

Pandemic

Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Washington County, Hillsboro, OR

Kathryn Warrior, April 7, 2020

Chalice Lighting: We gather in this time of uncertainty, full of unknowns, as angst closes in upon us. We light this chalice with a flame that draws us together. With this flame, we cut through the dankness of isolation and are warmed by the fires of our interconnection. For this moment, this radical moment, we find a certainty within the knowable bonds of love and community.—Amy Williams Clark

Check in: How is it with you today?

Topic/Readings:

Reading #1 Pandemic By Lynn Ungar

What if you thought of it
as the Jews consider the Sabbath—
the most sacred of times?

Cease from travel.

Cease from buying and selling.

Give up, just for now,
on trying to make the world
different than it is.

Sing. Pray. Touch only those
To whom you commit your life.
Center down.

And when your body has become still,
reach out with your heart.

Know that we are connected
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.
(You could hardly deny it now.)

Know that our lives
are in one another's hands.

(Surely, that has come clear.)

Do not reach out your hands.

Reach out your heart.

Reach out your words.

Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.

Promise this world your love--
for better or for worse,
in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live.

Reading #2 Breathe and Push—Valerie Kaur

What I wish for you is stillness.

The blistering pace of the pandemic, the cacophony of commentary, the relentless barrage of breaking news without rest kills the root of our own wisdom, our ability to think clearly. It drives us to act on fear and panic - to hoard, to ban, to isolate, to self-protect, to act on racist impulses.

But this is a time to gather the facts, then get quiet and summon our deepest wisdom - and let that wisdom lead us. For we have difficult choices to make in the coming days.

This pandemic will test who we want to be, as individuals and as a people. Will we succumb to fear and self-interest? Or will we double-down on love?

Will we let social distancing isolate us? Or will we find new ways to reach out, deepen our connections, step up community care, and tend to the most vulnerable in our communities?

Is this the darkness of the tomb - or the darkness of the womb?

I believe this is a time to love without limit. This is a time to see no stranger. In doing so, we gather information for the kind of world we want, where no one is uninsured or disposable, where our policies and public institutions protect all of us.

And if panic or grief or rage seizes you suddenly, it's okay. It means you are alive to what is happening. The work is to breathe through it. It becomes a dance-to-panic, then return to wisdom; to retreat then find the courage to show up with love anyway.

I spent all day in fear. But tonight, I got quiet enough to hear the wise woman in me, and she said, "Breathe, my love. Like any long labor, we are going to take this one breath at a time."

Reading #3 Lockdown By Richard Hendrick.--March 13th 2020

Yes there is fear.

Yes there is isolation.

Yes there is panic buying.

Yes there is sickness.

Yes there is even death.

But,

They say that in Wuhan after so many years of noise

You can hear the birds again.

They say that after just a few weeks of quiet

The sky is no longer thick with fumes

But blue and grey and clear.

They say that in the streets of Assisi

People are singing to each other

across the empty squares,

keeping their windows open

so that those who are alone

may hear the sounds of family around them.

They say that a hotel in the West of Ireland

Is offering free meals and delivery to the housebound.
Today a young woman I know'
is busy spreading fliers with her number
through the neighbourhood
So that the elders may have someone to call on.
Today Churches, Synagogues, Mosques and Temples
are preparing to welcome
and shelter the homeless, the sick, the weary
All over the world people are slowing down and reflecting
All over the world people are looking at their neighbours in a new way
All over the world people are waking up to a new reality
To how big we really are.
To how little control we really have.
To what really matters.
To Love.
So we pray and we remember that
Yes there is fear.
But there does not have to be hate.
Yes there is isolation.
But there does not have to be loneliness.
Yes there is panic buying.
But there does not have to be meanness.
Yes there is sickness.
But there does not have to be disease of the soul
Yes there is even death.
But there can always be a rebirth of love.
Wake to the choices you make as to how to live now.
Today, breathe.
Listen, behind the factory noises of your panic
The birds are singing again
The sky is clearing,
Spring is coming,
And we are always encompassed by Love.
Open the windows of your soul
And though you may not be able
to touch across the empty square,
Sing

Reading #4 Choices By Marcia Stanard

Yesterday, there were fewer cars at the Arrivals dock at the Portland airport than there were dogs being walked on my block.

Yesterday, a friend reported a clandestine meeting—a walk with her elderly mother—careful to keep a six-foot distance as they strolled together in the sunshine.

Yesterday, schools were closed, and bars, and restaurants. We no longer gather, laughing, in bustling crowds of strangers who might become friends.

But today, people in Italy sang together out their balconies. Meals on Wheels drivers put bags of food on doorknobs, backed up six feet, and waited to see if the seniors were okay.

Today, the technology that we swore was killing our relationships—those phones our youth sink into, ignoring the world in front of them—is saving us. Letting us gather, see one another's faces.

Tomorrow, fewer people will sicken and die if we keep our distance today. Imagine if all difficult choices had such clear and obvious results—

And then living as if they do.

Questions: Select a question that you feel you want to respond to.

1. Responses to readings—What resonated with you?
2. What are you grateful for today?
3. What expectations of normal am I letting go of today?
4. What beauty am I creating, cultivating, or inviting in today?

Likes & Wishes: How was this session for you?

Closing Reading: To Bless The Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings

"This is the time to be slow,
Lie low to the wall
Until the bitter weather passes.

Try, as best you can, not to let
The wire brush of doubt
Scrape from your heart
All sense of yourself
And your hesitant light.

If you remain generous,
Time will come good;
And you will find your feet
Again on fresh pastures of promise,
Where the air will be kind
And blushed with beginning."—John O'Donahue, To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings

Extinguish Chalice

Loving Kindness Meditation:

May you be happy and peaceful

May you be healthy and strong

May you be safe and free,

May you be able to care for yourself with ease and joy.—Rev. Lena Breen