

# Preparation for Weathering the Storm in Troubled Times

As the Chinese proverb goes, we have the misfortune to live in interesting times. Every day we are subjected to disturbing tweets from the White House and absorb news about mass shootings and weather catastrophes; children torn from their parents and locked in cages; violence against minorities, women, and those of nonconforming gender; an opioid epidemic and rising suicide rates; melting arctic ice and vanishing species; voter suppression and foreign interference in our elections; wars raging, refugees fleeing for their lives across the globe, intimations of nuclear war on the horizon ... all that and more. Meanwhile, government regulations to protect us and our planet are being gutted, the rule of Constitutional law is under threat by those in high places, and Congress is failing to act.

If you are struggling under the impact of this ceaseless torrent, you are not alone. Buddhist teacher and environmental activist Joanna Macy puts our unsettling situation into perspective by identifying ours as a time of historical transformation that she calls The Great Turning. She encourages us to take heart by seeing our era as laden with possibility for a better future, a hopeful long view that can help us navigate these troubled waters. At the same time, though, we have to make it through our days and keep our footing while doing what we can to address the converging crises that beset our communities, our country, and our world.

We can be thankful that our church provides us shelter from the storm. As a faith community that answers the call to bend the arc of history towards justice, First Unitarian offers us a place to find strength and sustenance. Held in its wise and nurturing arms, we come together in a spirit of love to bear witness to what is happening, to invoke our deepest values as a source of guidance, and to put those values to work in the public sphere. This is the tangible gift of spiritual fellowship, a gift that allows us to stop simply absorbing the impact of what's going on and rise up in congregated power to do what needs to be done to reclaim our democracy and salvage our Earth.

That said, each of us has to find her own way of coping day to day. You are invited to reflect on how you are personally affected by the troubling events that beset our world and what you find most effective in keeping grounded and keeping going.

Then take a moment to consider the seven Unitarian principles that we as a beloved community hold dear, starting with the inherent worth and dignity of every person and building from there to embrace ever wider circles of mutual respect, caring interdependence, and social justice.

As you reflect on these principles at this pivotal moment in history, how do you see them at work in your personal life, in your spiritual life, in your life as a citizen and community member?

Bear in mind that the first principle is the foundational one. As you reflect on these weighty questions, never forget that you yourself are inherently a person of worth and dignity with something of value to offer in your own unique way.

UU Principles:

- 1) The inherent worth and dignity of every person
- 2) Justice, equity and compassion in human relations
- 3) Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations
- 4) A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
- 5) The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process [in] our congregations and in society at large
- 6) The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all
- 7) Respect for the interdependent web of existence of which we are a part.

If one has courage, nothing can dim the light which shines from within .... You have to start with small things and build it up. *Maya Angelou*

In a century of staggering open questions, hope becomes a calling for those of us who can hold it for the sake of the world. Hope is distinct ... from optimism or idealism. It has nothing to do with wishing. It references reality at every turn and reveres truth. It lives open eyed and wholehearted with the darkness that is woven ineluctably into the light of life ... Hope, like every virtue, is a choice that becomes a practice that becomes a spiritual muscle memory. It's a renewable resource for moving through life as it is, not as we wish it to be. *Krista Tippett*

Facing it, always facing it, that's the way to get through ... Face it. *Joseph Conrad*

Humor can make a serious difference ... A sense of humor helps us to get through the dull times, cope with the difficult times, enjoy the good times and manage the scary times. *Steve Goodier*

I always imagined when I was a kid that adults had some ... inner toolbox full of shiny tools: the saw of discernment, the hammer of wisdom, the sandpaper of patience. But then when I grew up ... life handed me these rusty bent old tools – friendships, prayer, conscience, honesty – and said “Do the best you can with these, they will have to do.” And mostly, against all odds, they're enough. *Anne Lamott*

A nation of sheep will beget a government of wolves. *Edward R. Murrow*

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has. *Margaret Mead*

What would it be like if, right in the midst of this busyness, we were to consciously take our hands off the controls? ... What if we were to intentionally stop our mental computations and our rushing around and, for a minute or two, simply pause and notice our inner experience? ... Through the sacred art of pausing, we develop the capacity to stop hiding, to stop running away from our experience. We begin to trust in our natural intelligence, our naturally wise heart, our capacity to open to whatever arises. *Tara Brach, excerpts from Radical Acceptance*

People say nothing is impossible, but I do nothing every day. *Pooh, in the movie Christopher Robin*

## **Questions to Ponder**

1. How are you affected by events in the US and the world? How do you cope with the daily impact?
2. What do you most need to sustain your spirits and do your part?
3. How do you live the UU principles in these troubled times? What comes most naturally to you? What is most challenging?
4. How can you best contribute to the common effort and the common good?
5. What does it take to keep active involvement in balance with composure and groundedness?

## **Words of the Day**

Consider the way you cope with and respond to trouble in the world. For the Gathering, you will complete this sentence: “I feel comforted and empowered when I ... ”