

A Faithful Response

(transcript of a sermon given with few notes)

Sermon by Reverend Rebecca M. Bryan

November 10, 2024

I'm going to share my reflection, or homily, or thoughts, or wishes and prayers, and wherever spirit moves me now. Our children and youth are downstairs in the Lower Meetinghouse making an Advent candle and wreath because you know what? It all matters. They need to know they have a place to come that is home, that is safe, that makes Advent wreaths, where people know their names. So they'll be joining us for our New Member Ritual after I share a few of my remarks. I'll be honest: Perhaps these aren't the right remarks because I left them on my computer at home.

I hope I followed the right thing by calling my beloved and asking, "Have you left home?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Well can you turn around? I need this." And then when he got in front of the computer on my cell phone, in the robing room, he said to me, "You have a lot of documents open. Which one is it?" I said, "Healers. Healers. It starts with the word 'healers.'" Thank you, Bart.

But truth be told I don't know exactly what to say. I don't have all the magic answers and many of you are probably thinking *well we know that* but that's good. You should know that. This is *our* church. *We* are the church. *We* here. *We* online. *We* who have died. *We* who were here for nearly 300 years. *We* who will come in the future.

I was watching ministers online. We've got all kinds of Facebook groups...and I don't know what I think about Facebook these days, by the way. I may need to let it go. But I'm struggling a little bit with letting go of Facebook, and believe me, my remarks are not about me. Maybe you will hear yourself in a few.

Do we just step out of all of the difficult places, or do we stand there and shine the light? Do we move out? Maybe there are people who really will need that. So, we can only make our own decisions. But what I know is that there are people *looking* for the light. There are people *hungry* and *desperate* to know there are those of us who still carry the same values, who still believe in the power of Love, who will work for

justice. If we just step out of it all, what's left?

So though Facebook is a small example, it's an important little microcosm of how I invite us to approach these times. How do we balance the need to care for our own well-being, our peace of mind, and our connection to our own selves, with being there in the world, being there for other people, and being the ones who speak up? The best thing I can say is that it is most likely going to change, maybe even day to day. I would encourage us to stop looking for prescriptions and start following truth.

I went on Facebook the other day. I had posted something, but I really go on there because I want to see those of you who are online and make sure you're okay. That's the truth. I saw that some of you were not okay, and then I saw other responses, and then I got pulled into other things...within about 10 minutes maybe, and it took me three or four hours to come back. There's a spiral going on, folks, and if we lose touch with our truth and who we are, then we are truly powerless. Then truly we will have lost what it is that guides us.

I watched these other ministers. There are so many of us who just want to know what to say. And I'm really glad it's us—*us*—and that I've been here a while, because I don't have anything to prove. I don't have all the answers. I don't have a four-point sermon that's going to tell you what to do.

So, I'll briefly offer my prepared reflections that were found and that start with healers. And then we'll celebrate our beloved faith community. And this I know: If we stay together and accept one another and love one another, I can't promise we'll all be okay, but I can promise we will be working for Love. Love is brave, courageous, strong, gentle, comforting, and protective.

When I thought about us—now I'm talking just about us, FRSUU First Religious Society, here on Pleasant Street for almost 300 years—here's the best I can say. At this time we need healers. And here's the best news: Everything we've always

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believed in and all the values we've worked for don't need to change one single bit.

We're not going to reinvent what we believe in. We're going to decide how to respond to what's happening.

So when I think of this time and us, and when I think of our flock, my flock, I know that we need healers. As I'm talking, think about what resonates in you today.

We need healers. We need people who will sing, who will play singing bowls, who will meditate, who will pray, who will visit the sick, who will listen, who will just *heal* with Love.

We need organizers. We need people who will look with reason but deep conviction at what's happening. People who will find partners—because we don't do anything alone—and create and organize strategies for how we best respond.

We need actors. I don't mean theater actors, although to Teddy and Mara and all of you in theater arts: We need you too. I call you healers.

We need those people who will accept the invitation, who will show up, who will go to the vigil, who will write a postcard, who will make a phone call. We need all of it. Action takes many different forms.

We've gotten many voicemails over the last couple of days from the community at large asking, "What do we do?" And guess what? We are the church of this area. *We are the church.* We are the church. I forward some of those voicemails and I ask, "Would you call this person?" And the person who receives my email replies, "Absolutely. I will call."

They are actors too.

We need healers and organizers so that we don't burn out. We need actors who will respond. We need caregivers—and I'm using these words differently than usual.

Healers are those who offer healing. Organizers are those who will sit and create strategies in partnership with reason and Love. Actors are those who will respond, and caregivers are those who will ensure that this beloved church—our governance, its buildings, its energy, and its

staff—are cared for. Because this is our home.

So, where are you? We need you all.

We must understand the imperative of "we" not "I" and I don't mean "I" as in myself, Reverend Rebecca. I mean "I," a person. It never has been about "I." It's always been about us. Always. We must make Love real and give it a chance.

I want to do sort of a litany here to close this moment. Well, it's a little more than a litany. I'm going to start by using our way of saying "I see you" and inviting you to respond "I am here" if you would like. As I name each group you can respond silently or aloud. I'm speaking on behalf of all of us.

For those who are terrified right now:

We see you. I am here.

For Black and brown people:

We see you. I am here.

For Hispanic, Asian, Pacific, indigenous people, and all other nonwhite people:

We see you. I am here.

For members of the LGBTQ+ community:

We see you. I am here.

For transgender people:

We see you. I am here.

For parents and relatives who have children who are trans:

We see you. I am here.

For people living in unsafe situations:

We see you. I am here.

For lovers of peace:

We see you. I am here."

For protectors of the environment and all her creatures, especially the four-legged, the winged, and the scaled ones:

"We see you. I am here.

For immigrants, refugees, and those who are related to and love those people with their whole hearts:

We see you. I am here.

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For those who are disabled with visible and invisible disabilities:

We see you. I am here.

For the economically insecure:

We see you. I am here.

For all those who are feeling helpless, angry, numb, grief-stricken, confused, and defeated:

We see you. I am here.

For all those whom I have not named but who are here:

We see you. I am here.

Here you are safe.

We promise to do all we can to love you with our actions that speak louder than our words, and to love you with the words that you want and need to hear. This is a place where we know we must act and where we believe in the power of Love to overcome evil. Yes, evil. Here we speak and listen to each other and seek always to respect and honor the inherent worth and dignity of all people.

The good news, my friends, is that our Unitarian and Universalist values have not changed with what's happened. The need for the realization of those values in this world has never been greater. We need to be kind and compassionate with ourselves and each other. We need to take care of ourselves and really, truly get to know all people as our neighbors. And again, start right here.

When I hear questions about others with whom perhaps there is a greater distance between us, let's start right here and really strengthen that muscle. We need to be curious, brave, and bound in our lives to truth, equity, justice, compassion, and action.

Come, come whoever you are. You are welcome here.

Amen.