Rev's Reflections

Positive Portrayals

For the last week, to help distract us from our fear that we are headed toward civil war, every night Joe and I have been indulging in season three of HBO's costume drama "The Gilded Age." There are multiple storylines interweaving the lives of dozens of fictional and real-life characters. The sets are gorgeous, and the costumes are breathtaking.

In one way, it's not helping. Too much of the story is a bleak reminder that absolute power corrupts absolutely, and that the lifestyles of oligarchs are attractively appealing, even to the desperately disadvantaged. People are so quick to make excuses for the financially successful, sure as they are that someday they'll be super rich, too.

But in another way, it is helping to watch this season, mainly because the show has introduced some real-life historical Unitarians and Universalists. Two stand out.

Clara Barton founded the American Sanitary Commission during the Civil War, which eventually became the American Red Cross. Francis Ellen Watkins Harper was a Black poet, abolitionist and suffragist who spoke across the country galvanizing interest in uniting the two causes. Both women are depicted as powerful, energetic and focused. In real life they both dedicated their lives to producing something good from the carnage of the war.

There's one fictional character, John Adams IV, who is supposed to be descendent from the second and sixth presidents, John Adams and John Quincy Adams. He's a kind and generous gay man succeeding in the homophobic toxicity of the industrial and financial markets of the time.

We don't know what's going to happen next on "The Gilded Age," and we don't know what's going to happen in the United States over the coming weeks, months and years. As much as we may show up, fight back, and do our best to support the most at-risk, ultimately there isn't much we can do to actually change the future growing out of the past. But it's nice to have reminders that our shared UU faith can be our companion, our guide,

and our connection to the past, as we figure out how to live our lives in a way that will be remembered positively in the future.

In Peace,
Rev Denis