think of others before themselves, where we have perfect compassion, *agape* love, are always adaptable, and comfortable with conflict and disagreement. We are human, messy, sometimes stuck people, who can do terrible things to one another and our planet. In our hardest, darkest corners, hope is the spark that can push us to put a first toe forward. In the face of seemingly insurmountable odds, hope leads to the first step.

"I will walk through the fire." The people who lead change in the world, in some ways are different from most of us. They have gifts in leadership and oration, and great conviction, but they are also human. They struggle and doubt, and worry that they are heading down the wrong path, or a path too dangerous. In times of suffering and challenge, these leaders, sometimes with conviction, and sometimes reluctantly, stood up and named their vision for change, and that comes through hope. Why do we know the stories of prophets? Because people were inspired by their example, followed them, and made change. The people who change the

world—that's us. Change only happens when the doers, the people, are there to say yes, and to make things happen. "I will wade through the waters."

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King believed when the powerless are brought together, they have the combined agency to force change. Together, the oppressed have power. The 100th anniversary of women's suffrage is this year, and I was just reading up on Alice Paul, the leader of the National Women's Party who organized hunger strikes and protests and was incarcerated for her work to try and break her. She prevailed, and after suffrage, wrote the Equal Rights Amendment in 1923. Paul, and many other leaders, including some of our Unitarian and Universalist luminaries, were on the front lines of the women's suffrage movement. It was the thousands of people who showed up again and again, who finally wore down those in power, *and* they wouldn't have been there without leadership, and without hope that their voice mattered.

Dr. King was a prophet and leader, someone who had hope, and sparked hope in others. He worked to build connections among people, and to deepen our understanding of how oppression works on many levels. When leaders are able to bring together those without power, and inspire them to do extraordinary things, they are dangerous to structures of power. We have seen in our history, that in the United States, the powerless can make change when their numbers are large enough. We have seen political change happen for African Americans, for women, for many groups of people. And yet... we have not changed the system. "There are more waters rising." It is still true that in the United States large amounts of power are concentrated in the hands of the wealthy few. The poor are not a minority, they are a majority, and that is why organizing the poor can be dangerous work. The powerful are not often willing to give that power away. This is why the work of Dr. King in the last year of his life was and is so important. And this work is a spark, a place of hope. Next week we will hear more from someone who is involved in the current Poor People's Campaign with Rev. Barber, and I am very much looking forward to that.

In "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence," preached at Riverside Church, April 4, 1967, one year before his assassination, Rev. Dr. King spoke out about connections between poverty, war, and race. King ended his speech in this way:

We are now faced with the fact, my friends, that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there is such a thing as being too late. Procrastination is still the thief of time. Life often leaves us standing bare, naked, and dejected with a lost opportunity. The tide in the affairs of men does not remain at flood—it ebbs. We may cry out desperately for time to pause in her passage, but time is adamant to every plea and rushes on. Over the bleached bones and jumbled residues of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words, "Too late." There is an invisible book of life that faithfully records our vigilance or our neglect. Omar Khayyam is right: "The moving finger writes, and having writ moves on."

We still have a choice today: nonviolent coexistence or violent coannihilation. We must move past indecision to action. We must find new ways to speak for peace in Vietnam and justice throughout the developing world, a world that borders on our doors. If we do not act, we shall surely be dragged down the long, dark, and shameful corridors of time

reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without sight.

Now let us begin. Now let us rededicate ourselves to the long and bitter, but beautiful, struggle for a new world. This is the calling of the sons of God, and our brothers wait eagerly for our response. Shall we say the odds are too great? Shall we tell them the struggle is too hard? Will our message be that the forces of American life militate against their arrival as full men, and we send our deepest regrets? Or will there be another message—of longing, of hope, of solidarity with their yearnings, of commitment to their cause, whatever the cost? The choice is ours, and though we might prefer it otherwise, we must choose in this crucial moment of human history.

The message and work of Dr. King kindled hope in the black community and has continued to bring hope to people around the world struggling for justice. On Martin Luther King weekend, may we celebrate his life and legacy, and lift up the generations of people whose lives were changed by the brave people who took the spark that King kindled, and went out to change the world. We have come so far and have so far yet to go.

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In hope, faith, and love.
Amen.