

Sermon To Be a Blessing Rev. Sarah Person

Every worship service at Temple Beth David we would recite the Mishebeirach, a prayer for healing. It always struck me that before the blessing for those in need of healing came the request for help to find the courage to make our lives a blessing. Courage came before comfort. Courage and comfort were together in the same prayer. Just as they are in life.

I was very deliberate about the words we shared today. Did you notice how Vanessa Southern's prayer and St. Francis's prayer seemed to contradict each other? One tells us 'Let us strive more to comfort others than to be comforted ... for it is in giving that we receive' and the other 'doing nothing much but being [can offer our weary hearts] the aching, healing sense this is enough, even this.'

That's because we live in tension between the energetic poles of our own lives. We live in tension with others. We live one day at one end galvanized into action, another day at the other end hunkered down to conserve what is ours.

One of you stopped me a while back to tell me that he was beginning to wonder if the church was giving him what he needed. He needed spiritual comfort. His life was hard and complicated enough. He didn't need to be told from the pulpit what more godawful things were going on in the world. He didn't need to be told from the pulpit how he was supposed to go into the street or the state house and protest. I listened deeply. Underneath his words, I heard three important questions.

Am I getting what I need? By that I mean is this still my spiritual home?
Do I have to be an activist to be a Unitarian Universalist?
Do you still care about me?

Who among us has never asked those questions?
Am I getting what I need?
Do I belong?
Do you care about me?

Are you getting what you need? In a spiritual home, we offer one another our truth. I will tell you one of mine. If we are thinking and feeling humans, we wake up every morning with a broken heart. It doesn't matter who we are, happy or sad, content or anxious. It doesn't matter whether we are working hard and can't keep up with the bills, or comfortably set, whether children are struggling or successful. Our world is broken and there is always, always, that tug, that pull on our hearts, to respond.

Mark Nepo says: "The broken door lets in the light. The broken heart lets in the world." Oh, we may shield ourselves: be happy and sated for a while, or busy and preoccupied for a while. We may tuck our hearts in the background and go about our daily lives, we may ignore them, but they are there waiting for us. How do we respond to our broken hearts? How have you responded? Felt waves and waves of hurt? Pretend it doesn't hurt? Shut the door and say, just leave me alone? Get mad? Get even? Fix it? How do you respond? Some days, maybe even years, we want to be healed, some days or even years we want to be healer. In this house, there is room for both. Are you getting what you need? You may find it in the sermon, or the prayer or reading or interactions with others or in a weekday group or the next time you join us. Or you may find it in what you choose to say and do with us. As you well know, Sunday mornings are not a one-way dispensary. You bring yourself, your truth, to us.

Do I belong? Do I have to be an activist to be a Unitarian Universalist? Who do I have to be, what do I have to do to feel like I belong? As we become more and more active in social action, these questions will rise up again and again among us. What are *you* feeling today?

The latest issue of UU World asked that question of six Unitarian Universalist leaders. It seemed to the authors that, although UUs have been active in justice movements for decades, “UU leaders and many congregations have embraced justice work as central to our movement in ways not seen in a long time – and in ways that some UUs are experiencing as unsettling or disruptive.”

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/activism-unitarian-universalist>.

Do you have to be an activist to be a Unitarian Universalist?

Six leaders reflect on activism and religious identity in a racially and politically charged era.

Takiyah Nur Amin, Robin Bartlett, Ranwa Hammamy,

Paul Rasor, Marilyn Sewell, Pamela Wat

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Introduced by Kenny Wiley and Christopher L. Walton.

It will come as no surprise that their answers ranged from “Yes,” “No but Really Yes,” “No,” and to “No and it’s really disturbing that you even asked.”

“No but Really Yes.”

“This isn’t about calling yourself an activist or an organizer or anything else—it is about being a person who lives out their principles in their home, at the job, in their congregation, and anywhere else their life might take them.

I am frankly tired of hearing fellow UUs saying “I am not an activist” or “I didn’t come to this faith to be an activist” because it misses the point. This faith requires something of us in return for being our ideological home, and that requires that we get up, get out, and build the world we dream about. I don’t care what anyone calls themselves—but if you aren’t called to act in, on, and through our Principles, maybe you shouldn’t call yourself a Unitarian Universalist.” (Takiyah Nur Amin)

“No and it’s really disturbing that you asked”

“There are many ways to express and live out the Principles and values we hold dear. Activism is certainly one of them. But not everyone has to take to the streets. We all have our gifts, and not everyone is suited to this kind of work, just as not everyone is suited to pastoral care or finance or religious education. And those who are drawn to activism (or to other roles) will often need times when they need to step back for quiet reflection and restoration. The last thing we need is a form of ideological or behavioral orthodoxy where those who are not called to activism feel judged or devalued. At the same time, I hope that those called to other roles could support our activists (as one expression of our values), and that the activists could equally support those who undertake other equally important tasks in our communities.” (Paul Rasor)

So, do you have to be an activist to be Unitarian Universalist? No, but you have to let your heart be broken by what’s going on in the world. Some days that will be enough. But some days your heart will demand you respond with what is in your inner core. Some days you must be a blessing to you and yours and to whatever part of the world you embrace. Some days or years that may be an aching compassion for yourself and for others.

Some days or years that may be outrage. You may fill to the bursting point and want to yank others with you.

The heck with compassionate aching, it’s outrage that moves people to action...

We know things are bad — worse than bad. They're crazy. It's like everything everywhere is going crazy, so we don't go out anymore. We sit in the house, and slowly the world we are living in is getting smaller, and all we say is: 'Please, at least leave us alone in our living rooms. Let me have my toaster and my TV and my steel-belted radials and I won't say anything. Just leave us alone.'

Well, I'm not gonna leave you alone. I want you to get MAD! I don't want you to protest. I don't want you to riot — I don't want you to write to your congressman, because I wouldn't know what to tell you to write. I don't know what to do about the depression and the inflation and the Russians and the crime in the street. All I know is that first you've got to get mad. [*shouting*] You've got to say: '**I'm a human being, [gol-durnit]! My life has value!**'

So, I want you to get up now. I want all of you to get up out of your chairs. I want you to get up right now and go to the window. Open it, and stick your head out, and yell: **I'M AS MAD AS [HECK}, AND I'M NOT GOING TO TAKE THIS ANYMORE!**

But if I am not outraged, you ask, if I am not out to fix the world ...

Do you care about me?

The answer to the third question is, yes. I dedicate today's prayers to you. And I dedicate this sermon to you. They go hand in hand.

We are all weary, we are all connected. Today you may say, This day I will need to have my soul weariness acknowledged and that is enough. Tomorrow I may respond with everyday generosity and kindness. The day after, I may act out of kindness or conviction or fury to heal the world. Comfort and courage go hand in hand when that which we call sacred and holy is present. When that which we call God is present. *Ubi caritas et amor, deus ibi est.*

Today, at coffee hour, we will have a new feature for you; a center for advocacy from our Social Justice Council — a place to learn about issues and events and yes, write your legislators. And it will be plunked right in the midst of our fellowship and caring conversations. Because we have room in this house, in that Parish Hall, for it all: for minds that think, hearts that love, hands that serve, and souls that receive.

What is required to be a Unitarian Universalist? To be a blessing. What is required to be a blessing? Today to have a broken heart, and tomorrow to find the hope and courage to heal a broken world.

From Debbie Friedman

Mi shebeirach avoteinu
M'kor hab'racha l'imoteinu
May the source of strength,
Who blessed the ones before us,
Help us find the courage to make our lives a blessing,
and let us say, Amen.

Mi shebeirach imoteinu
M'kor hab'racha l'avoteinu

Bless those in need of healing with r'fuah sh'leimah,
The renewal of body, the renewal of spirit,
And let us say, Amen