

Interdependence
July 5, 2020
Rev. Carol Allman-Morton
UUMSB

MEDITATION and SHARED QUIET
Rev. Robert Walsh - "Fault Lines"

When the great plates slip
and the earth shivers
and the flaw is seen to lie in what you trusted most,
look not to more solidity,
to weighty slabs of concrete poured
or strength of cantilevered beam to save the fractured order.

Trust more the tensile strands of love that bend and stretch
to hold you in the web of life that's often torn but always healing.
There's your strength.

The shifting plates, the restive earth,
your precious life,
they all proceed from love,
the ground on which we walk together.

READING:

James Baldwin

"For nothing is fixed, forever and forever and forever, it is not fixed; the earth is always shifting, the light is always changing, the sea does not cease to grind down rock. Generations do not cease to be born, and we are responsible to them because we are the only witnesses they have. The sea rises, the light fails, lovers cling to each other, and children cling to us. The moment we cease to hold each other, the sea engulfs us and the light goes out."

SERMON:

Last week was our annual meeting of our Unitarian Universalist Association. Karen Clark, Bill Young, and I served as delegates for the congregation, and Rhonda Pastori was also able to attend, which was wonderful, and meant we had the largest number of registered folks from our congregation for General Assembly, since I have been with our congregation. Many of us were part of Sunday worship which had 11,000+ screens watching last Sunday. Given households with more than one person watching, that could be a huge percentage of our Association. For some context, there are only about 190,000 members of congregations, with just over 1,000 congregations in our Unitarian Universalist Association. For those of you who do not follow the national work of our Association so closely, here is a nutshell of what happens at our annual meeting, known as General Assembly or GA. We gather in plenary sessions to debate changes to the bylaws and do the business of the Association. We worship, participate in social witness, and attend workshops and training for professional and lay leaders to share best

practices and learn new ways of approaching our work in community and deepening our spiritual lives. Each year a social justice luminary offers a lecture, called the Ware Lecture, this year it was Naomi Klein. We celebrate the lives of clergy who have died in the past year and those who are entering the ministry and retiring from the ministry at the Service of the Living Tradition. It is five packed days, and this year it was all online. More than half of the registered attendees reported that this was their first General Assembly, and we had a big year for attendance overall. We have learned a lot about access, interest, and barriers to attendance through this process I am sure.

In the plenary session, thousands of delegates from congregations around the country debate and vote on something called Actions of Immediate Witness. These are social justice statements that let our Unitarian Universalist Association leaders and congregations know what is on the minds and hearts of the people. These statements are public support for particular justice issues, and offer calls to action for our congregations. We can choose up to three each year, this year, there were two put forward and passed. Karen mentioned them in her newsletter article, and I provided the links online, but today, I wanted to share some of what these statements ask of *us*. After some history and context setting, the Action of Immediate Witness called, “Address 400 Years of White Supremacist Colonialism” states

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT we, the delegates of the 2020 General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association, call upon the Unitarian Universalist Association and its member congregations to:

- Continue to gather in solidarity with the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, Standing Rock nation, and all Indigenous peoples struggling to preserve their lands, waters, peoples, sacred sites, and sovereignty;
- Continue to push for release of Indigenous Water Protectors from prisons, end public policies that criminalize resistance to extractive colonialism, and adopt a vision of prison abolition;
- Work nationally, statewide, and locally on public policy that is decolonizing –such as establishing Indigenous Peoples Day, including Indigenous peoples’ histories in public education curricula, and eliminating racist monuments, flags, and mascots;
- Work to stop and reverse ecological harm in genuine collaboration with and taking leadership from communities most consistently and harshly impacted by extractive exploitation of land, water, air, and all beings;
- Research, identify, and acknowledge the Indigenous peoples historically and/or currently connected with the land occupied by congregations, and find ways to act in solidarity with or even partner with those Indigenous peoples; and
- Examine practices relative to Indigenous peoples, particularly the narratives regarding UU origins and US holidays including Thanksgiving.¹

To honor an immediately accessible piece of this resolution, as an important act of honoring our United States history and present, and the peoples who were impacted by the white colonialism that brought our religious tradition, to this place, we can name and honor the peoples whose land we occupy. Today, I am leading worship from Newark, VT, home to the Abenaki people, and in

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https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/20200625_aiw_400_years_white_supremacist_colonialism.pdf

particular, Nulhegan Band of the Coosuk-Abenaki. And our church sits on land home to the Mohican people. Where I live in Montgomery, is at the intersection of four native nations: Agawams, Nipmuck, Mohican, and Pocumtuc. One of the most destructive stories that many are taught in school is that these nations are gone, and even that they were gone long ago, as if people disappeared shortly after the Thanksgiving story in colonial history. There are people still living in our communities whose ancestors have been on this land for more than 12,000 years, and we are occupying that land.

The second Action of Immediate Witness passed was “Amen to Uprising: A Commitment and Call to Action” Again there is context setting, history, and a number of recommendations and resolutions, especially around relationships between congregations and police, which I encourage you to read. But today, I wanted to highlight *this* language in particular:

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT, as Unitarian Universalists we commit to shaping a world in which love and justice may thrive, where Black leadership, creativity, and resilience is celebrated while Black grief is honored and held with love. We will use our voices to amplify the demands of Black Lives Matter, Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism (BLUU), Diverse and Revolutionary Unitarian Universalist Multicultural Ministries (DRUUMM), Movement for Black Lives (M4BL), Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100), Undocublack, and other organizations by and for Black people....

THEREFORE, we commit to making our congregations and communities authentically multicultural, multiracial, anti-oppressive spaces that dismantle anti-Blackness; resisting a culture of perfectionism, and repairing our mistakes; and given that building the Beloved Community is an ongoing and ever evolving process, we commit to staying in this work for the long haul.²

Anti-racism work, and advocacy for Black lives is right at the intersection of some incredibly deep-seated and painful dysfunction in our social and political system. It touches on the evil history of slavery and Jim Crow, violence against people for their race, civil rights, economic justice, class, privilege, and gender, all of this sometimes shorthanded as White Supremacy Culture. Anti-racism work touches the very heart of who we are as people. For the white folks among us, how will we face our history and role in perpetuating white supremacy culture? This is big and painful stuff. As a community, we are called to engage with love and compassion. James Baldwin wrote, “Generations do not cease to be born, and we are responsible to them because we are the only witnesses they have. The sea rises, the light fails, lovers cling to each other, and children cling to us. The moment we cease to hold each other, the sea engulfs us and the light goes out.” We need each other.

Work for justice is holy work. It can be spirit-filled and bring us to new depths of understanding our own inner lives and story. It can connect us to one another. It can also bring us to the edge of despair, of feeling like Sisyphus pushing a rock up a hill, over and over again. It can be isolating. Doing justice work in spiritual community supports us on our journey. Doing spiritual work in a community that works for justice helps to ground our faith in history and theology and pushes us to grow and change. Robbie Walsh wrote, “Trust more the tensile strands

² https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/20200625_aiw_amen_uprising.pdf

of love that bend and stretch to hold you in the web of life that's often torn but always healing. There's your strength. The shifting plates, the restive earth, your precious life, they all proceed from love, the ground on which we walk together."

At General Assembly the Commission on Institutional Change released a report about the status of anti-racism and white supremacy culture in our congregations and our denomination. We will be wrestling with and learning from this work with going forward. What their report really brings home is that the work that we have before us as a denomination and in our congregations to address white supremacy culture at home. There is a call to fix our own houses, and in doing so to build skills, relationships, and compassion we need to create change in the world. Of course, it isn't an either/or, but we can't tell a story that we are woke and done because we aren't. We are people, and we have work to do. While hatred, objectification, greed, and evil choices of valuing some lives and not others *built* systems of white supremacy, it is an unwillingness to change *and to be uncomfortable*, to really examine privilege and to dare to imagine a denomination, society, and government that lends authority, value, and economic security in different ways that keeps white supremacy culture in place. Whether we pay attention or not.

Again, this is spiritual work. This is the work of all of us. We are dependent and interdependent.

Trust more the tensile strands of love that bend and stretch
to hold you in the web of life that's often torn but always healing.

There's your strength.

I invite us to share in a litany together. The repeated response is written by Rev. Theresa I. Soto, and the words for the litany by Megan Foley. Rev. Joan Javier-Duval referenced this in her sermon last Sunday so you may remember it--the line "All of us need all of us to make it." So I invite you to join me in this litany from Megan and Theresa:

Unitarian Universalist minister Rev. Theresa Soto writes, "All of us need all of us to make it." I want you to get used to those words; make them your prayer. All of us need all of us to make it.

This is why Unitarian Universalists support the Black Lives Matter movement. Please take a moment to center the struggle for Black lives in your thoughts.

Say it with me, loud or soft: "All of us need all of us to make it."

In a world where some of us are targeted for struggle and brutality, where others of us benefit and flourish, we pray:

"All of us need all of us to make it."

In a world where powerful people of ill will and indifference make us fearful for our safety and our futures, we pray:

"All of us need all of us to make it."

In the excruciating space that lives between seeing and naming, and hearing and changing, we pray:

"All of us need all of us to make it."

Make a picture in your mind of someone you aren't very happy with right now. Look at their face in your mind, and pray:

"All of us need all of us to make it."

Unitarian Universalists believe that all of us need all of us to make it; this is why we are in solidarity with the movement for Black lives today and every day.

And today I would add, we are in solidarity with those indigenous peoples who struggle to be seen and for basic human rights.

"All of us need all of us to make it."

As we as people and Unitarian Universalists continue the hard and important work of learning more about how we are enmeshed in white supremacy culture and what we can do to dismantle it.

"All of us need all of us to make it."

As we deepen our spiritual commitment to recognizing and honoring our interdependence with all that is.

"All of us need all of us to make it."

May we all be held in the web of life, and do all we can to keep it whole.

"All of us need all of us to make it."

Amen and so may it be.