



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York

"Survival Is A Garden"

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"Because in every universe in which I am alive, it is because of other people. And I don't always like them, but I love them. In every universe in which I am alive, it is less because I could fight... and more because I could forgive. Because I could cooperate. Because I could apologize. Because I could dance. Because I could grow pumpkins in my backyard and leave them at my neighbor's door, asking for nothing in return."

Because I could apologize. Because I could dance.

Y'all know I come back to my favorite poets, writers, lyricists, artists again and again. It's how I live into the sense of invitation I wish to cultivate here in our faith communities. It's how I grow the garden of my own hope.

"Survival is not a fortress; it is a garden." [Kyle Tran Myhre](#) is one of my favorite poets and lyricists; when I recently purchased some of his work it came with a signed card with this quote on it. That card now sits propped on my little bookshelf-altar at home, the place where I gather the pieces and reminders of the sacred that most center me.

We ground ourselves in our faith again and again, both by discovering new ways of thinking, being, and doing - and by revisiting those beloved rituals and considering the love and gratitude those rituals allow us to cultivate in our hearts. The annual rituals that this congregation observes are periodic reminders across the calendar to examine our own faith and our faith

community, to consider who we are, where we've been, where we are going. What we are planting.

"We cultivate a spirit of gratitude and hope.

We covenant to freely and compassionately share our faith, presence, and resources. Our generosity connects us to one another in relationships of interdependence and mutuality."

Perhaps some of you remember last year I gave a [series of sermons](#) on the proposed revisions to Article II of the Bylaws of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations. I'm certain that some of you remember "JETPIG," the acronym that serves as a mnemonic device to remember the proposed core values of Unitarian Universalism - Justice, Equity, Transformation, Pluralism, Interdependence, and Generosity, with Love always at the center. (Think of it as the planet around which Jetpig orbits, or even better, the fuel in the jetpack that allows those values to do their work in the world without depleting their own resources.) What I just read to you - cultivating a spirit of gratitude and of hope - is the full text for the value of Generosity.

We share our faith, we share our presence, we share our resources. We are connected in relationships of interdependence and mutuality.

"Because in every universe in which I am alive, it is because of other people. And I don't always like them, but I love them." We'll apologize. And we'll dance. Because we will mess up and we'll celebrate the mess, because we are in it, together.

Yes. It can feel hopelessly disingenuous to talk about celebrating messes given...**gestures broadly** everything happening in the world. It CAN feel that way if one can't ground oneself in the belief in one's heart - the hope we cultivate. Love and hope are small words that do a lot of heavy lifting in the language of faith. But I will remind you that we are not called to a passive love but an active one. We are not called to a hope that requires us to ignore the

world but to a challenging active hope that invites us to look directly at the deep and dark truths and still dare to imagine something greater.

“Survival is not a fortress; it is a garden. Survival is not a siren; it is a symphony. And yes, we fight for it sometimes, but survival is not the fight. It is the healing after: clean water washing away the blood, the soft hum of someone you trust applying the bandage, the feeling of falling asleep in a safe place.”

Survival isn't the fight - it is the healing after. In a world full of fighting - in dangerous armed combat in war zones, in our cities and schools, in our places of public dialogue, the halls of our government - we long for survival. We long for the healing after even as we cannot see a path to it. I often despair, personally, as a pacifist, that we will never reach a time when humanity no longer turns to violence as a means to solve any of its problems. I wonder how long we humans will continue to perpetuate hurt and harm, to continue to uphold systems of oppression that will always harm the most vulnerable among us, and that will continue to isolate the least vulnerable among us (and I include me in that statement, in my white middle-class cisgender mostly-straight body) so that it is too easy for us to turn from the harm being done. Particularly today, on this Transgender Day of Remembrance, I reflect on how much harm is done that doesn't always dominate our headlines, that doesn't always break through the 24-hour news cycle.

Listen.

“In every universe in which I am alive, I am holding: A first aid kit, a solar panel, a sleeping cat. Never a rusty battle ax or rocket launcher—sure, maybe sometimes a chainsaw, but only for firewood. I am holding: a cooking pot, a teddy bear, a photo album, a basketball, a bouquet of flowers.”

We cultivate a spirit of gratitude and of hope. Gratitude. That's the word we use so often at this time of year, when we are asked to count our blessings. And we have the social science that shows us that a practice of gratitude improves

our mental and our physical health. Gratitude heals. And healing people heal people. This list of blessings from our reading, this list of the tools that will be in our hands in our time of survival - they are not just tools of surviving but of thriving. The tools of shared meals, shared comforts, shared memories, shared joy, shared beauty.

What do you enshrine on your own personal altar of gratitude? What are the hopes you plant, the dreams you cultivate that make space in your life for healing? What will we grow together in the time before this particular annual ritual arrives again? What grows in the garden that is our survival? When we wash off the blood, when we put down the weapons of war, when we turn aside the actions of hatred that arise from hurt and from fear, what will be revealed? What harvest will arise when we apologize? What harvest will arise when we dance?

“Survival is not a fortress; it is a garden. Survival is not a siren; it is a symphony.”

Let your heart sing to that symphony. Let your spirit dance. Dare to cultivate a generous heart in a hurting world. What wonders we might grow, together.

So may it be.