

In These Times

Sermon by Rev. Rebecca Bryan

November 6, 2022

"Give us something to live for!" My friend was sharing the struggles she had been having with her teenager. Her heart was breaking for her child, for that child's siblings, and for her parents who lived with them, all of whom were helplessly watching the daily chaos. "He doesn't see a reason to live." She threw his arms in the air and looked right at me, as she pushed his hands toward the ground in anger. "I mean look around us, look at all that is happening in the world. What messages are we are giving our kids? What are we telling them about the future, their future? What do they have to look forward to?"

Then and there my heart broke open to the realization that the bemoaning, dire predictions, and the hands in the air about the conditions in our country are doing nothing to help our kids have hope. Honestly, it wasn't helping me or the adults I care about.

Does this mean that I think we should bury our heads in the sand, turn the other way, or disengage? It's the bemoaning, dire predictions and hands in the air that concern me. How is it helping? Is it helping? I know it lets off steam. Clearly, it's also causing distress among our younger ones, and I know others as well.

It brings me back to our decision earlier this year to rebalance our worship to focus on ritual and spiritual grounding and to reinforce us as we engage in our work for social justice throughout the rest of the week. We are using this sacred space as to come together offering each other ways to let go, recenter, and grieve, while at the same time invite each other to keep caring, remember what we love, and appreciate the beauty of this world.

This year's ministry theme is peace. We spent last month focusing on inner peace through the lens of things such as reviewing our lives and making amends, connecting with animals, and remembering our loved ones who have died. We could have focused on many other things and will in the months to come.

This month's ministry theme is justice. "Justice is what love looks like in public," says Cornel West. Our Unitarian Universalist faith is deeply rooted in

the intersection between faith and service. Each week we join our voices in saying, "Love is the doctrine of this church and service is its prayer." I know what those words mean to many of you. I know what they mean to me. They are a true and resounding testament to our faith tradition.

Love is the doctrine of this church:

- Love that is imperfect and humanly flawed
- Love that reaches out and crosses over fear, division, and limitations
- Love that is ever evolving and divinely inspired
- Love that gives us a place to laugh, cry, rage, and hear each other's stories
- Love that allows us to learn to value our differences and disagree with respect and open minds
- Love that reminds us to stop, notice what is beautiful, and say thank you
- Love that has us know that we are not alone

Service is our prayer:

- Service that looks like coming to church week after week, greeting others with a smile, and engaging where we can, because we are part of what makes this place whole
- Service that writes a note, offers a ride, or picks up the phone to call someone, just to say *Hello, I'm thinking of you*
- Service that houses Afghan refugees and collects food for those who are experiencing food insecurity
- Service that leads us out of our comfort zone, into new and deeper understanding of what it means to be human

Ours is a faith focused on the days of our life, less so the afterlife. It is a faith that seeks to learn from history, uphold tradition, and change and grow with the times as we learn.

We are a congregation made up of theological diversity, individuals seeking together, each on our own path, yet equally part of this community of support. Unitarian Universalism is a faith that is young in many ways but has as well a rich

November 6, 2022 *page 2*

history, nearly three hundred years of it here in the Port of Newbury.

When I was planning this service and thinking ahead to the coming days, with Election Day and all that that may bring, I knew I wanted to offer you something you could hold and make your own.

I didn't just want words; we have so many. Surely there are times and places for them. I wanted to avoid false hope or clichés. We are beyond that.

I wanted something that embodied our congregation, our commitment to love and to justice, our exploration of peace, and our welcome to our newest members. I wanted to remind you that we and you are not alone and wanted to give you something to take with you as a reminder of that truth in the days to come.

The thing that called to me was our chalice, a simple, powerful vessel with a strong story of love and service behind it. The Unitarian Universalist chalice is from the era of World War II. It was originally created to serve as an official stamp for documents created by the UU Service Committee whose members were helping Jewish children to cross borders into safety.

Love is the doctrine of this church. Service is our prayer. It grew from a flat stamp to a three-dimensional holder of the flame through the eyes and hands of children, who came up with this idea in religious education classes, and by the early 1980s it began to spread in use through Unitarian Universalist worship services across our country. Today there is nary a church that doesn't have a chalice. Our churches vary widely in geographic location and customs of the congregation and ministry, but all of us share the chalice. All of us light the flame.

We have lit a chalice in our home for decades. We have several. Some handmade by our children when they were young, others given for services offered, still others purchased at General Assemblies and places of UU gatherings. We light our chalice to bless each other and our food. We light them to celebrate and to add light to a dark room on a winter day. I also lit them when Trayvon Martin was murdered and again when George Floyd was killed. I light them when I need to center myself, regain composure, and choose

carefully the words I want to say and actions I want to take.

In other words, I light our chalice in love and in service. It is my prayer.

I hope you have heard that our sanctuary will be open on Election Day from 9am though 6pm. The chalice will be lit. Everyone is invited to come and sit, find the ground, feel peace, gain perspective. You may be alone, or others may be here with you.

We are also holding a gathering on Friday, Veterans Day from 5:30 – 6:30pm, when Alan Seale and I will lead a brief service, including having time for folks to share what is on their minds and hearts.

One of the beautiful things about our chalices is that there is no standard way it has to look. It can be homemade from natural things you find outside or be elaborate and made of bronze or silver. I have brought tealight candles for everyone who would like to make your own chalice and have it lit this week, perhaps on Election Day, or any day. You may keep it just as it is, simple, austere, and ready to be lit, or you may place it in a holder – a shell, a favorite saucer, or whatever suits your fancy. Whatever you choose, may we remember each other as we light our candles this week. May we remember this space. May we remember what we believe in and who we are called to be, by ourselves and together. May we remember peace, and may we pray for and act for peace in big and small ways. Until we meet again.

Amen.