

Honoring Our Veterans, Honoring Our Freedoms

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Beloveds, these are anxious times. Aren't they? No matter where we may fall on the political continuum, no matter what our beliefs or spiritual practices, no matter whether we have enough and to spare or are dirt poor – and I have been both in my life – no matter how we might try to prepare for what might happen in the next few months, no matter *what*, I think most of us are feeling frightened and not a little helpless. What we thought we had in this country, including civil political discourse and cooperative governance, has changed so much we can barely recognize it. That is scary.

I have been thinking a lot lately about another scary time – a time when our troops, our own fathers and sons and brothers and sweethearts – and a lot of women, too – signed up to fight in what is now called WWII. It was in that scary place that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, in one of his famous fireside chats, proclaimed we were fighting for four freedoms. Everywhere in the world, he said, people have a right to Freedom of speech; Freedom of worship; Freedom from want; and Freedom from fear.

The artist Norman Rockwell painted four famous pictures illustrating those four freedoms. They capture my imagination, especially the one captioned Freedom from Fear.

The picture shows two parents, standing by the bedsides of their sleeping children. Those parents, I am certain, are praying, “May nothing evil cross this door.” They are aware that these are dangerous times. They would do anything – ANYTHING – to stand between the danger and their beloved little ones.

That's what people do when we truly love: we care enough to work for the peace and safety of our loved ones.

Those parents in the painting are not fighting overseas. They are not making public policy. They undoubtedly feel rather helpless to change the course of

national and world events in ways that could ensure the safety of their family, of their beloved children.

But what they can do, they are doing. Making sure those children are fed, are clean, are warmly tucked in for the night: that is what they can do, and that is what they do. They do what they can.

Here in this religious community, as Unitarian Universalists, we aspire to both the common good and looking out for each other's individual good. We aspire to see the worth and dignity of all people – ALL people. No matter their color, no matter their political affiliation, no matter their religion.

Unitarian Universalism has reason to be grateful for our freedom of religion in this country. We have a long history of martyrs who lost their lives because they could not in good conscience agree with the dominant religious views of their times. Here in this land, our constitution guarantees us freedom to worship and believe as we wish to. And now, as much as any time in our nation's history, we need to make sure that we do what we can to defend every person's right to freedom of religion.

In honoring our war Veterans today, we are especially grateful for the freedoms our people hold dear. But I don't think for a minute that I can tell their story as well as they can. So I have invited two of our Veterans, Bob Fancy and Les Lambert, to join me in a question and answer session today.

- Tell us about how and why you went into the service, and where you served
- How did your experience in the service impact your life?
- What opinions or beliefs do you hold now that are different from those you had at the time you were in the service?
- What else would you like to say to us about being a Veteran in America today?

As Unitarian Universalists, we have high goals and aspirations. We help each other work toward those goals. We strengthen and support each other, as together we do the work of building a new way of being, a kinder, wiser, more inclusive, more loving way of being together and reaching out into the world. We

are the people who aspire to be the change we hope to see. And we do it together.

Dear ones, in closing, I offer these words from UU minister Rev. Ashley Horan: *You are loved beyond belief. You are enough, you are precious, your work and your life matter, and you are not alone. You are part of a “we,” a great cloud of witnesses living and dead who have insisted that this beautiful, broken world of ours is a blessing worthy of both deep gratitude and fierce protection. Whatever happens tomorrow, our ancestors and our descendants are beckoning us, compelling us to onward toward greater connection, greater compassion, greater commitment to one another and to the earth. Together, we are resilient and resourceful enough to say “yes” to that call, to make it our life’s work in a thousand different ways, knowing that we can do no other than bind ourselves more tightly together, and throw ourselves into the holy work of showing up, again and again, to be part of building that world of which we dream but which we have not yet seen.*