

rising from sacred ground ~ 10.28.18
On the Occasion of the Ordination of James Field into Unitarian Universalist Ministry

This sermon used two songs and an Alice Walker reading as texts*

*Resilient by Rising Appalachia**

*Gentle Arms of Eden by Carter and Grammer**

**See lyrics and reading at the bottom of the sermon*

breathe with me ...

In this time of joyful beginnings and white supremacist terror, in this time... let us connect with the breath of life that connects us all – in all of who we are what we bring...

Breathe with me...and imagine rising up from the only sacred ground we have ever know...even as the world reels...

Breathing in –

Opening to the holy spirit that moves in through and among us and all things...

Opening to the spirit...

Calling...

calling us to rise up...rise up...rise up...

In the face evil, rise up

In the face of hate, rise up

In the face of despair – rise up

In beauty – rise up

In faith – rise up

In Love - rise up...

Humans – we have risen before...

We slithered forth from the womb of the mother – on this our home, our only home,
onto the only sacred ground we've ever known -

We have risen before...

How magnificent we were in our evolving...in our rising

Learning to stand upright and create – art, words and weapons...

we learned of love and how to fight...

We hunted and gathered and for a moment knew where we belonged...a part of everything, just like the other creatures around us, for we were/are creatures after all...

Part of all that is... part of ecosystems based upon interdependence and relying on what the rest of nature spontaneously provide on this only sacred ground we've ever known...

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How magnificent we were in our evolving...in our rising

Hands to craft all manner of things, words to craft ideas, especially ideas of our own unique magnificence....

We rose and began to shape the world around us for our own purposes...to invent our own way of life...

And what a life it has been...

¹Possibilities for social innovation abounded as this human freedom and civilizations flourished and faded....

And along the way we forgot the truth of who and whose we are,
and that forgetting has wrought unspeakable tragedy and great evil ...

it was the freedom of forgetting, that caused the tragic play of history and the shift in the human psyche...

That we were somehow separate from our only home, the only sacred ground we have ever known, and from the kin of our species, and the other species who are also our kin...

forgetting the love that coaxed us into being...from the first flaring forth making us one with everything...

And so we rose in a forgetful freedom that has come at a price...

For the first time in the three billion year history of life, living entities acted out unregulated by any life-serving order," We believed ourselves as separate...and all powerful and then created gods that looked like us.

Author Andrew Bard Schmookler tells us "Historical forces that disregard human needs push people toward defensive grandiosity.

The inevitability of the rule of power makes it inevitable that people will worship power. A species caught up in a destructive spiral out of its control will place control inordinately high among its values."

And so here we are...

Schmookler observes, "most animals in their natural state comport themselves with dignity and poise" – (funny cat videos notwithstanding). "To feel craven and of little worth is not our birthright. But neither were we fashioned to strut with bloated pride." (17)

¹ Andrew Bard Schmookler, *Out of Weakness: Healing the Wounds That Drive Us to War*, (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1988) All subsequent references will include page number only.

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Human beings were compelled from that time – from the time we had forgotten who and whose we are – we were compelled to struggle for power and control....

and that power is not the power-with of interconnectedness,

but the power-over of genocide of native peoples here, and of genocides on every continent, of slavery and white supremacy, homophobia and the toxic masculinity of the heteropatriarchy, of xenophobia and nativism and nationalism...

In this moment when totalitarianism is rising, in this country, and around the world, as the planet groans beneath the weight of greed and need, of capitalism and nationalism...

In this moment –an illegitimate, opportunistic authoritarian president who claims the title of nationalist, dog whistles about globalists, whose response to a mass shootings in a synagogue is to blame the victims for not being armed...who responds so school shootings by calling for arming teachers...

He who worships dictators, and with the consent of the Republican party, the complicity of a rabid white supremacist Christian nationalism, and at the behest of oligarchs, whips up his base's fear-fueled anger and hate calling for the erasure of our trans siblings, demonizing the poor, immigrants and refugees, black and brown people, and the free press, he unleashes devastating policies on the earth...

And he is a symptom...he is a symptom of festering wound of the systems of domination and oppression that many with privilege had thought were being overcome...

I could go on... But you know this, beloveds, you know it too well, and you do too James, as you have been toiling for decades on that ground.

But still it is into this moment, my dear friend and colleague, that you are ordained and called, as are we all called...

James, you are a hospice chaplain...you know the work of companioning those whose lives are fading...and their families who must sit by and witness...

You know how you sit by the bedside and hear the fears and regrets and longings, and also the loves, accomplishments and beauty that a life has wrought and witnessed...

you have seen and fostered healing in those moments even when curing is not possible...

reconciliations, sometimes?...acceptance and grace...we pray

We need those skills now as a nation and world...for we know that we will lose, have lost, much...

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There is a deep wound in the psyche of humanity, – and we are at risk of bleeding out...

It seems that humanity is flailing (perhaps failing) in the struggle to live into the evolutionary imperative and possibilities of our interdependence and interconnectedness.

I have long considered myself a hospice worker and a midwife – saving what can be saved, holding with tender love all we will lose, and birthing the consciousness of a holy new humanity and new ways of being out of the devastation.

Saving what can be saved means that we resist with all of our might that which jeopardizes the lives of the most vulnerable and the planet... With all our might.

Maybe some of you have seen the meme -
If you've wondered what you would've done during slavery, the Holocaust, or Civil Rights movement...you're doing it now.

Really. This is it. This is the time. Of this I am certain.

It is that time, beloveds. Like Queen Esther in the Hebrew scripture, who when faced with approaching the king bent on destroying the Jewish people – she who had hid Jewish identity, did so knowing that that approach could lead to her death. Her cousin Mordecai said,

“For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father’s family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.”

It is time for us to join our struggles...to refuse to be divided...

it is time to cooperate and coordinate...

to build fusion coalitions...locally,

and to take on systemic racism, poverty, the war economy, ecological devastation and to dismantle the false moral narrative.

It is time to let our hearts break open, and don't be afraid of a broken heart, for a heart broken open can hold the world...

It is time to follow the lead of those most affected, poor people, people of color...indigenous people...those who have always known how it really is.

There have always been those who have denounced oppression and totalitarianism – we are not unique at this time in doing so, but we are at a unique time...

A time to offer our “own stone of activism,” no matter how small we think it is, to not “withhold our offerings out of shame,” but to show up our in our enoughtness...because never forget that

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you/we were born, resilient, from sacred holy ground.

There are no guarantees... but there is nothing else to do if we are to live fully into the call of this time - into the call of radical love, fierce compassion and eyes wide open hope, because hope just means we don't know the future. It is time to be fully alive to this moment.

And Alice Walker reminds us

“There is always a moment in any kind of struggle when one feels in full bloom. Vivid. Alive. One might be blown to bits in such a moment and still be at peace...”

It is the aliveness and the witness of that “moment of transcendent presence,” Walker tells us, that we know that “what is human is linked, by a daring compassion, to what is divine.”

For what is divine is *in* the sacred ground from which we had first risen, from which we have never really been separated...and through which we may be roused into rising into a new way of being...

We save what can be saved...as we rise up from the sacred ground, the only home we've ever known....

We are at this moment in history, able to identify, variously understand, and seek to restore balance to our nature, and to create, perhaps for the first time, a broken open wholeness that comes from knowing our oneness...

and the willingness to risk...for those us with privilege to risk it...to risk everything...

I AM NOT AFRAID...I AM NOT AFRAID I WILL DIE FOR LIBERATION FOR I
KNOW WHY I WAS MADE...*(here I sang this song from the Poor People's Campaign)*

We are capable of being moved by migrants making their way from one danger to another, by a child dying of hunger, of people killed for the color of their skin...we are capable of being moved...

And we are capable of being moved by that image of earth from space that spinning beautiful blue jewel – our blue boat Home ... forever turning..... And in it we would be one...

We are resilient...

We are midwives –

Sikh civil rights activist and attorney, Valerie Kaur, asks in this time, “what if the darkness we are experiencing is not the darkness of the tomb, but the darkness of the womb?” It may be and we may choose...

And she reminds us of what the midwife says...

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Breathe...push...

Breathe...push...

We are resilient...we are midwives of communities where we come to love one another. And to love the hell out of this world...

To move beyond anything that would divert us from the call of love - there is no time for diversions.

To be uplifted for the work that needs to be done in the world.

To love so inclusively and put that love in action in every. thing. we. do.

To create communities of resistance, resilience, transformation, joy and love.

Communities of resistance to all that would thwart life.

Communities of resilience that grow in depth and capacity.

Communities that are themselves transformed and offer a vision and way of living to the world.

Communities that knows the joy of being fully alive and awake.

a joy that comes from living from our deepest moral values....

a joy that comes sharing food and laughter even in the midst of struggle because we know we are in this together...

there is joy and there is celebration as the people are rising up...and living with passion for a more just and beautiful world...

And love. Always love...

We are rising up from sacred ground where our roots go deep, deep deep - so we might all wake up...rise up...rise up...rise up

On this our home, the only sacred ground that we have ever known...

To this, beloveds, we are called...

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Songs and Readings – chosen by ordinand

Gentle Arms of Eden

On a sleepy endless ocean when the world lay in a dream
There was rhythm in the splash and roll, but not a voice to sing
So the moon fell on the breakers
And the morning warmed the waves
Till a single cell did jump and hum for joy as though to say

This is my home, this is my only home
This is the only sacred ground that I have ever known
And should I stray in the dark night alone
Rock me goddess in the gentle arms of Eden

Then the day shone bright and rounder
Til the one turned into two
And the two into ten thousand things, and old things into new
And on some virgin beach head one lonesome critter crawled
And he looked about and shouted out
In his most astonished drawl

This is my home, this is my only home
This is the only sacred ground that I have ever known
And should I stray in the dark night alone
Rock me goddess in the gentle arms of Eden

Then all the sky was buzzin' and the ground was carpet green
And the wary children of the woods went dancin' in between
And the people sang rejoicing
When the fields were glad with grain
This song of celebration from their cities on the plain

This is my home, this is my only home
This is the only sacred ground that I have ever known
And should I stray in the dark night alone
Rock me goddess in the gentle arms of Eden

Now there's smoke across the harbor
And there's factories on the shore
And the world is ill with greed and will and enterprise of war
But I will lay my burdens in the cradle of your grace
And the shining beaches of your love
And the sea of your embrace

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This is my home, this is my only home
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And should I stray in the dark night alone
Rock me goddess in the gentle arms of Eden
Rock me goddess in the gentle arms of Eden

Resilient by Rising Appalachia

I am resilient I trust the movement I negate the chaos Uplift the negative I'll show up at the table
Again and again and again I'll close my mouth and learn to listen

These times are poignant The winds have shifted It's all we can do To stay uplifted Pipelines
through backyards Wolves howling out front Yeah I got my crew but truth is what I want

Realigned and on point Power to the peaceful, prayers to the waters Women at the center All
vessels open to give and receive Let's see this system brought down to its knees

I'm made of thunder, I'm made of lightning I'm made of dirt, yeah Made of the fine things My
father taught me That I'm a speck of dust and this world was made for me so let's go and try our
luck I've got my roots down down down deep

So what are we doing here What has been done What are you going to do about it When the
world comes undone My voice feels tiny And I'm sure so does yours Put us all together we'll
make a mighty roar

I am resilient I trust the movement I negate the chaos Uplift the negative I'll show up at the table
again and again and again I'll close my mouth and learn to listen...

Reading – Alice Walker

There is always a moment in any kind of struggle when one feels in
full bloom. Vivid. Alive. One might be blown to bits in such a moment
and still be at peace...

To be such a person or to witness anyone at
this moment of transcendent presence is to know that what is human is
linked, by a daring compassion, to what is divine.

During my years of being close to people engaged in changing the world I have seen fear
turn into courage. Sorrow into joy. Funerals into celebrations.
Because whatever the consequences, people, standing side by side, have
expressed who they really are, and that ultimately they believe in the
love of the world and each other enough **to be that** - which is the
foundation of activism.

It has become a common feeling, I believe, as we have watched our

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heroes falling over the years, that our own small stone of activism, which might not seem to measure up to the rugged boulders of heroism we have so admired, is a paltry offering toward the building of an edifice of hope. Many who believe this choose to withhold their offerings out of shame.

This is the tragedy of our world.

For we can do nothing substantial toward changing our course on the planet, a destructive one, without rousing ourselves, individual by individual, and bringing our small, imperfect stones to the pile.