

## Walking With the Wind

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First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany

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**Story** from John Lewis *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement*; see version for children at <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/time-all-ages/walking-wind>

**Reading Part 1** excerpt from Clarissa Pinkola Estés “Letter to a Young Activist during Troubled Times.” <https://www.mavenproductions.com/letter-to-a-young-activist>

### Sermon

Jaw-dropping astonishment and righteous rage. I can do that. But, made for these times? Really? I’m not so sure about that one. I’d much prefer a softer, gentler time, a less demanding and more predictable time. A time of easy confidence in the longevity of democracy. A time without the devastating and immanent reality of climate change; with racial justice, and reproductive rights secure and immigrants safe from violence and deportation. Or at least a time with less fear, less hate, and fewer Nazi’s.

And my children. This is not a time I would have chosen for them. This is not a time they deserve. I resist the idea that they were made for these times.

And all of you. And all the children we love. Made for these times?

But what if we were?

I don’t mean that some intellect individually crafted each of us for a particular earthly task. Some theologies go there comfortably, but mine doesn’t. And, I don’t mean that everything that’s happening now is acceptable, or will work out in the end. It isn’t, and it might not.

But, what if being made for these times isn’t about assigned tasks, acceptance or assurance? What if being made for these times is about knowing that whatever is going on, we are needed - even if we’re not sure what for, even if we really don’t have the time or the energy, even if our hearts are breaking?

We’ve had some lessons in recent years in the fragility of democracy and the human capacity to be pretty awful in the quest for belonging, validation, security and power. We’ve watched hatred, racism, misogyny, public bullying, science denial, and sheer nastiness reach levels that many of us once thought we would never see in this country of which we sing. The rise of white Christian nationalism (which is not Christian in any sense that I understand) is terrifying. These things have always been here, but we’ve watched them grow.

All of this runs counter to the values we cherish and commit to as Unitarian Universalists. Some of us are feeling the loss of the world we maybe once thought our children would have. Some of us are feeling the impact now, in our sense of personal safety, or that of those we love. There is grief and despair, and fear.

It breaks my heart.

And yet, the poet asks us to not spend our spirit dry bemoaning these difficult times. Some bemoaning is probably healthy – rushing into action isn't necessary or helpful. Still ... what are we to do?

Estés offers two things not to do. One is to focus on the big picture of everything that's wrong in this moment. That can be a hard one – I think many of us have a sense that something big is very wrong, and it's hard not to spiral ever deeper into the enormity of it all. Especially if we watch the news, pay attention to pundits, or spend time on social media.

But Estés urges us to not go there. Or at least to not stay there too long. Not because it isn't real, but because it is so easy to get stuck there. And it drains our spirit dry, she says.

She also urges us to avoid the “tendency to persevere on what is outside your reach, and that cannot yet be.” This, too, is a challenge – especially, it seems, for those of us who are white. We do tend to focus on the difference between the world as it is, and the world as we think it should be, as though we ought to be able to make it so. We sometimes struggle with the idea that the world as it should be cannot yet be. And we sometimes grow impatient, even despairing.

But this, too, the poet says, weakens us.

And if we are not to focus on what cannot yet be or the sheer magnitude of all that is wrong, what are we to do? Why are we needed? Let's return to the letter.

## **Reading Part 2**

### **Sermon**

“Ours is not the task of fixing the entire world all at once, but of stretching out to mend the part that is within our reach.”

That “mending” might involve care for the people most affected by the rhetoric and policies of the incoming administration.

It might involve witnessing, speaking truth, refusing to be silent.

It might involve legislative action – kind of a specialty for this congregation over the years. If you aren't already, perhaps consider getting involved with New York Unitarian Universalist Justice – an organization that's holding their justice convocation right here next Saturday.

And that “mending” involves displaying the poet's “lantern of soul.” Together.

Our worship theme for this month is the Unitarian Universalist value of generosity. The full descriptive language is in your order of service. But the first sentence reads: “We cultivate a spirit of gratitude and hope.”

These times call for people who do that - cultivate a spirit of gratitude and hope. And they call for communities that can sustain us, and inspire us to be those people, and invite others to join in. They call for communities that help us to see a different way forward and, more than that, that are themselves a different way forward - for those who seek it, and those who never imagined it.

Communities that are prophetic and healing and resilient. Communities of gratitude and hope.

We - and this congregation - might just be made for these times.

We're not always that kind of community, of course. We miss opportunities, we get tired. And we're humans in deeply anxious times – we make mistakes, our interactions can be less than kind, we sometimes add to another's burden or pain. There are all kinds of trauma present in us and in this community (as in the world at large) and it shows up in all sorts of ways. But this is a

community with a tradition of mending the part of the world that is in your reach. You've done this before. You can do it again.

Both Lewis and Estés call us to come together and do the thing within our reach. And both also invite us into a perspective shift – where we lift our gaze, even for a moment, from its fixed stare at the immediate storm, to take in the arc of history – the long view.

A view that reminds us that we are part of a story larger than our concerns.

Taking a long view is not a denial of what is hard and unacceptable. It's not about encouraging suffering now with a promise of a future reward. It is about remembering that our liberation is found – not in our arrival at a destination – but in the joyful planting of seeds that we choose to trust will bear fruit ... someday.

Or as Vice President Kamala Harris said this week, “sometimes the fight takes a while.”

This long view may not be helpful (or possible) for everyone, all the time. It does kind of gloss over the needs of people who are experiencing a lack of safety right now – immigrants, Trans people, people in need of an abortion who live in certain states, ...

But it can, perhaps, help us to reconnect with the truth that there have been terrifying and deadly storms before. And there will be again. And, when they come, we can't control the outcome, and indeed may never know it. But we always have something to offer, something the world needs. And we can heed those prophetic leaders, who remind us to hold hands and reground ourselves and the house to our foundations. Over and over as often as needed – even when we're scared, and pummeled by the wind.

It's not our job to fix the world all at once. It's not even our job to prevent things from getting worse. All that is asked of us is to live our piece of the story, with courage, love, and the joy that keeps us going. To let go of the pieces that are not ours to carry, to let go of comparisons to an ideal story of what should be, so we can mend the part of the world that is in our reach.

That is all we can do. That is the best that anyone has ever done. And it is enough.

Enough, but not easy, especially for those of us who grew up believing that we can have security, permanent solutions to problems, and the outcomes we deserve. All of that was, and is, a myth, but it clings tightly. The liberation we find in a long view might be from the despair that comes with insisting that our life is supposed to be a certain way, freeing us to attend to the life that is, with as much gratitude and hope as we can muster.

There's one more piece of the letter that I'd like to share with you – the ending. Ireta will read it for us.

## **Reading Part 3**

### **Sermon**

Alice Walker writes “We are here now. Do we share our awakening or only our despair? The choice is ours.”<sup>1</sup>

There will always be times when we feel discouraged, even despairing. But we have more to offer than that.

We have a foundation – a solid ground – that we inherited from our religious ancestors: wisdom and practices of celebrating, mourning, forgiving, coming together and making meaning. They

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<sup>1</sup> <https://msmagazine.com/2018/01/16/alice-walker-dont-despair-trump/>

taught us that all are loved, and that wherever we're going, we go together - so of course we care for the most vulnerable.

Our ancestors could not have foreseen this exact moment, but they have nonetheless given us a faith for now – rooted in Love and our deep inherent worth and unalterable interdependence. It's a theology that insists that we never normalize bullying and dehumanization, that we remain committed to democracy, and that we are needed, that this church is needed, and the way forward is together.

On Wednesday, our Unitarian Universalist Association put out a press release.<sup>2</sup> Rooted in our history, our denominational leaders shared this about the way forward:

Beloveds, we will hold our fear together.  
We will honor our rage and devastation and grief.  
We will hold one another ferociously, tenderly, faithfully.

And then:

We will move deliberately.  
We will invest in trust.  
We will claim joy, rest, and sustenance.  
We will resist *en masse*.  
We will fight fascism and continue the struggle for democracy.  
We will continue to build our movements for justice.  
We will focus our efforts and abandon distractions.  
We will create safe harbor for those in danger.  
We will leverage our resources.  
We will sharpen our skills and our analysis.  
We will act as if no person is disposable.  
We will refuse the politics of division and despair.  
We will seek the wisdom of elders and of history.  
We will weave deeper connections with our neighbors.  
We will fight for our survival.  
And we will create the conditions of possibility for our thriving and liberation.

So ... breathe. Rest as you need to, hold one another. And then, in the world as it is, let us joyfully clasp hands and walk together with the wind – over and over, reconnecting the house and ourselves to that solid ground.

May it be so.

Amen.

**Choral Anthem:** *On Solid Ground* by Reggie Harris

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.uua.org/pressroom/press-releases/wellspringofhope>