

## **“When Hope is Hard to Find”**

Rev. Ken Read-Brown  
First Parish in Hingham (Old Ship Church)  
Unitarian Universalist  
July 26, 2020  
*(text from live-streamed worship)*

**Song** – “Quite Early Morning” – *Pete Seeger*

Don't you know it's darkest before the dawn  
And it's this thought keeps me moving on  
If we could heed these early warnings  
The time is now quite early morning  
If we could heed these early warnings  
The time is now quite early morning

Some say that humankind won't long endure  
But what makes them so doggone sure?  
I know that you who hear my singing  
Could make those freedom bells go ringing  
I know that you who hear my singing  
Could make those freedom bells go ringing

And so we keep on while we live  
Until we have no, no more to give  
And when these fingers can strum no longer  
Hand the old banjo to young ones stronger  
And when these fingers can strum no longer  
Hand the old banjo to young ones stronger

So though it's darkest before the dawn  
These thoughts keep us moving on  
Through all this world of joy and sorrow  
We still can have singing tomorrows  
Through all this world of joy and sorrow  
We still can have singing tomorrows

### **Call to Worship**

We gather this morning in the midst of everything in this world of joy and sorrow... to sing, to pray, and simply to be together, drawing strength from one another and from the spirit of life and love.

### **Lighting of the Flaming Chalice**

I light the flaming chalice of our free faith, symbol of Unitarian Universalism, chalice of welcoming, hospitable community, flame of freedom, truth, and love.

## **Meditation and Prayer**

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

Whether sitting, standing, walking, rolling... awake...

Awake to one another, even at a distance...

Awake to how beautifully connected we are...

Even when we can't see or touch one another...

Awake to all that breaks our heart in this suffering world...

Awake to what we can do, one thing, then another, then another...

Awake to the prayers rising from our hearts...

Prayers for the safety and health of those we love...

Prayers for the safety and health of the family of humanity...  
family of life...

Prayers of gratitude today, every day, for the helpers and healers, for the justice-seekers, peace-makers, and earth-keepers...

Prayers from the silence of our hearts to the God of our hearts, the wellspring of our love...

### **Song** – Just My Hands – *Pete Seeger*

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 voice can't shout to make them hear...  
Just my heart can't turn this world to love...  
Just my eyes can't see the way ahead...

### **Reading** – from the Lakota spiritual leader Black Elk

Then I was standing on the highest mountain of them all, and round beneath me was the whole hoop of the world. And while I stood there I saw more than I can tell and I understood more than I saw. For I was seeing in the sacred manner the shape of all things of the spirit and the shapes as they must live together like one being. And I saw that the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that make one circle, wide as daylight and starlight, and in the center grew one mighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father.

## Message – “When Hope is Hard to Find”

Joy Harjo, the poet laureate of the United States, the first native American poet laureate – specifically Muscogee Creek – wrote this in a New York Times op-ed a couple of weeks ago: “From my elders, I learned that justice is sometimes seven generations away or more — and inevitable.”

This sentence and her entire column was written in response to the extraordinary decision by the United States Supreme Court, the majority opinion written by conservative appointee Neil Gorsuch, which affirmed that “because of an 1866 treaty that the Creek Nation signed with the United States much of Oklahoma is still sovereign tribal land.”

Yes: “...justice is sometimes seven generations away or more...”

Here is some more of what Justice Gorsuch wrote:

“On the far end of the Trail of Tears was a promise. Forced to leave their ancestral lands in Georgia and Alabama, the Creek Nation received assurances that their new lands in the West would be secure forever. In exchange for ceding ‘all their land, east of the Mississippi River,’ the U.S. government agreed by treaty that ‘the Creek country west of the Mississippi shall be solemnly guaranteed to the Creek Indians.’”

And here is how Joy Harjo completed her column:

“It is important to stop here, in the moment, and to recognize all that it has taken to arrive at this act of justice. There was the resolve, struggle and battle, the food cooked to help those working long hours.

“There were those who picked up, who took care of the children. Those who kept walking the long distance of heartbreak to arrive, in a reservation, and start all over again. And at last, on the far end of the Trail of Tears, a promise has been kept.”

I quote all this at length, from Justice Gorsuch and from Joy Harjo, to bring home some things that have been on my mind lately having to do with faith and hope – both in our shared lives, and in our individual lives.

It seems to me that our ability to carry on in work for justice or for whatever good cause or, close to home, in caring for our dear ones, has less to do with any assurance of or even hope, as we usually might understand hope, for immediate or even eventual success, and everything to do with such things as faith in what is right and just, faith in the power of working with others, faith in the power of love – in other words the sort of faith that keeps you moving in spite of whatever obstacles.

John Lewis, who faced plenty of obstacles in his life and work, was a man of Christian faith, but I believe he also had this other, not unrelated, sort of faith in what is right and just, faith in the power of working together to get things done, faith in love. Lewis has said that good and love are always there – we just need to make them real.

All in the spirit of the Pete Seeger song we've just sung... only so much can get accomplished with just my hands... or just your hands... but if two and two and fifty make a million... well, that's another matter altogether.

Working together. So maybe – indeed maybe certainly – hope does also have to do with love.

Poet Jane Hirshfield has written “I know that hope is the hardest love we carry.”

And love is the most powerful force in the world.

So: Hope as a form of love? Sure, whether for seven generations of the Creek people, or four hundred years for Black Americans... and for each of us as we meet the responsibilities of our lives – in our families, in our work, as citizens and activists. Hope: the hardest love – and a beautiful love. Love: the most powerful force.

What all this means to me, then, is that whatever hope *is*, it is *not* the same as optimism. Optimism, you see, might or might not be grounded in the reality of what's going on.

But hope is grounded in the reality not of circumstances, but of love. So with hope, you stick with it – whether the “it” is caring for your family or a friend or facing some personal challenge... or the “it” is a generational struggle for human rights and equality or the “it” is the work of ensuring a habitable Earth home... you stick with it because of faith in the “right” and in the meaning of what you are doing, and in the love that drives what you are doing, regardless of the cost or the apparent possibility of success or not.

We are living in an extraordinary moment in time, I hardly need remind you. I don't know about you, but when it comes to the world beyond my circle of family and friends, sometimes I find myself optimistic and sometimes pessimistic and discouraged when it comes to how we will emerge from the pandemic, how and whether we will address hundreds of years of injustice and racism, whether we will adequately meet the challenge of the climate crisis... not to mention whether we will elect people this November who are equal to all these challenges and committed to the health of our democracy.

But I've come to realize that whether I feel pessimistic on Tuesday or optimistic on Thursday is sort of beside the point. What matters is that I continue to hope: with faith in the right and in the power of love as we work together for a good cause... say the next word, sing the next song, make the next contribution to a worthy organization, write the next postcard encouraging fellow citizens to vote, and care for each other in our family and among our friends.

All grounded in a deep and abiding sense of who we are as human beings sharing this Earth with myriad other forms of life.

As all the ancient traditions affirm, each in their own way: all of us children of one God, all part of the Buddhist web of Indra, one interwoven tapestry of life, many hoops, as Black Elk affirmed, making one circle of life...

So it is. So may it always be. As together we keep on.

**Song – Come Sing a Song with Me – *Carolyn McDade***

Come, sing a song with me (3x)  
That I might know your mind.  
And I'll bring you hope when hope is hard to find,  
and I'll bring a song of love and a rose in the winter time.

Come, dream a dream with me... And I'll bring you hope...  
Come, walk in rain with me... And I'll bring you hope...  
Come, share a rose with me... And I'll bring you hope...

**Closing Words and Benediction**

This is our final live-streamed service until the Sunday after Labor Day.  
I will miss sharing my thoughts and music with you, miss “seeing” you each week in my mind’s  
eye.

But I'll be back!  
And you will never be far from my thoughts and prayers...

Be well. Be safe.  
Take care of yourself,  
take care of one another...  
take care of everyone!  
As best we can...

May it be so. Blessed be. Amen.