



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York

"This Midpoint"
Delivered 2 July 2023
Rev. Jen Raffensperger

July 2. The precise middle. Half of the year lies behind us, half of the year lies before us.

This is a holy day.

At least from my perspective.

Talking about a midpoint means talking about a particular perspective - a certain way of thinking about, examining, and being in the world. I learned about this day from the reading that we used as our chalice lighting, from [365 Tao](#) by Deng Ming-Dao.

“Once you reach the center of anything, you can dominate the whole in any way you please. In chess, those who gain the middle board are usually in the superior position. In a storm, those who reach the eye are safe. In making decisions, those who cleave to the center are wise.”

Dominate. Superior. Those words give me pause; they evoke an emotional reaction from me, and not a particularly positive one.

Safe. Wise. Those words bring forth an entirely different emotional reaction. I don't want to dominate or claim myself superior! But we all crave safety, and who wouldn't want to be perceived as wise?

Are these very different perspectives on the middle point of the year - or of any cycle or system - really talking about the same thing?

We can contain contradictions. In fact we must. We talk about the busy [early bird](#) but we also feel a sense of sympathy for that worm ...sleep late, little buddy. Sleep late today. There are days we feel like the bird, and days we feel like the worm.

I've already invited you to think about what "sleeping late" means to you right now. That's something I think can change with age, of course - and it can also change depending on the job we work, on our health - physical, mental, emotional, on our stress levels, on our living situation, on the amount of obligations on our time, and a thousand other factors.

Does rest feel revolutionary to you? Do you feel as though you rest better when you are safe?

We read out loud the names of 32 cities with a mass shooting in the last two weeks, with several cities experiencing multiple incidents.

How are the people in those cities sleeping? How well can you rest when you feel like you must be ever watchful, when your life has been disrupted by loss or violence or hateful actions, by ignorance and indifference that mean your community, your family, feel less than safe and without the power to change that circumstance?

Who gets to feel safe in our beloved country? Who gets to rest?

I do not say "beloved" with any sense of irony or play - I say it full-heartedly and broken-heartedly.

Independence Day is also a holy day. Independence Day asks of us, begs of us, to examine the state of our nation, the state of our independence and our interdependence, the state of who our nation is serving and who it is failing.

Holy days, beloveds, are complicated things. They must be.

“[...] [Perhaps](#),
the truth is, every song of this country
has an unsung third stanza, something brutal
snaking underneath us as we blindly sing
the high notes with a beer sloshing in the stands
hoping our team wins. Don't get me wrong, I do
like the flag, how it undulates in the wind
like water, elemental, and best when it's humbled,
brought to its knees, clung to by someone who
has lost everything, when it's not a weapon,
when it flickers, when it folds up so perfectly
you can keep it until it's needed, until you can
love it again, until the song in your mouth feels
like sustenance, a song where the notes are sung
by even the ageless woods, the short-grass plains,
the Red River Gorge, the fistful of land left
unpoisoned, that song that's our birthright,
that's sung in silence when it's too hard to go on,
that sounds like someone's rough fingers weaving
into another's, that sounds like a match being lit
in an endless cave, the song that says my bones
are your bones, and your bones are my bones,
and isn't that enough?”

The song that is our birthright. The song that is sung in silence. The song that sounds like hands clasping, like a light kindled, the song that draws us together, that reminds us of our interdependence.

Our hearts are full of complications and contradictions, as they must be. Our hearts fill with love when we think of this country and our hearts fill with ...something else. Many somethings. They fill with sorrow, anger, uncertainty.

They fill with the thousand things we cannot speak, the un-whispered hopes and the unshed tears. They fill with pride and they fill with shame.

“Once you reach the center of anything, you can dominate the whole in any way you please.”

“Any way you please” means you can choose. Any way you please means you can choose what you do with your power. Because we have power, beloveds. And we have more of it together. At the midpoint of the year, I invite you not to think about teams, about sides, about winning and losing, about who is right and who is wrong. I invite you to think about who gets to rest. Who gets to feel safe. What if we chose to let kindness, compassion, and love dominate our life, and by turns our world? What if we asked ourselves, from the perspective at the middle, at the center, where do we feel safe and where do we feel fear? What if we listened in silence to the song that sounds like hands clasping, that sounds like recognizing the whole, holy, complications of all those around us? What if the power we gather is love, and the potential exists for us to use that power together to change the world?

Because it does.

Rest on it.

Reflect.

Renew yourself.

Then arise to the work, arise rested, arise greater, arise connected.

Arise.

So may it be.