

“An Unrelenting 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 “Praise Song for the Day” by Elizabeth Alexander¹

...Some live by love thy neighbor as thyself,
others by first do no harm or take no more
than you need. What if the mightiest word is love?

Love beyond marital, filial, national,
love that casts a widening pool of light,
love with no need to pre-empt grievance.

In today’s sharp sparkle, this winter air,
any thing can be made, any sentence begun.
On the brink, on the brim, on the cusp,

praise song for walking forward in that light.

Sermon

Will you take a breath with me?

Here’s a disclaimer on this homily. As much as I might want it to be the case:

My words today cannot and will not provide you with an easy way forward.
My words today cannot and will not take away all of your angst or confusion.
My words today cannot and will not promise you a happy ending to this chapter of our
democratic experiment.

¹ Full poem can be found here: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/52141/praise-song-for-the-day>

I cannot and will not do these things because, quite honestly, I cannot do these things for myself. Not that I won't try to find ease and clarity in this moment for myself or help you find ease and clarity as well.

Together, perhaps, we can help one another find our way.

The truth of the matter is none of us has faced this particular moment before, as much as it echoes moments in troubled years past with its volatility, its division, its immorality.

This is a new moment in time born of generations-long social ills and also the particular convergence of contingencies and players in our time.

This is a new moment because never before and never after will this particular constellation of human beings as we are now exist. A constellation that includes me and you and you and you.

This moment also echoes moments in the lives of many of our ancestors who faced repressive governments on this continent and afar. Humans before us have been somewhere like here before.

Upon the fields and hills and vales of this very land, people have been beaten, bloodied, hosed down, silenced, censored, interned. And people have endured, risen up, and continued on the long arc towards justice.

Even now, people across the globe are enduring dire and deadly circumstances and are rising up and finding a way forward on their own arc toward justice and peace.

And now, this moment in this place is ours to reckon with.

A message from our UUA leadership this past week put it plainly: “[T]he religious and political right’s decades-long strategy to sow fear and division and pit our communities against one another prevailed on the electoral landscape.”² This is an unescapable reality. The fear and worry felt in this sanctuary and in living rooms, doctor’s offices, classrooms across the country is heavy.

² [Click here](#) to read the full message from the Unitarian Universalist Association.

At the same time, and quite paradoxically, voters in multiple states chose to protect women's agency and autonomy by restoring abortion rights. Voters also insisted on the dignity and just treatment of workers and passed ballot initiatives to raise the minimum wage and require paid sick leave. Wins that were made possibly by the persistent organizing of ordinary people including many Unitarian Universalists.

And, strides are being made towards greater representation of the diversity of our country within the ranks of elected officials with the first transgender individual being elected to Congress from the state of Delaware and the first Korean American elected to the Senate from the state of New Jersey. And the new U.S. Senate will for the first time include two Black women serving at the same time.

As the somatic teacher, trauma therapist, and writer Resmaa Menakem puts it: "This is a time of great peril and great possibility."

In this perilous moment of heartache, we can touch in to what and who we love and and put this love at the center. The grief, the fear, the disappointment, the anger--they all come from a place of love.

The part of you that loves the friend who didn't vote the way you did, that loves your trans child, that loves your chronically-ill wife, that even loves this country, its lakes and rivers, meadows and forests, and the part of you that loves yourself.

As the poet asks, What if the mightiest word is love?

This love must be our guide as we resolve to keep possibility alive.

Our UUA leaders shared the following in their message to us as well: "Perhaps the greatest gift of belonging to the rooted, dynamic living tradition of Unitarian Universalism is knowing in our bones that we are both the inheritors of a complex and powerful historical legacy and the stewards of a future yet to be imagined.

Today, as it has always been, the unwavering Love at the center of our faith is our greatest balm, our strongest shield, and our fiercest power. That animating core of Love will both demand our rigorous action and offer us the wellspring of hope and courage that will equip us for that work in the times ahead."

It is this love that will lead us towards pathways of survival and allyship in the days ahead.

We will need an unrelenting love because in the work of advancing peace and justice in the world, we can expect that a lot will be harder.

Our natural world and already chaotic climate will likely be under increased threat.

Immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers will likely face harsher treatment and greater restrictions.

Trans, nonbinary and LGBTQ folx will likely encounter more targeted vitriol and curtailing of freedoms.

Those whose lives depend on the social safety net for health care or food assistance will likely face diminished care and lack of access to life-sustaining necessities.

The harm coming our way will be great.

And, as Rebecca Solnit says, “The fact that we cannot save everything does not mean we cannot save anything and everything we can save is worth saving...Remember what you love.

Remember what loves you. Remember in this tide of hate what love is. The pain you feel is because of what you love.”

And, let us remember a deeper truth about this moment, an ever-abiding truth. Neither the name on the desk of the Oval Office nor the party that holds more seats in Congress can change this: We are each Beloved, a precious being of the Universe.

This cannot be taken away. Each of you are beloved and worthy of belonging. Nothing and no one can change that.

In the days to come, we must keep our hearts open, tender, and courageous. We must lean on one another when our resolve falters and when our confusion grows.

We must partner with one another in providing sanctuary and refuge; in keeping an engaged civic life alive; in creating and crossing bridges of belonging to those who today we might see as foes.

Our brave hearts will be needed to keep democratic practices alive, to care for one another, to stay the course of claiming a future on this fragile planet earth for generations to come.

And we have this community to lean on. This community of brave and loving souls who honor our interdependence and give generously of our gifts.

Please take a moment to look around this room and witness one another — you who have shown up for yourself and for this community. These are the people you will continue to look to for support, to offer a helping hand. These are the people who will remind you of what is most important and how we can be our best selves.

In the days to come, there will be time yet to create beauty, to delight in one another's company, to turn one's face towards the sun, to admire the glimmering water and the night sky.

We must fall in love with the world again and again and with open hearts and clear minds face the day we have been given.

In the words of Octavia Butler, "So be it. See to it."