

## October Theme

### *Resistance: The Practice of Hope*

*"Hope is like a road in the country; there was never a road, but when many people walk on it, the road comes into existence." — Lin Yutang*

#### **Introduction**

The link between resistance and hope may not be readily apparent to many, but today's environmental and political climate has placed the topics of resistance and hope at the forefront of many people's minds. People on all sides of the political aisle(s) are resisting and "rising up" with the hope that their ideals will eventually be realized. Typically, people do not resist policies unless they have hope that their resistance will have a positive effect.

Across the world, there have been acts of resistance that have led to hope (if not actual change in policy). These include Standing Rock and the Dakota Access pipeline, a protest in South Korea that brought down a corrupt administration, and a protest by thousands of Polish women against a tightening of abortion laws. Success of these protests leads to hope for more acts of resistance.

Hope is a key concept in most major world religions, and it is one of the three theological virtues of the Christian religion, alongside faith and love. The swallow has been a symbol of hope in historic literature, in part because it is among the first birds to appear at the end of winter and the start of spring. Other symbols of hope include the anchor and the dove.

Elpis (Hope) appears in ancient Greek mythology with the story of Zeus and Prometheus. Prometheus stole fire from Zeus; in turn, Zeus created a box that contained all manners of evil, unbeknownst to the receiver of the box. Pandora opened the box after being warned not to, and unleashed greed, envy, hatred, mistrust, sorrow, anger, revenge, lust, and despair. Inside the box, however, Pandora also discovered and released a healing spirit named Hope. From ancient times, people have recognized that a spirit of hope had the power to heal afflictions and helps them bear times of great suffering, illnesses, disasters, loss, and pain.

Our Unitarian Universalist faith and principles provide some guidance and seeds for resistance which can lead to hope. The second principle ("Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations"), points us to join in a larger community and to participate in collective responsibility. As the Reverend Emily Gage puts it, "We can demonstrate openness, give people respect, and treat people with kindness on our own. But we need one another to achieve equity and justice." In other words, we need to band together, to join forces, to resist as one to give us hope for a better future.

Many new people have joined us in the sanctuary recently. Some of you may have been on a journey to find hope which has led you to these doors of First Parish in Sherborn. Perhaps some of us could view our connection to church community as an act of resistance; one in which we all partake.

This month's theme was composed by Alan Cantor, Jess Jonas and the Worship Associates.

### **Questions for discussion and discernment on your own, or with each other:**

1. Was there a time in your life when you felt hopeless about something? Who/what helped you get through those times?
2. What acts of resistance give you hope?
3. Is your UU faith an act of resistance? If so, how?
4. Does your UU faith give you hope? If so, how?
5. Do you typically find resistance difficult, or do you find that resisting gives you strength?
6. Whether you are new to our church since last fall or have been with us for a while, did you come as an act of resistance or with hope in your heart? What are you finding as you worship with us?

### **Quotes and Short Readings****In your darkest hour, what is the source of your hope?**

The Rev. Robert Hardies of All Souls Unitarian Church, Washington, D.C., says his definition of religion is: “people telling stories of hope.”

“A British couple in their mid-twenties, haggard and bruised, recalled for the television camera how they were on holiday in Indonesia, trying to decide whether to get married, when the ferryboat they were riding between islands sank during a storm. They clamored into a lifeboat, but so did many others, and the lifeboat foundered. So the couple set off swimming, calling back and forth to keep track of one another in the rough seas, until they came upon a floating spar, and there they clung, waiting for rescue. Eventually five other passengers joined them; but one by one the others ran out of strength, let go of the spar and drowned. Asked how they managed to hold on for thirteen hours while the waves hurled them about, the couple smiled shyly at the camera. The woman says, ‘We remembered things we’d done together, we told jokes, we sang.’ ‘We promised one another we’d get married straightaway,’ the man says, ‘if only we survived.’ ‘It seemed like a test,’ the woman says, ‘as though some great power had asked us a question. How could we let go?’” (Re-told by Frederic John Muir in Heretic’s Faith)

"Just as despair can come to one another only from other human beings, hope, too, can be given to one only by other human beings." — Elie Wiesel (b. 1928), writer, activist and Holocaust survivor

"The resources (divine and human) that are available for the achievement of meaningful change justify an attitude of ultimate optimism." — James Luther Adams (1901-1994), Unitarian minister and theologian

"No one has a right to sit down and feel hopeless. There's too much work to do." — Dorothy Day (1897-1980), journalist, activist, and founder of the Catholic Worker movement

For more on this month’s theme go to: <http://uuac.org/worship/themes-for-spiritual-practice/>

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"In spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart." — Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl* (1952)

## Hope

Our mission is to plant ourselves at the gates of hope — not the prudent gates of Optimism, which are somewhat narrower; nor the stalwart, boring gates of Common Sense; nor the strident gates of self-righteousness, which creak on shrill and angry hinges; nor the cheerful, flimsy garden gate of “Everything is gonna be all right,” but a very different, sometimes very lonely place, the place of truth-telling, about your own soul first of all and its condition, the place of resistance and defiance, the piece of ground from which you see the world both as it is and as it could be, as it might be, as it will be; the place from which you glimpse not only struggle, but joy in the struggle — and we stand there, beckoning and calling, telling people what we are seeing, asking people what they see. — Victoria Safford, Unitarian Universalist minister

Being hopeful will lead us in the direction we want to go. Being fearful will lead us in the direction of our fears. Which way do we want to go? By staying positive and always expecting the best, we set ourselves up for a much better chance at a positive future. An optimistic spirit will carry us a lot further than a pessimistic one and will make us more welcome in people's lives. At the same time, we want to be grounded in reality so taking positive actions to improve conditions in our world will bring our hopes and realities closer together. As we creatively transform ourselves from within, we will find that we have a positive effect on the people around us and ultimately will transform our world.

## Mediation:

I have high hopes for myself and my world. By being hopeful, I am not avoiding reality, but rather, I am giving a positive direction to my life. I am always looking to see the good in other people and in events that occur. By focusing on the positive, even in apparently negative situations, I am able to transform what is happening in a constructive way. My optimistic approach to life is contagious, and I find that people around me are gradually becoming more encouraged about their future. Together, we are creating the kind of world we want to live in. — Dudley & Dean Evensong of DailyOM



[12victories.tni.org](http://12victories.tni.org) — [Transnational Institute \(TNI\) 12 social movement struggles that inspired us in 2016](http://TransnationalInstitute.org)

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## Hope

Hope is a state of mind, not a state of the world  
Either we have hope within us or we don't.  
Hope is not a prognostication—it's an orientation of the spirit.  
You can't delegate that to anyone else.  
Hope in this deep and powerful sense is not the same as joy  
when things are going well,  
or the willingness to invest in enterprises  
that are obviously headed for early success,  
but rather an ability to work for something to succeed.  
Hope is definitely NOT the same as optimism.  
It's not the conviction that something will turn out well,  
but the certainty that something makes sense,  
regardless of how it turns out.  
It is hope, above all, that gives us strength to live  
and to continually try new things,  
even in conditions that seem as hopeless as ours do, here and now.  
In the face of this absurdity, life is too precious a thing  
to permit its devaluation by living pointlessly, emptily,  
without meaning, without love, and, finally, without hope. — Vaclav Havel

## Hope

Hope is with you when you believe  
The earth is not a dream but living flesh,  
That sight, touch, and hearing do not lie,  
That all things you have ever seen here  
Are like a garden looked at from a gate.

You cannot enter. But you're sure it's there.  
Could we but look more clearly and wisely  
We might discover somewhere in the garden  
A strange new flower and an unnamed star.

Some people say we should not trust our eyes,  
That there is nothing, just a seeming,  
These are the ones who have no hope.  
They think that the moment we turn away,  
The world, behind our backs, ceases to exist,  
As if snatched up by the hands of thieves. — Czeslaw Milosz

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Look well to the growing edge! All around us worlds are dying and new worlds are being born; all around us life is dying and life is being born. The fruit ripens on the tree, the roots are silently at work in the darkness of the earth against a time when there shall be new leaves, fresh blossoms, green fruit. Such is the growing edge! It is the extra breath from the exhausted lung, the one more thing to try when all else has failed, the upward reach of life when weariness closes in upon all endeavor. This is the basis of hope in moments of despair, the incentive to carry on when times are out of joint and men have lost their reason, the source of confidence when worlds crash and dreams whiten into ash. The birth of the child — life's most dramatic answer to death — this is the growing edge incarnate. Look well to the growing edge! — Civil Rights theologian Howard Thurman

Heavy

That time  
I thought I could not  
go any closer to grief  
without dying

I went closer,  
and I did not die.  
Surely God  
had His hands in this,

as well as friends.  
Still, I was bent  
and my laughter,  
as the poet said,

was nowhere to be found.  
Then said my friend Daniel  
(brave even among lions),  
“It's not the weight you carry

but how you carry it -  
books, bricks, grief -  
it's all in the way  
you embrace it, balance it, carry it

when you cannot and would not,  
put it down.”

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So I went practicing.  
Have you noticed?

Have you heard  
the laughter  
that comes, now and again,  
out of my startled mouth?

How I linger  
to admire, admire, admire  
the things of this world  
that are kind, and maybe

also troubled -  
roses in the wind,  
the sea geese on the steep waves,  
a love  
to which there is no reply? — Mary Oliver

### The Journey

One day you finally knew  
what you had to do, and began,  
though the voices around you  
kept shouting  
their bad advice --  
though the whole house  
began to tremble  
and you felt the old tug  
at your ankles.  
"Mend my life!"  
each voice cried.  
But you didn't stop.  
You knew what you had to do,  
though the wind pried  
with its stiff fingers  
at the very foundations,  
though their melancholy  
was terrible.  
It was already late  
enough, and a wild night,  
and the road full of fallen

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branches and stones.  
But little by little,  
as you left their voice behind,  
the stars began to burn  
through the sheets of clouds,  
and there was a new voice  
which you slowly  
recognized as your own,  
that kept you company  
as you strode deeper and deeper  
into the world,  
determined to do  
the only thing you could do --  
determined to save  
the only life that you could save. — Mary Oliver

### Still I Rise

You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?  
Why are you beset with gloom?  
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells  
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?  
Bowed head and lowered eyes?  
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,  
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?  
Don't you take it awful hard  
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines  
Diggin' in my own backyard.

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You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?  
Does it come as a surprise  
That I dance like I've got diamonds  
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame  
I rise  
Up from a past that's rooted in pain  
I rise  
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,  
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear  
I rise  
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear  
I rise  
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,  
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.  
I rise  
I rise  
I rise. — Maya Angelou

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