

“Change in the Shape of Love”
Sermon by Rev. Joan Javier-Duval
Unitarian Church of Montpelier
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The delivered sermon may have slight variations from this written manuscript. Video recordings of sermons can be found online at <https://ucmvt.org/category/whats-new/sermons-and-podcasts/>.

Reading

Election Promises by Mark Belletini in Sonata for Voice and Silence

I hear the polls
are going to be open on Tuesday.
All day.
Good. I certainly intend to go to them.
I certainly invite you to go to them and vote too.
But today I say the polls
are not just open on Tuesday,
I say they are open every day.
Every hour. Even here. Even now...
I actually am going to vote for love,
I am going to vote for truthfulness as the norm,
not the exception.
I'm going to vote for a world
that doesn't vote for killing, control and swagger,
I'm going to vote for you.
I'm going to vote for me.
Right now. Right here. Silently. But for real.

Sermon

I met with a small group in the church recently and in introducing ourselves we each responded to the prompt, “How’s the weather?” Meaning, how’s the weather inside, the weather of our hearts and spirits. More than one person described their weather as “unsettled.” Perhaps you can relate.

The winds and gales of change swirl all around. On so many fronts, it is an unsettling and unsettled time.

Personal upheaval and change abounds. The death of loved ones. New diagnoses. Unstable housing and employment. Beginning new life stages without any clear roadmap for the path ahead.

On the societal level, change is afoot, too. We continue to feel the impacts of the pandemic even though we may be trying to resume as much of our lives as possible that existed before its start. Extreme weather and altered weather patterns are disrupting lives around the globe. And, much hangs in the balance as we approach this Election Day.

Much of this change - personal and societal - is disruptive, yet some of the change is positive. New relationships that are flourishing. New work that is enjoyable. Renewed efforts and victories for collective worker organizing. An increased appreciation for and honoring of indigenous voices and perspectives.

For the most part, it is yet to be determined, what the outcome of all this change will be. The uncertainty can be unnerving, and it is also where there is great possibility.

The Zen priest, Rev. angel Kyodo williams, has said, “There is something dying in our society, in our culture, and there’s something dying in us individually. And what is dying, I think, is the willingness to be in denial. And that is extraordinary. It’s always been happening, and when it happens in enough of us, in a short enough period of time at the same time, then you have a tipping point, and the culture begins to shift.”¹

There are many among us who are no longer willing to deny what is broken - the ways that inequality and disparities have grown, the instability of the planet’s climate and destruction of ecosystems and habitats, the profound disconnection and alienation we have from one another that leads to hateful acts and violence.

We are in this shifting time, moving our collective weight forward, making our way from what was into what can be, what will be.

¹ <https://onbeing.org/programs/angel-kyodo-williams-the-world-is-our-field-of-practice/>

What I find exciting about this time is that the magnitude of the change we seek is so much greater than the smallness of our politics in its current state.

At its best, I believe that Unitarian Universalism points us towards a transforming change. Change that levels power. Change that negates the status of wealth as the key to accessing education or a home or care for the body. Change that guides us back to care for the Earth and all of our kin of all species.

This kind of change runs counter to the current dominating narratives of how we relate to one another and our planet. This is a story of scarcity, of go-it-alone individualism, and of dominion over the earth. Our vision for change is not served by holding onto these old stories.

The economist David Korten puts it this way, “At present we live in the grip of a deeply flawed story. To change the situation, we must find our way to an authentic narrative. We need a story informed by traditional wisdom, the world’s great religious traditions, and the leading edge of science.”²

We are part of shaping and articulating this authentic narrative. Bringing forward our theologies of belonging and interdependence as our guides. We must dream big and continue pointing to a future in which life flourishes and thrives.

What does this future look like to you? The future of your greatest hope and longing?

In 2015, the Parliament of World Religions issued a Declaration on Climate Change, that I find incredibly inspiring. Part of it states: “The future we embrace will be a new ecological civilization and a world of peace, justice, and sustainability, with the flourishing of the diversity of life. We will build this future as one human family within the greater Earth community.”

This kind of transformative change doesn’t usually happen all at once. It happens over time and with continuous engagement and continually reminding one another of the kind of world we want to live in and create together.

One election or one campaign is just one small part of a greater change that fulfills our most audacious hopes and dreams.

² From [The New Possible: Visions of Our World Beyond Crisis](#), Cascade Books, 2021.

I know that this kind of change can feel daunting. It helps to remind ourselves that we do not do it alone, and we don't do it all at once. There is power in remembering that we are the ones who make change possible.

The artist Jan Phillips writes, “We are attendants at the wake of the old way, and each of us—through our actions, our thoughts, our work and relationships—is midwifing a new world into existence...It is an illusion that we are powerless. It is an illusion that someone else is responsible... We are the people. This is our world.”³

We are the people, and there is a role for each of us.

The social change leader, Deepa Iyer, describes the network of people engaged together in making change as an ecosystem, and she maps out ten different roles that people take on in a social change ecosystem.⁴

There is a role for the weavers who see connections between people, places, and ideas.

There are the experimenters who innovate and take risks.

There are frontline responders who marshal resources to address community crises.

There is a role for the visionaries who imagine our boldest possibilities and remind us of our direction.

There are the builders who organize and implement the practices needed to carry out a collective vision.

There are the caregivers who sustain care, joy, and connection in the community.

There is a role for the disruptors who shake up the status quo to raise awareness and build power.

There are the healers who tend to the traumas caused by harmful systems and policies.

There are the storytellers who craft and share community stories and culture through the arts.

And, there are the guides who teach and counsel using their gifts of discernment and wisdom.

In this community, we are blessed to have a diversity of gifts with people taking on each and every one of these roles - sometimes multiple roles at one time.

³ From *No Ordinary Time—The Rise of Spiritual Intelligence and Evolutionary Creativity*, Livingkindness Foundation, 2012.

⁴ <https://buildingmovement.org/our-work/movement-building/social-change-ecosystem-map/>

Here, with others like you in some ways and different in others, you offer care and nurture joy across the lifespan of ages. You share music and stories and ritual. You mentor others and share your wisdom. You plan and organize and get the work done that needs to be done.

Our engagement is our witness to the longing of our souls for a world changed and transformed.

We must continue to call people towards the world as it should be, a world transformed by love until the planet and its people are made whole. We must stretch our imaginations beyond all that seems lost in the present moment to what is yet to be born. To that time and place where love has quieted the inciting shouts of the mob and has drawn together those who once saw themselves as enemies. To that time and place where we live in mutuality and reciprocity with the Earth, giving and receiving, caring and being cared for.

We are the change we wish to see, and we make it so with our acts of kindness, our acts of solidarity, and our acts of truth-telling. Together, these actions tell a story not yet complete, but longed for in the deepest part of our souls.

And so, in the days ahead, let us vote the homeless into homes, the sick into healing, the lost into belonging. Not only on Tuesday, but every day. Not only with ballots, but with the bravery of each small act, that together form the magnitude of the change we seek. A transformative change rooted in Love.