

White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church

Living a True Life
Rev. Sara Goodman

Sunday August 25th 2019

White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church
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Readings:

Our first reading is **Alive** By Natasha Sajé

You and me, of course, and the animals
we feed and then slaughter. The boxelder
bug with its dot of red, yeast in the air
making bread and wine, bacteria
in yogurt, carrots, the apple tree,
each white blossom. And rock, which lives
so slowly it's hard to imagine it
as sand then glass. A sea called dead is one that
will not mirror us.

We think as human
beings we deserve every last thing. Say
the element copper. Incandescence
glowing bright and soft like Venus.
Ductile as a shewolf's eyes pigmented red
or green, exposed to acid in the air.
Copper primes your liver, its mines leach lead
and arsenic. Smelting is to melting
the way smite is to mite. A violence
of extraction.

What's lost when a language
dies? When its tropes oppose our own?
In the at-risk language Aymara
the past stretches out in front, the future
lags behind. Imagine being led
by knowing, imagine the end as clear.

Our second reading is an excerpt from **How to be Alive: A Guide to the Kind of Happiness That Helps the World** By Colin Beavan

“Through the tiniest of our world relationships, we affect both our own happiness and the happiness of the world. Our iPhones connect us to [each other, yes, but also] children working in factories in China, our food choices connect us to domestic animals everywhere, and our oil use to Iraqi and Afghani widows and widowers.

“For so many of us, these relationships are out of line with our values and so we feel bad when we look at them. In our mistaken feeling of powerlessness, some of us develop a habit of suppressing or ignoring thoughts and feelings about these relationships. We stop listening to the little voice inside ourselves and put ourselves to sleep. ...

“This isn’t to say that [we ought to] become overwhelmed with grief and sadness. Being alive to yourself doesn’t mean you have to constantly bathe in the sorrows of the world.

“But instead of turning the sometimes painful feelings off, we have to come to terms with them. [We have to] be able to feel compassion for the suffering in the world without either feeling overwhelmed or having to go numb. [We have to] be able to be in the presence of our compassion. One way to [do that] is to be able to reassure yourself that you are taking some action.”

Sermon

[Alive,] You and me, of course, and the animals we feed and then slaughter. [Alive] The boxelder bug with its dot of red,
[the] yeast in the air making bread and wine,
[the] bacteria in yogurt, carrots, the apple tree, each white blossom.
And rock, [Alive], which lives so slowly it’s hard to imagine it as sand then glass. A sea called dead is one that will not mirror us.

We think as human beings we deserve every last thing.
Say the element copper.
Incandescence glowing bright and soft like Venus.
Ductile as a shewolf’s eyes pigmented red or green,
exposed to acid in the air.
Copper primes your liver, its mines leach lead and arsenic.
Smelting is to melting the way smite is to mite.
A violence of extraction.

[We don’t know, do we, the cost, the very real costs of our desires]

What’s lost when a language dies? ... In the at-risk language Aymara, the past stretches out in front, the future lags behind. Imagine being led by knowing, imagine the end as clear.

Imagine being led by knowing. What kind of a life could you lead? Knowing what was coming, would you sit back idle or would you make some changes?

2015 and 16 were incredibly difficult and life changing for me, and as I sat there dealing with my own personal heartbreak, I watched the world go crazy. I watched and didn’t have enough in me join in the revolution that I saw sprouting. I was too alive to my own grief to turn my face towards justice.

I am far from the only one.

I felt guilty and selfish and like a hypocrite – I can preach it, but I can't do it. It's my job as a minister to comfort to your spirits, it's my job as a Unitarian Universalist minister to also send you out to create a better world, to work for it myself.

This has never been my strong suit – creating justice opportunities. It's not in my nature as a homebody and an introvert to actively participate in much. I spent my time and energy growing up on creating beloved community in my own world, through theater and in the UU youth community. This is where my call to ministry is rooted, in communities of people working together to create something beautiful.

To me ministry is about people and connections. It's about building healthy and strong relationships – a place to come home to when life outside is beyond what we can deal with. This is my ministry, it's the core of my work here.

Yet I was raised UU, so I know all about social justice, working for change, protesting in the streets and giving our time in service. I know that to live a true life, to make a difference you have to put your body, your money and your time where your mouth is, you have to vote in elections, and when there are unjust laws, you have to disobey.

When the kids at my high school wanted to protest the campus closure at lunchtime, they stood with signs on the “correct side” of the line, showing their displeasure. I told them that they were doing it wrong. There were only 2 campus security guards and dozens of them. I told them that if they wanted to take back the campus, they needed to cross the line and take it back. I showed them what it would take – I just walked past the line and took a seat.

Of course, I had nothing invested in the action. So when they asked me to move, I said no, but when they told me I wouldn't be able to graduate, I walked away. I feel like that's been my life.

I know how to make change, I just haven't found the willingness to give up my peace and comfort for justice.

And this is my own privilege showing. I have the ability to live comfortably despite oppression and injustice. I have the choice whether or not to engage with the work of changing the world. I can think about how to spend my money and where to spend my time and where to put my energy. I choose to put my energy into working on our beloved community and on making a healthy future for my family.

I live with the illusion that I have too much to lose to fight, to protest, to stop the world from turning. I forget that I have too much to lose NOT to. We all do.

We have all gone a little numb to the atrocities around us, we have all gone a little numb to the world. I am overwhelmed with grief these days, not my personal grief

anymore, but grief that there is so much wrong with the world and I feel powerless to change it.

As Colin Beavan, author, speaker, hope activist, said in one of our readings: “In our mistaken feeling of powerlessness, some of us develop a habit of suppressing or ignoring thoughts and feelings; We stop listening to the little voice inside ourselves and put ourselves to sleep.”

We need to stay awake, awake but not overwhelmed. We have to face our compassion and not be swamped by it. Beavan suggests that the way to move forward is to listen to the small voice inside and find a small way to live true to yourself, true to your values. Start small, he says, start with a simple but significant change, and others will slowly come.

Beavan suggests that the snowball effect will take shape and soon bigger changes will come, harder changes become simpler once you get the ball rolling. There is too much at stake to get stymied by overwhelm.

And yet, we may be at a time that we need to have a revolution, we may need to throw caution and small steps to the wind to make the change that needs to happen now.

Parker Palmer, in an article for On Being wrote about the five revolutions he wants to be part of. I will summarize them, rather than read them, as he states them more bluntly than I would.

1. He wants to revolt against the fear of otherness – he wants to stand up to those who peddle fear, to those who are afraid of people who “aren’t like us” – to say “I stand with those you are afraid of”
2. He wants to revolt against “the state of denial in which most white American’s live.” He wants to look into his own heart and understand that he’s not had to experience oppression in the same way as people of color do. He wants white Americans to sit in the discomfort of seeing what they’ve not been able to see – that oppression is what pays for their privilege.
3. He wants to revolt against the public education system which doesn’t account for poverty and is being overregulated and underfunded, in a power play to make private schools the only way to get a decent education.
4. He wants to revolt against the gun-related policies that make it easy for people to obtain automatic weapons, and those people who keep touting that more guns and less regulations will make the world safer, which is clearly not the case. There were more mass shootings in the US in 2015 than days in the year, and we are outpacing that so far in 2019.

5. And lastly, he wants to revolt against the idea that the few deserve more than the many. He wants to revolt against capitalist theory that tells us those of us who are born into privilege (say born in the upper-middle class in the United States, or other Western countries) deserve to live in luxury, while millions of people around the world live in poverty.

These revolutions are on the horizon, and I too want to be a part of them. I want to spread love and compassion to the world. I want to choose to be more pro-actively justice seeking.

AND, I think if you and I are going to try to make change, we need to start where we are. Working to keep ourselves sane while we go through our lives, fighting for justice, supporting our causes, helping those we can help. We can't do everything, but we can do something.

Sometimes that something is taking time to find calm within ourselves as the storm rages around us, and sometimes it's jumping in whole heartedly to fight with a revolution.

Let's start where we are though – if you are working to make it day by day in your life, practice living.

If you are holding your own, and looking for something more – practice embracing justice. It doesn't take much, just some self-education and a dedication to allowing discomfort. It's a good place to start anyway.

To change this world, someone has to keep the home fires burning, and someone has to be willing to live in a prayer camp like Standing Rock in the heat of the summer, in the frozen winter, all year round until we are heard.

To change this world, someone (and I might mean all of us who can) must march on the capitol as they did in Puerto Rico last month.

To change this world, we have to claim our power of numbers, we need to gum up the works and get in the way, and stop production.

Through direct action, the Quakers, and many Unitarian Universalist allies were able to close down the Homestead Child Detention Center in Florida. If we come together, if we risk and sacrifice, we might be able to close down more detention centers, more prison camps holding immigrant children and families captive and separate.

I can't help but wonder what will happen to the families of 680 migrant workers in Mississippi now that their caregivers and financial providers are detained? Another kind of family separation brought on by corporate greed protected by state sanctioned violence.

We have declared ourselves to be a sanctuary congregation, and have lived that in action. We are proving that we Side with Love. Even if it means taking risks. It is a far greater risk not to give shelter to a person, a family in need of our protection.

To change this world, we have to let go of the safe should-bees and the afraid what-ifs to make our presence here matter. To show that we live a true life, to show that we are stronger together than we are alone. To show that we can stand up and roll in and give for the people who need us most. We'll show up. We'll make it better. We'll give it all we got. We have no other choice.

I share with you these words by Christian D Huerta, Adapted

We must shine, We must shine now
This is the goal toward which we stretch,

Step by step,
In our own time, at our own pace.
As our beauty unfolds, and our hearts open,
We become gentler, more compassionate,
Yet brighter, more empowered, and fearless.
We have been holding on, holding back,
Playing small, hiding our light under a bushel.
Enough of that!
It is time to let go.
We are needed now, all of us.
All of us together,
all who feel a calling to be who we are, to the fullest, to make a difference, to give
it all we got.
[We are needed and we must shine]