

Share Your Umbrella
Rev. Lynda Sutherland
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[This sermon is adapted from “Making Space for Grace” Gretchen Haley, Jan 2017, Foothills UU in Ft. Collins, CO]

How am I going to live through this?

This is the question people ask when they are in the middle of a crisis, a trauma, or in grief that won't seem to find its bottom.

It's a question I've heard more than a few times in the past two years.

It's not always about what is going on in politics, but almost always, those things are in there somewhere.

There is a collective anxiety and dread washing over our country – and even, over much of the world – as politicians and the public increasingly take sides and throw verbal grenades, and talk not of getting along but of getting evenfear is growing, as is a sense of helplessness.

Meanwhile, it's not like all the regular parts of life got themselves figured out– life continues to be filled in big and small ways with struggle – broken relationships, illness, money troubles, job stress and strain. The work of simply trying to make a life, to become the person you are meant to be. Put all of this together and you come to that question: *How are we are going to live through this?*

Collectively and historically, as a faith tradition, we have answered this question in one primary way – which is, to get busy. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, busiER.

In our Unitarian Universalist faith, as theologian Rebecca Parker says it, “WE are the agents of history, we are the creators.” We will build a land where we bind up the broken. We will.

And this feels good, necessary, and justified....until....we find ourselves in moments like the one we are currently in. Moments where we've been working hard, and efforting, and marching, and doing ALL THE THINGS, yet still the outlook for justice feels bleak, and even science is considered just somebody's “opinion,” and we're tired.

As Parker says, “We come up against our helplessness, the inability to stop loved ones from dying, or turn our children from paths of self-destruction, or keep those we love from breaking our hearts. And we find ourselves asking, ‘Is there any source of help beyond my own strength? Is there anything I can trust beyond our power to make it right?’”

Or in other words, where is my umbrella, my sanctuary, my shelter from the storm? And what umbrella do I have to offer others?

The Unitarian strand of our faith, the part that is all about the head, and reason, would tell us that we better get busy, it's all on us. The good news of our Universalist theology is that there is

something bigger than us that we can trust, something that is holding us and healing us, that has nothing to do with our effort. As Parker puts it, “There is a gift, already given, to all people, a gift that does not have to be earned, that will never be lost, that cannot be taken away.”

This is grace. And in these times, it feels like exactly the good news we need.

Especially in the times of great storms, we need to remember – there IS a love holding us – there is a GIFT already given – we are already blessed – already healed – and it is by resting in this love that we have any hope of remaining awake to all that’s broken in our world – and NOT becoming ourselves broken.

Yet even as I was working on this sermon, and then hearing the latest crazy news, I started to think – this isn’t the message we need! We need to take action. We need to do more, call more, read more articles, create more outrage, wake ourselves and our world UP....it’s up to US.

More often than not, in place of grace, we just see US, and WORK, and ALL THERE IS TO DO, and ALL THE NEWS ARTICLES and the LATEST thing to be OUTRAGED ABOUT.

But when we pause. When we slow down. When we imagine ourselves not in charge of everything, responsible for everything – but rather, as partners with something greater than us all.

Then, things like – the National Park Service going rogue – appear.

Or, spontaneous mass-gatherings happening across the country – people engaging in civic life like never before. Women and people of color running for office in unprecedented numbers.

Lawyers working pro-bono on behalf of those the system has always left behind. Teachers and Walmart workers speaking up. All while most of us were resting.

This is grace.

Grace breaks through, and we breathe, and we notice how the sun came up once again – none of us did that – yet here it is.

To our great surprise and delight, we arrive in a room filled with these others who have come to sing, even to surround us in song – these souls who come still to hope, to figure it out, still not pulling the covers over our heads after all, but feeling called by this possibility of peace, this righteous sense that Love still connects us, heals us, holds us. That we could rest in this love.

For those of us who believe in the worth and dignity of all people, it’s going to be a long road ahead, my friends. It has always been a long road ahead, to keep progress moving along amid setbacks, to bend that arc of the universe just a little more firmly toward justice.

And there are such storms along the way!

We don’t know which way the universe is going to toss us, what ups or downs – and sometimes this is daily, hourly.

If we are going to make it through, we need to make space for grace – that is – we need to make space between ourselves, and everything, and everyone else, so that love can break through. We need to know what part of the work is ours, and which is not. We need to know where we stand, what we’re willing to do. And we need to do this all from a deep connection

to our center, to that peace within, that grounding. To live from this place, even as we are engaged with openness towards all that comes our way.

I suggest that this is the shelter, the refuge, the umbrella sanctuary that we have to offer as Unitarian Universalists. To so ground ourselves in love that we can remain open to the crying human needs around us, and find those moments in which we in turn can offer an umbrella in the storm.

Give me an example, you say? How can we offer an umbrella?

When life brings rain

We offer health networks

We design tiny houses for homeless folk

We run a women's group or men's group or covenant circle

We sit and fix someone's hair

We make way out of no way

We advocate for the powerless and oppressed

We sing

We open our arms in welcome

Where we find hatred, we offer love.

Where there is offense, we offer pardon.

Where we find discord, we encourage reconciliation.

Where there is error, we offer truth.

We don't expect ourselves to fix things. We cannot go out and stop this storm. But we can find an umbrella, and we can share it.

As we delve deeper into the concept of Sanctuary this month, we will be exploring both sides of this: the ways we can more deeply ground ourselves in love and the experience of grace in the world, and the ways we can then act in the world to bless and protect other people, other beings, and the interconnected web of existence of which we are a part.

We gather on Sunday mornings to shelter from the storm, to enter this sanctuary of peace and hope. To receive an umbrella for going forth. Every other day, we can be the ones doing, marching, writing, reading, calling....trying to make ends meet, getting to work or the doctor appointment on time, processing the news of yet another severe weather disaster or fire or angry outburst...but on Sunday, for just one day, we make space for grace to show up and do its healing work on our hearts, and in the world.

May our Sunday services help us find shelter from the storm. May we find here, at least from time to time, the umbrella we need to walk back into that storm and do what needs to be done. As we go forth into the demands and business of our lives, may our umbrella sanctuaries help keep us from the worst of the storm, and may we find those in need of someone to share an umbrella with them.

May it be so.