

White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church

Keep on Keeping On

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WHITE BEAR UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH
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Words for Chalice Lighting

Our church is a house of hope and hospitality.
Our church is a harbor of refuge and a beacon in the storm.
Our church holds the faith of brave adults.
Our church holds the dreams of children who are wise and strong.
Our church is built on love, and its open arms can hold us all.
I light the chalice for the light we shine together.

READINGS

These words are from the Harry Potter Alliance, an international online community.

Here is how we move forward:
keep loving;
keep fighting;
celebrate story;
laugh,
dance,
sing - with your friends, with strangers,
with every single person who keeps showing up
when the world tells them not to;
resist hatred;
resist cynicism;
know that none of this is foolish;
know that it is necessary;
give love and light to those around you
and those around the world;
be excellent to each other;
be good.

Always, always, always:
the weapon we have is love.

Wands up!

from Clarissa Pinkola Estes (adapted)

My friends, do not lose heart.
 I urge you, I ask you, I gentle you –
 to please not spend your spirit dry by bewailing these difficult times.
 Especially do not lose hope.
 The fact is we were made for these times...
 For years we have been learning, practicing, been in training for and waiting to meet on this
 exact plain of engagement.

We are needed, that is all we can know.
 ... To display the lantern of the soul in shadowy times like these – to be fierce and show mercy
 toward others, both, are acts of immense bravery and greatest necessity. Struggling souls catch
 light from other souls who are fully lit and wanting to show it.

Stand up and show your soul.

from Leonard Cohen

The birds sang at the break of day
 “Start again,” I heard them say
 Don't dwell on what has passed away
 or what is yet to be.

The wars, they will be fought again
 The holy dove be caught again
 bought and sold and bought again
 the dove is never free.

You can add up the parts
 but you won't have the sum.
 You can strike up the march,
 there is no drum.
 Every heart to love will come-
 but like a refugee.

Ring the bells that still can ring
 Forget your perfect offering
 There is a crack in everything
 That's how the light gets in.

There is a crack in everything
 That's how the light gets in.

A Riff on Pastor Martin Neimoller and Matthew 25*Rose Marie Berger*

First they came for the Muslims, and I said “I’m with them”
even though I wasn’t a Muslim.

Then they came for the immigrants, and I said “I’m with them,”
even though I wasn’t an immigrant.

They came for the Black Lives Matter activists and the LGBTQ folks,
and even though I was white and straight, I said “I’m with them.”

When they came for the hungry
and for those who hunger for change and hunger for righteousness,
I said “I’m with them.”
I’m with the thirsty
and the thirsty earth gasping for rain.

I’m with the stranger, the refugee, all those who scale walls for freedom.

I’m with the naked, those stripped of human dignity,
those without decent work, without the cloth of human compassion.

I’m with the sick, the disabled, the addicted,
and all those dependent on the kindness of strangers.

I’m with the prisoners, the journalists, the detained, the deported, and the deplorables.

When they came for those, I said, “I’m with them.”

I AM with them.

I’m with us.

from Denise Levertov

But we have only begun to love the earth.
We have only begun to imagine the fullness of life.

How could we tire of hope? -- so much is in bud.

How can desire fail?
We have only begun to imagine justice and mercy,
only begun to envision how it might be
to live as siblings with beast and flower,
not as oppressors.

Surely our river cannot already be hastening
into the sea of nonbeing?

Surely it cannot drag, in the silt, all that is innocent?

Not yet, not yet –
there is too much broken that must be mended,

too much hurt we have done to each other
that cannot yet be forgiven.

We have only begun to know the power that is in us
if we would join our solitudes in the communion of struggle.

So much is unfolding
that must complete its gesture,
so much is in bud.

from Ariel Dorfman

Let me tell you, America, of the hopes I have for you...
How could I not wish you well?

You gave me, an americano from the Latino South,
this language of love that I return to you.
You gave me the hot summer afternoons of my childhood in Queens, calculating Jackie
Robinson's batting average.
How could I not wish you well?

You gave me refuge when I was a toddler, my family fleeing the fascist thugs in the mid-1940's.
I was one of you then. Still one of you now.

How could I not wish you well?

You offered me the freedom to speak out that I did not have before,
 you gave me the opportunity to write and teach,
 you gave me a gringa grand-daughter:
 how could I not love the house she lives in?

Where is that America of mine? Where is that other America?
 Where is the America of “as I would not be a slave so I would not be a master,”
 the America of “this land is our land, this land was meant for you and me,”
 the America of all men, and all women, every one of us on this ravaged, glorious earth of ours,
 all of us, created equal?
 Created equal: one baby in Afghanistan or Iraq as sacred as one baby in Minneapolis.

Where is my America?
 The America that taught me tolerance of every race and every religion,
 that filled me with pioneer energy,
 that is generous to a fault when catastrophes strike?
 Was I wrong when I believed America the just, America the rebellious, the unselfish,
 would rise to the challenge,
 was still alive,
 not entirely spoiled by excessive wealth,
 with the courage to conquer its own fear?

Am I wrong to believe that the country that gave the world jazz
 and Faulkner and Eleanor Roosevelt
 will be able to look at itself in the cracked mirror of history
 and join the rest of humanity,
 not as a city on a separate hill,
 but as one more city in the shining valleys of sorrow and uncertainty and hope where we all
 dwell?

A chance to grow, America, that is my hope.

The final reading, on the following page, is by Loden Croll.

What If

What if we could change the world

What if we all knew that kindness is free

~~What if we allowed every single person on this planet to have a voice~~

What if we were all equal

What if

What if we stopped global warming

What if we stopped racial prejudice

What if every person on this earth had a home

What if

What if we spoke up

What if we raised our voices so everyone could hear

What if we gave every human being a full and beautiful life

What if

What if we worked together

What if we stood up for our beliefs

What if every child had an education

What if we changed the world

What if

-Loden Croll

Keep on Keeping On

We voted – no matter whom you voted for– we voted for Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Carrie Chapman Catt, Julia Ward Howe, Lucretia Mott, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, and so many other patriotic forebears who bore in their bodies and in their brilliant minds, their fiery, fearless souls, a vision of us, long before our parents, grandparents, great grand-parents were even alive.

They bore a vision of us and of our country with all of us in it, all of us, and the wider circle of “us” that is the whole country, indivisible. They saw us in their minds, their hearts, saw us voting, dreaming, marching, and they whisper still to those who strain to listen, those with ears to hear, they whisper to us still, **“You keep on keeping on. This is no time to turn back.”**

We are held in the great strong mothering arms of our history.

Those women were white and they were black. They were Quakers, they were Baptists and Congregationalists, and in great, disproportionate numbers, they were Unitarians and Universalists.

No matter what our ballots said, we voted for Thurgood Marshall, for John Lewis, Fannie Lou Hamer, Diane Nash, Yuri Kochiyama, James Reeb, and so many other patriotic forebears who struggled and died, some of them, for the right to vote, for universal, unimpeded suffrage. This was in the lifetime of some of you in this room.

They saw us in their minds, the big wide “us” that is our whole country, and they called us out before they themselves even had the words, before they even knew the names to call, they saw Somali-born legislators, Muslim representatives, Hmong office holders, queer, gay, lesbian, transgender candidates. They saw all of us, the wider us, and they whisper to us still, **“This is what America looks like. You keep on keeping on. This is no time for turning back.”**

Theodore Parker, the great Unitarian Transcendentalist, abolitionist, wrote long ago in words reclaimed a hundred years later by leaders of the civil rights movement,

I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the

experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice."

It's hard to see that now, but our history implores us.

Parker gave his life entire and his ministry to the cause of abolition, but when he died in 1860 it was still legal, it was still common, it was still perfectly acceptable and blessed by church and state for white Americans with money to own black people, the way you own a dog or a horse or a house or a car. Parker died before that changed, before any reasonable person could see any evidence that it would ever change, any evidence of hope at all. It was a desperate time, and yet he wrote and preached incessantly,

I see with my eyes that the arc of the moral universe is long – so long –but with my heart and soul and conscience I know that it will bend toward justice. He had no way of knowing, but he knew. In times of immediate trouble it can help to take the longer view, to lift your gaze and look with larger eyes, as have our ancestors in every age. Had they not, we would not be here. The moral arc is a long, long arc.

And yet and still, we live right now, at the tail end of a harrowing week.

Someone called here early Wednesday morning from school. I could hear the lockers clanging between classes, kids talking in the hall. The caller, a member of our youth group, said, "I'm not sure what's going to happen; I'm not sure what to do." They used the word, "afraid." I said, "You mean you're scared right there at school, right now?" They said, "No, I mean *what's going to happen? What's happening?*" All I could think to say was, "Hold what you believe in. Take a breath and find it. Hold it in your mind. Hold our church – a picture of our sanctuary, filled with people, filled with light, and know that we're all holding you. Hold what you believe in like a chalice of light before your eyes, and walk on toward it, as you walk to class or go to lunch or on the bus. Hold what matters most."

The Quakers say, *walk in the light*: the light within a sliver of the light of God, they say, primordial light older than the planets and the stars. It is the same light people sing of in South Africa - *siyahamba, we are marching in the light of God* - which is the light of love, and the shadow shall not, cannot, will not overcome it. That's an old, old song, that love-song of freedom and justice, faith and hope, love and courage, and who are we to say we're too discouraged, too exhausted, or too scared to go on singing anymore? Who are we to lay it down? Our lives are a pinpoint in a

long, long arc of struggle and sorrow and striving and imagination and hope. Who are we to betray the elders, or the children, by opting for despair? There are some powerful young voices out there, powerful young voices right in here this morning. Who are we to even think of laying down our hope?

My friend who called from school on Wednesday morning came over later in the afternoon. It had been a long day, for each of us, for all of us, just holding it together. We sat in my office and talked for a few minutes, and then we were still, and when this young person glanced up at me and said, “But how are *you*?” with such concern, it was then that I broke down and cried. This young person, who grew up in this church, raised by all of you, held out a strong, young hand and said, “You know it’s going to be okay.” And we both laughed and shook our heads and said, “Well, actually we don’t know that at all.”

Right there I realized that this week we’ve been learning again what we have always known: that we keep each other going, we keep each other keeping on. There’s no way to do this by yourself. That may be the clearest lesson that our faith has to offer – our utter interdependence, this saving, grace-full interdependence that binds us each to each and each to all, within these walls and well beyond, just about as far as you can see – and farther than we’ll ever see – in time and in space. You never know whence help will come, so stay open. Don’t close down. You never know where help is sorely needed, so stay open. Don’t close down. Stay bright. Each of us, the great wide “us,” is bound to all the others. That glad gospel is the light that we can offer to a shattered world.

And it is a shattered world.

We know that half the country is shattered by the outcome of this election, and some large portion of the other half must surely have felt shattered long before, beaten down and battered for a long, long while before by an unforgiving, harsh, economy. Each of us, the great wide “us,” is bound to all the others- our relatives who voted differently, our co-workers, friends, the people at the gym, the people in the grocery store, people at your children’s school, my neighbor with his lawn sign. What’s shifted here is not about any candidate winning or losing. It’s about the loss, the total loss, of trust that what’s been shattered can ever be restored. Some words, once spoken, cannot be easily unspoken. Some ideas, once unleashed and legitimized, take on a deadly life of their own. The work before us all is trust.

On Tuesday night here in the service, and again on Wednesday at the vigil, people called out what they voted for, you called out what you voted for, as if it were a prayer:

compassion
 peace
 healthcare
 intelligent control of guns

Lord, hear our prayer.

dignity and worth
 civility
 the fragile and endangered planet
 climate action
 pluralism

Lord, hear our prayer.

women
 girls
 children
 refugees
 immigrants

God of many names, let this be a prayer.

sentencing reform
 a living wage
 care for people who are poor, people who are homeless, or helpless

We called out what we voted for, not the candidates, but issues, aspirations, policies and programs closest to our hearts, and now we hold them all before our eyes, in the chalice of light that is still our deepest prayer.

*Ring the bells that still can ring
 Forget your perfect offering
 There is a crack in everything
 That's how the light gets in.*

Here is how the light gets in:

A member here, married more than 30 years, a marriage at long last legalized just three years ago by the state of Minnesota and by Federal law, wondered this week whether that might all be overturned.

We have no idea -and so we hold together.

A member here who is a teacher worried, as she always does, but this week all the more, about the safety of her students and their families, children of color with nowhere to hide

– and so we hold together.

A member here who last year for the first time was able to buy health insurance, to pay for medication to manage lifelong, life-threatening depression, and who now, because the illness is managed, has a job, wonders what will happen next, if that health care goes away.

We don't know - and so we hold together.

A member writes to ask if this church will join with others, with Christian congregations and with others, to protect immigrants who could face deportation as soon as February.

I don't know - I hope we'll hold together.

A member who identifies as transgender wonders if it's safe to go to school, or work, or anywhere.

We are going to hold together.

One member sends an email, another leaves a message, someone else stops by, so many of you now reporting what you've really seen and heard and witnessed, not just rumors out of Facebook, all relating workplace incidents of what last week would have been called **unspeakable** racism. It is spoken now, it is unleashed now, out loud, (not new hatred, but hatred that newly believes it has some kind of national mandate, some kind of American blessing) -

- and so we hold together.

If anything has changed for sure this week, it must be our resolve, our renewed, rekindled, re-consecrated resolve, that if we see something we will say something, where once we might have stepped aside; if we hear something we will do something, where once, as recently as Monday, we might have looked away. What's changed is that our best intentions now become a solemn, sacred vow. This is a spiritual necessity now, for those of us whose privilege protects us, grants us some degree of immunity from the real and present danger that our sisters and our brothers, and our blue green planet all are facing.

*Ring the bells that still can ring
There's a crack in everything
That's how the light gets through*

Hold your faith before you like a chalice of light. Hold what you believe in. Take a breath and find it. Hold our church- filled with people, filled with light, and know that we are holding one another.

A minister I've long admired in the United Church of Christ (Jim Gertmenian from Plymouth Congregational) posted this week: "I'm 69 years old, retired. I had really looked forward to these next years, but instead I find I have been enlisted in the resistance. I'm ready. I'm retired but not tired. I will look for leadership for generations behind mine, twenty- and thirty-somethings who are bold, fearless and creative. We will employ the great tools of nonviolence as taught to us by Ghandi and King. I am rock solid in my faith that there is a creative force (which I call God but others call by other names) at the heart of the universe that is drawing us toward a world of equity, community, gentleness and peace. I'm ready for this," he writes. "It's not what I wanted, but I'm ready."

I think of a phrase I've not used much since high school civics class: "loyal opposition," which is defined as the dissent required in a functioning democracy, dissent which fears no accusation of treason, because it seeks not to destroy but to build up the commonwealth, to improve the common good. Loyal opposition – opposed not to any candidate or party or President Elect, but to those forces which threaten democracy itself, threaten liberty, justice, equality, mercy, compassion, decency and the living, fragile earth. *I find I am enlisted in the resistance* - and this is nothing new.

As we heard read so beautifully:

First they came for the Muslims, and I said "I'm with them"

even though I wasn't a Muslim.

*Then they came for the immigrants, and I said "I'm with them,"
even though I wasn't an immigrant.*

*I'm with the earth, and the great global community of humans, animals, plants,
sacred land and holy water.*

*I'm with the stranger, the refugee, the sick, the disabled, the addicted, the old and
the young, and all those dependent on the kindness of strangers.*

I AM with them.

I'm with us.

We are holding one another because our faith and love compel us to shine a mighty
light.

We shall not be moved.

We will keep on keeping on.