



# Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York

“Our Bodies, Our Futures: The 50th Anniversary of Roe V. Wade”

Delivered 22 January 2023

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***Important Note:** The following text is what I prepared for Sunday, January 22, 2023. It is not the sermon I wound up delivering. I hope to have a transcription of that soon, but in the meantime I offer this as perhaps an interesting insight into my writing process, and why sometimes it is more valuable to let the Spirit speak directly, and allow space for greater truths to emerge organically.*

Thank you Joanne, thank you Donna, for your powerful words of witness today.

On January 23, 2022, we held a Reproductive Justice Sunday service to honor the 49th anniversary of the Roe v. Wade decision of the Supreme Court of the United States of America. On May 2, 2022 the leak of the outcome of the Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health case was leaked ahead of the eventual decision of the Supreme Court, released on June 24, 2022. The Dobbs decision effectively overturned the Roe decision and ended the Court’s previously established legal protection of any child bearing person to have the right to choose to terminate a pregnancy. Today, January 22, 2023, is the exact 50 year anniversary of the Roe V. Wade decision, and we live in a United States both vastly changed and struggling with a past now brought into the present.

On the morning of June 24, 2022, I was in Portland, Oregon attending General Assembly - the annual meeting of the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association. The decision was released around 10 a.m. Eastern time, so when I woke up a little after 7 a.m. in the Pacific time zone, my phone was already overflowing with news notifications. There was also a text thread with the members of last year’s UUCYork Coming of Age class, both the youth

and myself and the adult sponsors and our DRE at the time. It was that thread to which I was drawn. There was fear, anger, uncertainty - what would this mean? What will or won't we get to decide about our own futures? It broke my heart, and it refreshed and renewed my own anger, my own fear, my own frustration, and my own determination to continue in the moral work of supporting people spiritually throughout their lives and struggles.

I wanted to ground today's reflection in the reality of our changed world, to acknowledge all the profound changes that have occurred in our world in the last year. Last year we celebrated Roe, this year we mourn it.

I need to be quite clear that the position I take here today is a moral one and not a political one - but we must also name and understand that these two realms of human experience are irrevocably intertwined. Whatever one feels about the personal choice involving abortion - as in our reading - you are loved.

In this changed and changing world I feel the most vital thing to do on this anniversary is to lift up the overall intersectional framework called Reproductive Justice, and most specifically the work of [SisterSong](#), a nationwide organization based in the Southern United States working to improve institutional policies and systems affecting the reproductive lives of marginalized communities.

It was Black women who developed the Reproductive Justice framework, meeting in 1994 prior to the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, where the entire world agreed that the individual right to plan your own family must be central to global development. SisterSong was formed in 1997 to create a national, multi-ethnic movement for Reproductive Justice.

The work of SisterSong is centered in intersectional justice. On their webpage, they quote Audre Lorde, "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle

because we do not live single-issue lives.” This quote is from Lorde’s talk titled [“Learning From the 60s.”](#) presented during Malcolm X Weekend at Harvard University in February of 1982. Later in that same speech, Lorde illustrates this deeply, writing, “Within each one of us there is some piece of humanness that knows we are not being served by the machine which orchestrates crisis after crisis and is grinding all our futures into dust. If we are to keep the enormity of the forces aligned against us from establishing a false hierarchy of oppression, we must school ourselves to recognize that any attack against Blacks, any attack against women, is an attack against all of us who recognize that our interests are not being served by the systems we support. Each one of us here is a link in the connection between anti-poor legislation, gay shootings, the burning of synagogues, street harassment, attacks against women, and resurgent violence against Black people. I ask myself as well as each one of you, exactly what alteration in the particular fabric of my everyday life does this connection call for? Survival is not a theory. In what way do I contribute to the subjugation of any part of those who I define as my people? Insight must illuminate the particulars of our lives: who labors to make the bread we waste, or the energy it takes to make nuclear poisons which will not biodegrade for one thousand years; or who goes blind assembling the microtransistors in our inexpensive calculators?”

None of this may sound like it has to do with abortion rights, but what I want to highlight today is how much more is involved in Reproductive Justice than access to abortion care. The definition of Reproductive Justice as developed and upheld by the SisterSong collective is: “the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities.” They align their work with the framework developed in the United Nations’ 1948 [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserts that, in addition to the freedom to marry and to end marriages, to have children as one chooses, human beings have the right to health care, to education, to security of person, to freedom from any interference with their privacy, home, family, or correspondence, as well as freedom from attacks upon their honor or their reputation.

Reproductive Justice is not a single issue, because we do not live single issue lives. It is imperative upon us to consider the structures we uphold that may support us while denying needed care and support to others. It is imperative upon us to examine those places where we are denied those basic human rights, and to ask how many others this may affect, how intertwined we all truly are.

Reproductive Justice implores us to imagine a world where every child is wanted, every child is supported emotionally, spiritually, physically, and economically, every child has the same access to quality healthcare, every child has the same access to a quality education, every child has the same chance to live to adulthood without becoming a victim of gun violence. For last week's message of nonviolence is also a vital part of this week's message about the imagining that Reproductive Justice requires of us. A country where Tamir Rice can be shot for playing, a country where a classroom full of children can be murdered, a country where nearly a third of Black men (who are children of mothers!) will eventually be incarcerated - this is a country falling short of the mark for Reproductive Justice.

We do not live single issue lives. We know that birth control is important; we know that access to birth control is inconsistent and not as available to some as to others. We know that comprehensive and accurate sex education reduces the rate of abortions, yet the sex education available in public schools across the country is either minimal, fear-based, or inaccurate - or all three. We know that pregnancy can be dangerous to the physical, emotional, and spiritual health of an individual, and yet since the Dobbs decision more than a dozen states have enacted laws that severely reduce access to abortion care or deny it outright. We know that Black women, indigenous women, and other women of color face more barriers to accessing abortion care, as well as other kinds of healthcare, than white women do. We know that the poorest populations also cannot access abortion care - or birth control - or good prenatal care or pediatric care for their children once born, or mental health care for postpartum depression - as easily as those with greater financial means.

Survival is not a theory. Audre Lorde's intersectional assessment was made a dozen years before the formalization of the Reproductive Justice framework, but her reminder that we are all connected, that injustice done to any of us keeps all of us from living in a world where it is truly possible to be free. As we name our grief over the change we have seen in our world, let us allow ourselves - no, dare ourselves to imagine a world where everyone has equal access not just to surviving, but to thriving. A world where everyone knows that none of us are free until all of us are free. That world will only come to be once we put our dreams into action, once we pray with our feet, and once we fight for the rights being denied to any of us.

So may it be.