



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York

"What Love Looks Like in Public: Justice as Spiritual Practice"

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["learn to be here](#)

critique is a seductress
her door is always open
so what if you get some
we are going further
past reform, to wonder
this requires comprehension
that cannot fit in words"

I wonder, how many of you here have what you consider to be a daily, personal spiritual practice? Or near-daily, or aspirationally-daily or even weekly?

What does that look like?

Prayer. Meditation. Journaling. Movement practices. Practices of silence and of song. Practices that ground us in the earth where we are, that guide our thoughts into a future that could be.

We are here this morning to speak, again, of justice. We have seen first hand the work of justice in a hurting world and we are shown again and again the places where justice is lacking, where the hurt feels as though it is growing in ways we cannot understand or name - and if we try to speak on it or reflect on it, we may even fear critique, that seductress - we may fear backlash, we may fear anger, we may fear, well - being wrong. I name that one because it's a big

one for me, especially as someone who has taken up work in this world that asks of me public witness.

In September of 2018, when I was still living in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, D.C. (my home, for 50 years!, before moving to York), I saw a call on a local clergy group for anyone willing and able to come downtown during the confirmation hearings for now-Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, to provide an open supportive presence for the activists as they went to lobby in the offices of the decision-makers. Now at that time I was still in seminary, a candidate for ordination but not yet ordained. In the Unitarian Universalist tradition, stoles are generally reserved as the symbol of ordained clergy - but in acts of public witness, candidates for ordination are encouraged to wear clerical collars and other identifying clothing. Just that summer I had bought my first clerical collar and now I prepared to wear it in public for the first time. I didn't know what to expect. I felt strange and nervous and highly visible, taking the Metro downtown. But when I arrived at the Hart Senate Office Building, I found other clergy there in support, some that I knew and many more that I didn't. It was powerful to hear the witness of my colleagues, and to lead prayer in that space. But the most powerful thing I did that day was listen. There were activists there who had been exhausting themselves, revisiting their own trauma, staying in places that allowed them to speak truth to power even from throats parched with crying, hoarse from chanting for change. One young woman sought me out during a time of prayer, saying she felt safer with me. Before I left the action that day I sought out that same young woman and sat with her a while, letting her share her fears and shed her tears.

What a thing to share. What a thing to be trusted with.

“externalize love
bind us together into
a greater self
a complex movement
a generative abundance

an embodied evolution”

Justice, beloveds, is not just external work. It is deeply personal, spiritual work. But even though it is personal we also know it is not solitary.

All those spiritual practices we named, they are fuel for the journey. We take the time to pray, to meditate, to fill our cups so that we have more to give, to cultivate a generous, imaginative spirit that is willing not just to challenge what is but to dare to dream what is to be.

Unitarian Universalism professes no one single creed - instead we ask of those gathered together in our faith communities to consider those things of greatest worth, and to work together to grow and cultivate them. Internally the UUA is doing a lot of work on bylaws, but what that means practically is we are inviting ourselves to stretch our imaginations, to consider the work we do in our communities and in the larger world, and to recommit to our central values. We name these Justice, Equity, Transformation, Pluralism, Interdependence, Generosity - and all these centered on that which is at the heart of all, Love.

When we cultivate active love in the world, it means more than praying by ourselves. It means praying together. It means joining on our spiritual journeys to make meaning together, to hold one another joyfully and lovingly accountable. If we do not all profess one single creed, we must focus on relationships and covenant, saying “We do not do this alone. We don’t do any of this alone.” It is an act of wondering imagination and of faith, to show up again and again.

“over and over again
it becomes known
the peace we seek
is seeking us
the joy a full bud
awaiting our attention

justice in our hands
longing to be practiced
the whole world
learning
from within”

If we cultivate our joy and fill our cups deeply within our spiritual communities, with our soul-companions, we find that deep peace. We look at the justice within our hands and find we have the strength to practice it. We learn from within and take our learning into the world.

And because I can't ever resist poetry, I'll end with this from Marge Piercy's ["The Low Road."](#)

“It goes on one at a time,
it starts when you care
to act, it starts when you do
it again and they said no,
it starts when you say We
and know who you mean,
and each day you mean one more.”

I am so glad we are here together. The “we” we are creating grows more wide, more broad, more deep. Cultivate wonder within yourselves, beloveds, and gather together for the strength to make it real in the world. So may it be.