

Don't Borrow Trouble
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First Parish in Hingham (Old Ship Church)
Unitarian Universalist
June 7, 2020
(text from live-streamed worship)

Call to Worship

It has been quite a week for our nation –
Filled with grief and anger and rage,
Filled too with hope and resolve.

And as always, the week has brought whatever measure or joy or sorrow or concern for each one of us.

So... it is very good to gather... to support one another through shared love, for distance avails not... and to renew our strength and resolve in the embrace of the universal spirit of love.

Lighting of the Flaming Chalice

I light the flaming chalice of our Unitarian Universalist faith.

May our flaming chalice this morning remind us – since we are united with hundreds of other UU congregations, each lighting a flaming chalice this morning – of the power of community, the power of working together for change, the power of high ideals and worthy goals to lead us toward a world of more justice, more equality, more peace.

In that spirit we sing.

Song - Just My Hands

Pete Seeger music, original lyrics Alex Comfort

Lyrics adapted by Pete Seeger and Alice & Staughton Lynd

Just my hands can't tear a prison down.
Just your hands can't tear a prison down.
But if two and two and fifty make a million,
We'll see that day come round, we'll see that day come round.

Just my strength can't break the color bar... Just your strength... etc.
Just my voice can't shout to make them hear...
Just my vote can't change the status quo...
Just my hands can't build a bridge of peace...
Just my eyes can't see the way ahead...

Story – “What Do You Do with a Problem” by Kobi Yamada

Meditation and Prayer

May we now pause, slow down, breathe into this moment, become more fully awake to this moment we share in spirit...

And from this deeper presence in the moment, our hearts' yearnings arise, prayers to the God of our hearts...

Prayers of solidarity with all those who have been peacefully marching and demonstrating for justice and reform of our criminal justice system.

Prayers of hope that we will go well beyond prayers to action for change.

Prayers of love for the family of George Floyd as they remember, grieve, and celebrate the life and light of this good man.

Continued prayers of gratitude... for all the helpers and healers and courageous justice-seekers in our troubled land.

And prayers holding each individual in our community of faith, in the midst of whatever personal sorrow or challenges each may be facing.

May we pause in silent communion... wherever we are... whoever we are... whatever our circumstances...

Reading – Matthew 6:25-34

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying “what will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” For is it the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

Message – “Don’t Borrow Trouble”

The reading we’ve just heard from the Gospel of Matthew is one of my favorite biblical passages.

But... part of me wants to say to Jesus: Don’t worry? Today don’t worry as deaths from coronavirus continue in our nation and around the world, disproportionately affecting the poor, the already marginalized, our black and brown sisters and brothers? Don’t worry as racism and white supremacy continue to plague our nation? Don’t worry as the climate crisis rolls on and won’t wait until we “solve” other problems?

Well... it’s not as if those who Jesus was speaking to were living on easy street. He wasn’t delivering this message to the rich and famous and powerful. He was talking to ordinary working folks, talking to those at the margins of the society of that time.

What, then, could he have possibly have had in mind?

He surely knew that his listeners had to take care of their families, put food on their tables and a roof over their heads. And he surely knew that each of his listeners faced whatever variety of challenge, sorrow, or grief their lives held.

But he said “don’t worry about your life, what you will eat or drink or wear.”

Then he said to look at the birds of the air and the lilies of the fields – who neither sow nor reap, toil or spin.

But here’s the thing. It’s not as if the birds and the lilies do nothing to earn their keep. I think he was suggesting that they do what needs to be done without what humans call worry. They just do what needs to be done, one thing at a time, one season at a time, one day at a time.

Then, the key to the whole passage it seems to me is right at the end:

...strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

Two really important messages here, it seems to me.

First – “strive for the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” My “translation”? As best we can, live a life of integrity and love in whatever we do, as we go about taking care of life’s material necessities, taking care of one another and seeking to help make a better world.

Second, one day at a time, because “today’s trouble is enough for today.”

For me, that’s the punchline, guaranteeing a knowing laugh or at least an ironic smile. For yes, “today’s trouble *is* enough for today.”

Now, it may indeed be that the old southern saying “don’t borrow trouble” is derived from this line of scripture.

And I’m talking about this today partly at the suggestion of West Virginian native Joan Wilson, another high-bidder for a sermon topic at a recent Merrie Market auction. Joan talks about “don’t borrow trouble” in personal terms, as many of us might, particularly in the midst of major challenges – but sometimes not so major.

It is so easy to magnify worries about what serious or terrible thing might happen, what could happen, and so on – to ourselves, to our children.

Yet – and this is what Jesus was saying I think – it does little or no good to *dwell* on what terrible thing might or could happen.

Which does not at all mean we shouldn't be *aware* of what might or could happen... and prepare. This is what doctors do all the time of course – and, when they can manage it, their patients too. Knowing that it is the *doing* that matters – not the *worrying*.

But this is not necessarily easy, to avoid borrowing trouble. Sometimes – maybe often – we need to remind ourselves not to borrow trouble.

Someone I know who is in the midst of cancer treatments wrote such reminders for himself... basically to accept that this is what's now happening, to be grateful for the medical experts guiding the treatments, to do his part moving ahead, to help others along the way... and to use well whatever time may be left in this mystery we call life. Seems to me these are words to live by, whether or not we are living with serious illness or other major challenges.

Finally, though, I want to return as I began; for much if not all of this applies to the larger life we share as well:

In other words, I come back to George Floyd and to the protests and marches and to the need – four centuries in the making – for wholesale change in our criminal justice system, in policing, in ensuring full voting rights... in transforming a nation founded on principles of white supremacy and built on, as Rev. Al Sharpton preached at George Floyd's memorial service on Thursday, the necks of those with black and brown skin.

But... don't worry? That's right. Don't worry *needlessly* about ways in which our nation might continue to fracture. Don't worry *needlessly* about the fate of the next, critically important election. Don't *worry*, borrowing trouble from tomorrow.

Instead, enough trouble today, and enough things to do to address what we know today: vigil, march, speak up and speak out, support candidates at every level of government who will work to transform our systems and culture of racism... and educate ourselves, especially if we are white, to the nature of and reality of white privilege, and to the nature and reality of black and brown lives in our nation today.

In other words, there is plenty to *do* without *worrying* about the trouble that tomorrow may bring.

Plenty we *must* do.

So may it be.

Closing Words and Benediction

May we (in words from the prophets repeated in one of our hymns) be among those who bind up the broken, who bring the good tidings to all the afflicted, who restore the ruins of generations... as we build a land of ever more justice, more peace, rolling down like an everflowing stream.

Be well. Be safe. Take care of yourself, take care of one another... take care of everyone!

As best we can.

May it always be so. Blessed be. Amen.

Postlude – This Little Light of Mine (arr. Hayes)