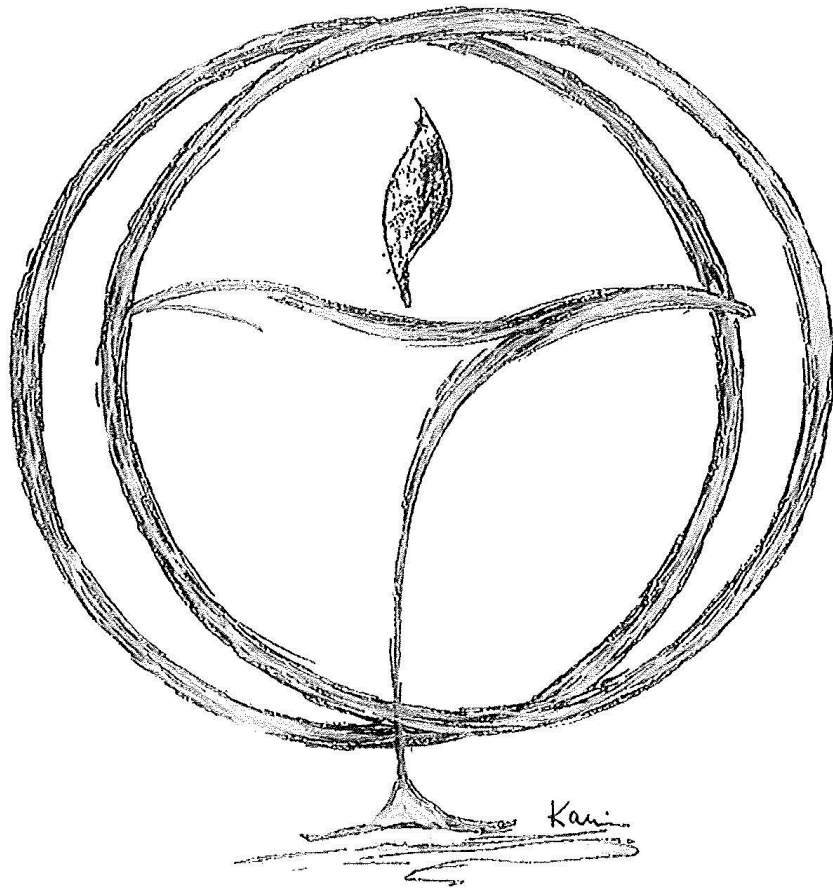


First Unitarian Universalist Church



Poetry for Politics ~ Care for the Soul

An invitation to reflection and care....

As we are in the midst of an important, and tense, political climate, part of what our spiritual community offers is an invitation to care for your soul. At their best, both politics and religion are about care of community – making sure we can all flourish, together. This also means neither are just about one election, but our daily actions and choices for creating a culture of care.

In these weeks, I invite you to read a poem a day. If you start the Sunday this begins, you will read one a poem a day, reading through this booklet twice, through election day. The Wednesday following (Nov. 6th) we will gather for a service of poetry, music, and candle lighting for our shared future.

Invitation to a daily spiritual practice:

- Light a candle or chalice and take a few breaths.
- Read the poem slowly, maybe a few times through.
- Reflect on these questions:
 - What in this poem speaks to me?
 - How does it encourage me to live my values?
 - What in this poem gives me courage, hope, or love?
- As you extinguish your chalice, speak a few words (aloud or silently), of gratitude for people, or moments, or places that nourish you.

Poet James Tracy writes,

*...the most important choices we make
are on the days between elections:
picket lines walked, homes unevicted, communities mobilized,
cynicism conquered, empires deleted
meanings for once not lost in translation
kindness given, love made
to that extent you know
we all vote every day...*

May these weeks, and all the weeks after, be held in compassion for a more just and loving world.

We are the Flag

by Alice Walker

If you want to show your love to America
Love Americans

Smile when you see one flower
like his Turban Rosepink.

Rejoice at the eagle feather
in a grandfather's braid.
If a sister bus rider's hair
is especially nappy

A miracle in itself
Praise it.

How can there be homeless
In a land so crammed with houses...

Love your country by loving Americans.
Love Americans.
Salute the soul & the body of who we
Spectacularly & Sometimes
Pitifully are.

Love us.
We are the flag.

Calling on All Silent Minorities

by June Jordan

HEY
C'MON
COME OUT
WHEREVER YOU ARE
WE NEED TO HAVE THIS MEETING
AT THIS TREE
AIN' EVEN BEEN
PLANTED
YET

One Vote

by Aimee Nezhukumatathil

My parents are from countries
where mangoes grow wild and bold
and eagles cry the sky in arcs and dips.

America loved this bird too and made
it clutch olives and arrows. Some think
if an eaglet falls, the mother will swoop
down to catch it. It won't.

The eagle must fly on its own accord by first testing the air-slide
over each pinfeather. Even in a letter of wind,
a mother holds so much power.

After the pipping
of the egg, after the branching—an eagle is on
its own. Must make the choice on its own
no matter what its been taught.

Some forget
that pound for pound,
eagle feathers are stronger than an airplane wing.

And even one letter,
one vote can make the difference for every bright thing.

Old South Meeting House

by January Gill O'Neil

We draw breath from brick
step on stones, weather-worn,
cobbled and carved

with the story of this church,
this meeting house,
where Ben Franklin was baptized

and Phillis Wheatley prayed—a mouth-house
where colonists gathered
to plot against the crown.

This structure, with elegant curves
and round-topped windows, was the heart
of Boston, the body of the people,

survived occupation for preservation,
foregoing decoration
for conversation.

Let us gather in the box pews
once numbered and rented
by generations of families

held together like ribs
in the body politic. Let us gaze upon
the upper galleries to the free seats

where the poor and the town slaves
listened and waited and pondered
and prayed

for revolution.
Let us testify to the plight
of the well-meaning at the pulpit

with its sounding board high above,
congregations raising heads and hands to the sky.
We, the people—the tourists

and townies—one nation under
this vaulted roof, exalted voices
speaking poetry out loud,

in praise and dissent.
We draw breath from brick. Ignite the fire in us.
Speak to us:
the language is hope.

On the Fifth Day

by Jane Hirschfield

On the fifth day
the scientists who studied the river
were forbidden to speak
or to study the rivers.

The scientists who studied the air
were told not to speak of the air,
and the ones who worked for the farmers
were silenced,
and the ones who worked for the bees.
Someone, from deep in the Badlands,
began posting facts.
The facts were told not to speak
and were taken away.
The facts, surprised to be taken, were silent.

Now it was only the rivers
that spoke of the rivers,
and only the wind that spoke of its bees,
while the unpausing factual buds of the fruit trees
continued to move toward their fruit.
The silence spoke loudly of silence,
and the rivers kept speaking
of rivers, of boulders and air.
Bound to gravity, earless and tongueless,
the untested rivers kept speaking.

Bus drivers, shelf stockers,
code writers, machinists, accountants,
lab techs, cellists kept speaking.
They spoke, the fifth day,
of silence.

Songs for the People

by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

Let me make the songs for the people,
Songs for the old and young;
Songs to stir like a battle-cry
Wherever they are sung.

Not for the clashing of sabres,
For carnage nor for strife;
But songs to thrill the hearts of men
With more abundant life.

Let me make the songs for the weary,
Amid life's fever and fret,
Till hearts shall relax their tension,
And careworn brows forget.

Let me sing for little children,
Before their footsteps stray,
Sweet anthems of love and duty,
To float o'er life's highway.

I would sing for the poor and aged,
When shadows dim their sight;
Of the bright and restful mansions,
Where there shall be no night.

Our world, so worn and weary,
Needs music, pure and strong,
To hush the jangle and discords
Of sorrow, pain, and wrong.

Music to soothe all its sorrow,
'Till war and crime shall cease;
And the hearts of men grown tender
Girdle the world with peace.

Praise Song for the Day

by Elizabeth Alexander

Each day we go about our business,
walking past each other, catching each other's eyes or not,
about to speak or speaking.

All about us is noise. All about us is
noise and bramble, thorn and din, each
one of our ancestors on our tongues.

Someone is stitching up a hem, darning
a hole in a uniform, patching a tire,
repairing the things in need of repair.
Someone is trying to make music somewhere,
with a pair of wooden spoons on an oil drum,
with cello, boom box, harmonica, voice.
A woman and her son wait for the bus.
A farmer considers the changing sky.
A teacher says, Take out your pencils. Begin.

We encounter each other in words, words
spiny or smooth, whispered or declaimed,
words to consider, reconsider.
We cross dirt roads and highways that mark
the will of some one and then others, who said
I need to see what's on the other side.
I know there's something better down the road.
We need to find a place where we are safe.
We walk into that which we cannot yet see.

Say it plain: that many have died for this day.
Sing the names of the dead who brought us here,
who laid the train tracks, raised the bridges,
picked the cotton and the lettuce, built
brick by brick the glittering edifices
they would then keep clean and work inside of.

Praise song for struggle, praise song for the day.
Praise song for every hand-lettered sign,
the figuring-it-out at kitchen tables.
Some live by love thy neighbor as thyself,
others by first do no harm or take no more
than you need. What if the mightiest word is love?

Love beyond marital, filial, national,
love that casts a widening pool of light,
love with no need to pre-empt grievance.
In today's sharp sparkle, this winter air,
any thing can be made, any sentence begun.
On the brink, on the brim, on the cusp,
praise song for walking forward in that light.

Still I Rise

by Maya Angelou

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.
Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.
Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?
Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise

I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise

Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise

Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.

I rise
I rise
I rise.

The Cure of Troy

by Seamus Heaney

Human beings suffer
They torture one another,
They get hurt and get hard.
No poem or play or song
Can fully right a wrong
Inflicted and endured....

History says, don't hope on this side of the grave...

But then, once in a lifetime
The longed-for tidal wave
Of justice can rise up,
And hope and history rhyme.
So hope for a great sea-change
On the far side of revenge.
Believe that a further shore
Is reachable from here.

Believe in miracles
And cures and healing wells.
Call miracle self-healing:
The utter, self-revealing
Double-take of feeling.
If there's fire on the mountain
Or lightning and storm
And a god speaks from the sky
That means someone is hearing
The outcry and the birth-cry
Of new life at its term.

It means once in a lifetime
That justice can rise up
And hope and history rhyme.

Two Flags

by Barbara Kingsolver

I have two American flags. Both were gifts.
One was handmade out of colored paper by my younger child;
it's a few stars shy of regulation but nonetheless cherished.
Each has its place in my home,
so I can look up from time to time and remember, That's mine. ...
That emblem wasn't handed to me by soldiers on foreign soil;
it wasn't handed to me at all...
That flag protects and represents me only because of Ida B. Wells,
Lucy Stone, Susan B. Anthony and countless other women
who risked everything so I could be a full citizen.

Each of us who is female, or nonwhite, or without land,
would have been guaranteed in 1776 the same voting rights as a horse.
We all owe a precious debt to courageous Americans before us.

I would like to stand up for my flag and wave it over a few things I believe in.
After 225 years I vote to retire the rockets' red glare and the bloody
bandage as obsolete symbols of Old Glory.

We desperately need a new iconography of patriotism.
I propose that we rip strips of cloth from the uniforms
of the unbelievably courageous firefighters
who rescued the injured and panic stricken from the World Trade Center in
2001 and remained at their posts till the buildings collapsed on them.

Praise the red glare of candles held up in vigils everywhere
by people praying for peace.

Let me sing praise to the ballot box and the jury box.
What could be a more honorable symbol of American freedom
than the suffragist's banner, the striker's picket, the abolitionist's drinking
gourd, the placards of humane protest
from every decade of our forward –marching history?

Give me liberty, now, with signs of love and life.

Let the Artists Win

by Bob Janis-Dillon

I vote we let the artists win
the ones covered in paint from their last attempt
to smuggle across the beauty of a bowl of fruit
the 14-year-old rapper learning to spit
throwing life's chaos on the rhythm wheel
uncovering the shapes that live on after the next break
I say we let the food bank volunteers win
the ones always carrying around their agenda
for the meeting, waging campaigns
to stock shelves with bread

I would like to see the nurses extend their string of victories
from the hospital bed to the nation's boardrooms
until we care for each other as if death
were inevitable and mercy was the only thing
that made the rounds bearable

I say we let the kindergarten teachers win
as they raise up small edifices
for the beauty words
will never capture or reveal...

I will let the grandmothers win
when they tell the old stories
that hold me in their keeping
And the children yelling
play! play!

The ones who have already cost us so much
of our final productivity
the only tyrants who can command
the true attention of the wise

I want them to win too
again and again
without pity
and then when the men with guns come
we can say I'm sorry
but whether you win or lose
it's really never been my game sir

I have lost
and lost again a thousand wars of the heart
and those to whom I have waved the white flag
those to whom

I have surrendered
the whole and holy of my life
will never
never
let me go

Poem With an Embedded Line by Susan Cohen

by Barbar Crooker

When the evening newscast leads to despair,
when my Facebook feed raises my blood pressure,
when I can't listen to NPR anymore,
I turn to the sky, blooming like chicory,
its dearth of clouds, its vast blue endlessness.

The trees are turning copper, gold, bronze,
fired by the October sun, and the bees
are going for broke, drunk on fermenting
apples. I turn to my skillet, cast iron
you can count on, glug some olive oil,
sizzle some onions, adding garlic at the end
to prevent bitterness. My husband,
that sweet man, enters the room, asks
what's for dinner, says it smells good.
He could live on garlic and onions
slowly turning to gold. The water
is boiling, so I throw in some peppers,
halved, cored, and seeded, let them bob
in the salty water until they're soft.

To the soffrito, I add ground beef, chili
powder, cumin, dried oregano, tomato sauce,
mashed cannellinis; simmer for a while.
Then I stir in more white beans, stuff the hearts
of the peppers, drape them with cheese and tuck
the pan in the oven's mouth.

Let the terrible politicians practice / their terrible politics.
At my kitchen table, all will be fed.
I turn the radio to a classical station, maybe Vivaldi.
All we have are these moments: the golden trees,
the industrious bees, the falling light.
Darkness will not overtake us.

Prayer Ballot

by Rev. Luke Stevens-Royer

I enter, as on pilgrimage.
The altar cloths are red, white, and blue
the ushers are the women
who have been running these things
who have been running everything
since before I was born.

I'm handed the ballot like a scroll
because the questions seem that important -
ancient and modern
of what my God and country ask of me: who?

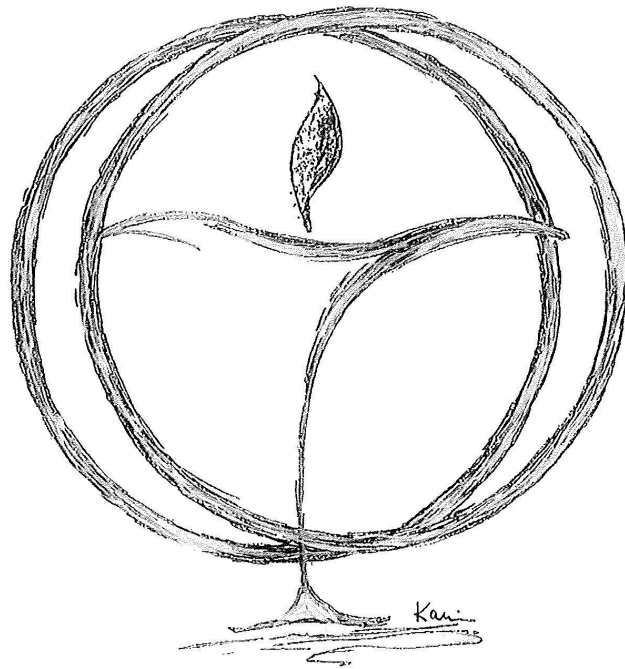
Who – for commissioner, mayor, president –
who –for district 8, ward 7, school board –
who – will do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly?

I make my mark
with at least a shred of hope
that something good will come from this.

And regardless, I remember:
the world won't be destroyed, entirely, by this;
the world won't be saved, entirely, by this.

Marking my vote is like kneeling in prayer
because neither will accomplish anything right away -
but the purpose of both is to remind me
of my deepest hope
for the world that I'm trying to help create.
So I rise from prayer, and turn in my ballot
and remember the who is me,
and us, and we the people -
and again I set to the task that is mine:
justice, mercy, humble service
in my small corner of the world.

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