

**Until the Storm Passes Over**  
Rev. Allison Barrett  
First Unitarian Congregation, Toronto  
Sunday, May 24, 2026

**The World is Both Burning and Blooming**

*You get the bad news  
And the sun in the same day.  
You cry over the headlines,  
Then you laugh at a baby  
Wearing a hat shaped like a bear.  
This is the dual citizenship  
of being alive.  
Rage and reverence  
Grief and grace.  
You are allowed to feel both.  
You are allowed to scream  
And still notice how good the soup is.  
You don't have to choose  
Let it all in.*

(Karen Salmansohn - Your 'To-Die-For' Life)

Thank you, Art and Good Morning, everyone – those who braved the cold and rain and those we love who are in their pajamas with a nice cup of tea or coffee. We bring you all into this circle of community.

It's a joy to be here in a congregation that welcomed me barely out of my teens and gave rise to a call to ministry, to see old friends and new friends I haven't met yet. This beautiful community changed my life and I will forever be grateful to the good souls who inspired me all those years ago and continues to do the healing work of love and justice in this city and this world.

Well, it's been a while but I want to take you back to just a few years ago. In the fall of 2024, I was excited to start a program I have been waiting for truthfully, for decades – training as a Spiritual Director or as I prefer, Spiritual Companion - within our own Unitarian Universalist faith. Our classes were on Wednesdays and started in October, so we were just starting to form as a group when Tuesday, November 5th rolled around, Election Day in the U.S. of A.

I had worked on Kamala Harris' campaign, phoning people all over Pennsylvania (Yes, I'm Canadian and don't ask, that's another story) and everyone I spoke to was so enthusiastic and so certain – the signs were all so positive! (Don't get ahead of me now!) I invited my best girlfriends over for a watch party and for this historic moment, we

all dressed as Cat Ladies for Kamala and served blue cocktails to welcome in the Blue Wave. We took a photo of ourselves getting ready to celebrate at 7 pm. We don't have any pictures after that. A few hours later, it felt as if the world was ending.

The next day, when I turned up for my online class with my 23 American colleagues, all I could think to say was "Emotional Support Canadian reporting for duty!" We thought things were about as bad as they could get on that day, but of course, we had no idea.

I don't need to characterize for you the spewing volcano of cruelty, violence, corruption and lies that has been assailing us since that day. It has been humbling to walk alongside my American colleagues as they try to care for their communities, offer ICE resistance training in between dressing up as inflatables or diving deep underground to protect the refugee women and children in their midst – all while becoming Spiritual Companions who believe in the essential goodness of life, humanity and God.

And what a time to be a middle power, a beyond anxious next-door neighbour watching over the fence - trying to be a country of sober second thought – most of us with family and friends on the other side - so close, and yet so far away - asking ourselves what can we do except buy Canadian and "Keep Calm and Carney on?"

At a time of such profound fracture in our world, the words of Leonard Cohen come to me as they so often do:

*"Ring the bells that still can ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
'There's a crack, a crack in everything  
That's how the light gets in."*

It feels as if we have often been huddled together in the dark since that time, hoping for a sliver of light to find us through the cracks. I have a few quotations that speak to the world we've been living in.

*"It's not an overstatement to say that the destiny of the entire human race depends on what is going on in America today. This is a staggering reality to the rest of the world; they must feel like passengers in a supersonic jetliner who are forced to watch helplessly while a passel of drunks, hypes, freaks, and madmen fight for the controls and the pilot's seat."*

That sounds like a White House and a Cabinet we recognize! But it's from 1968.

How about this one:

*"When corrupt leaders take power and fit reality to their lies, their propaganda is marked by extreme contempt for facts, for in their opinion, fact depends entirely on the power of the man who can fabricate it."*

That's Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 1951

Or how about this:

*“My father’s own father, he waded that river  
They took all the money he made in his life  
It’s six hundred miles to the Mexico border  
And they chased them like rustlers, like outlaws, like thieves.”*

That’s the song ‘Deportee, Plane Wreck at Los Gatos’ by Woody Guthrie written in 1948

Perhaps you recognize this one?

*“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.”*

- Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities written in 1859

And finally -

*“One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors.”*

That’s Plato’s Republic circa 375 BC.

I don’t know if it’s depressing or inspiring to know that we are today experiencing the same forces as these voices from the past. But it helps me to realize that this isn’t the first time or even the worst time that humanity has faced. It may seem like it because we see more of it, but we are not powerless, nor do we lack experience. We are as capable, insightful and as determined as they were.

The Akan people of Ghana have a symbol for their word ‘Sankofa’ which means “To go back and get it.” It is a bird carrying a precious egg in its mouth, moving forward while looking backward. It teaches us that learning from the past is the only thing that allows us to navigate a stormy present and build a better future, and that we hold the next generation tenderly in our hands (if not our beaks!) When we “Go back and get it” we ask what has sustained us in the past to know how to face the present.

When we look back, our search for truth is one touchstone of our faith and our unlimited capacity for goodness and love is the other.

Your Universalist ancestors, because they didn’t believe in hell or the devil, were unable to sit on juries because of their ‘imperfect moral character’ and were often the target of attacks. I love the courage of Universalist preacher John Murray who, when a rock was thrown through the stained-glass window of the church in which he was preaching, paused only briefly to pick it up and exclaim “Though this argument is both weighty and substantial, it is unconvincing!” and carried on with his sermon!

Unitarian abolitionist Theodore Parker, who wrote his sermons with a loaded pistol beside his desk in case he needed to defend runaway slaves from The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 wrote “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice” – words of perseverance we need to hear today uttered more than 150 years ago.

And our Flower Communion service was created by Rev. Norbert Capek, minister of one of our largest Unitarian churches in Prague - as a way of including everyone who had come from other faiths and celebrating not only the resilience of nature but the inherent beauty in each and every soul. Rev. Capek created it in the 1920s but as the Nazis tightened their grip on Europe in the 1930s and during the war, it became a symbol of the hospitality and safety that his congregation offered to Jews and others in need of safe harbour.

***Courage, perseverance, radical hospitality*** – these are just a few of the touchstones that our spiritual ancestors have given us and they are where good people of all faiths turned when ICE began to “chase them like rustlers, like outlaws, like thieves.” In Minneapolis, when people were being openly murdered in the streets, a network of people – midwives, doulas, nurses, doctors – formed a kind of underground resistance birthing collective – a community of protection around pregnant women who were at risk of detention, deportation and worse – and operated very much like the resistance in Nazi-occupied France or Holland, but with better technology. Risking arrest and even death, they deepened their commitment to life. In the words of Mother Jones ‘Pray for the dead and fight like hell for the living!’

People leaned into community; singing protests, ‘No Kings’ rallies and in hundreds of other ways, large and seemingly small have stood up for compassion, decency and humanity – even we ‘Emotional Support Canadians’ have voted with our money and our feet - and I have to believe that it all is making a difference. It is hard work and in between we need to take care of ourselves and each other along the way, break bread together and tend to our spirit. You’re allowed to notice that the soup is good.

My friend Kathleen Hunter takes a ‘Second Day Sabbatical’ – a break from media every second day to do the inner work required to act with purpose the next day. Or as Ghandi said when asked how long he meditated “An hour a day, and when I’m really busy, two hours.” Do whatever you must to gather your strength and purpose, but believe you have a part to play.

Margaret Mead said “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” *Sankofa* - looking backward for inspiration, we still move forward in hope, believing that the storm *will* pass over. If “Healing happens at the speed of trust” it’s going to be a while, particularly for our neighbour to the south. You have to believe that there *is* “more love somewhere” in order to find the strength to “keep on till you find it.”

One of the reasons I was happy to have Flower Communion fall on my Sunday here was that above all, nature takes the long view and puts everything into perspective. Be like water on rock, patient and relentless. Over time, you can move continents or make diamonds.

There is no one way to do this precious work of love. We are each of us unique and in a different stage of life. I returned to active ministry service as Ecumenical Chaplain at McMaster University just as Covid was starting to loosen its grip on our lives and I have been amazed and inspired by the generation of young people I meet.

Asked to bring my little therapy dog Biscuit to visit Environmental Science students during exams, I asked them how they felt about the state of the world and the mess we're in and one young woman said "It's OK, we've got this."

This is not bravado but the incredible resilience of a generation whose life since middle school was framed by a worldwide pandemic and who can barely remember when Barack Obama was President. This is the reality of people who are learning things we can't imagine in a field that didn't exist 50 years ago. As Darwin said – it's not the strongest, but the most adaptable that will survive. They are immensely adaptable.

"Maybe, maybe you will invent something that no-one has ever seen before." I bet they will. The lesson I have been taught by the young is to 'postpone pessimism for another day,' to hold on to idealism and to believe that the tide can be turned.

Those of us in the middle - the meat, or if you prefer, the haloumi or the hummus in the generational sandwich of life, need to be strong enough to hold fast to both hope and experience, to believe in the young and honour the wise while being the 'centre that holds.' Easier said than done I know but maybe, just "Maybe you are here to help in ways that only you can."

And I believe the task of elders is generativity - to pass on wisdom, to plant a tree under which you know you will never sit – and although I know it isn't easy - to gracefully accept the losses and diminishment of life - and yet somehow appreciate it more.

A few days before she died, I visited a beloved parishioner in her home in Hamilton. She had been a nurse and midwife who risked her life carrying messages for the Dutch resistance during the war, her life had been touched by grief, the loss not only of her beloved husband but a cherished grandson far too young. She was confined to her bed and very weak, but able to look out the window into her porch where a single plain geranium sat in a flower pot on a table. "Look at my flower" she whispered "Isn't it beautiful?" I looked. It was.

"Maybe you will help others to see the beauty in each day."

One of the religious symbols that has had resonance for me during these 'Times that test the soul' is the Taoist symbol Taijitu better known as Yin and Yang. While its distinctive black and white sides can be seen as polarities or halves of a whole – light and dark, each side also contains a small circle of the other within it. Thus we understand that light contains the seed of darkness and darkness the seed of light – all polarities are not absolute – hope must allow for despair and despair always leave room for hope.

Choosing to be hopeful about the future, cherishing the present and having gratitude for the past does not mean denying reality or seeing it all as black and white. Deciding when to act and when to rest, when to fight and when to wait it out is facing the complex nature of our world and its people and taking the longer view.

But what is the real balance of good and evil in the world? Think of all the people you know and ask 'How many are quietly tugging the world toward decency, hope, and love?' Imagine if they were on the news every day? 'Man still loves his wife after 50 years – details at 11.' 'That thing you bought 50 years ago still works – a CBC Marketplace Investigation.' 'Kids turn out all right – a CNN special.'

And so we carry on, we bless the baby, we plant the seeds, we turn the tide, we place ourselves between cruelty and love, we care for one another and our world. We encourage the young to believe, the seasoned to hold firm to our highest values, we cherish the wisdom of the elder. Because if it's darkest just before dawn, the sun must be about to come up and the storm about to pass over...

I'll close with the words of the poet Adrienne Rich:

*'My heart is moved by all I cannot save:  
so much has been destroyed  
I have to cast my lot with those  
who age after age, perversely,  
with no extraordinary power,  
reconstitute the world.'*

So may it be and Amen.