

## **“Trying to Be the People We’re Called to Be: An Inauguration Sermon”**

*“Here is the world; beautiful and terrible things will happen.*

*Be not afraid.*

*Because this is what we are about:*

*We hold hope for each other when hope is hard to find.*

*We plant seeds that will one day grow.*

*We are prophets of a future not our own.*

*We cannot do everything,*

*But we can do something.*

*So forget your perfect offering.*

*There is a crack in everything.*

*That is how the light gets in.”*

It is the night before Karyn and Ella will get on a plane to travel to DC

For the Women’s March yesterday...

Earlier that day Karyn declined some contract work so she could

Sit herself before her sewing machine,

The same machine she has used to make Halloween costumes

And curtains and Star Wars tunics for Emerson’s 5<sup>th</sup> birthday party years ago,

But that she now is using to make 10 pink fuzzy hats with cat ears

That she will distribute to other moms and daughters of this church

Who she will be protesting with...

So many hats, so much pink fuzz, that I am picking bits of pink fuzz

From Karyn’s hair and the dog’s hair and my hair and Ella’s hair

And Emerson’s hair for the rest of the night.

But all is packed now, the bags at the foot of the bed,  
And their flight leaves in something like four hours from now,  
Because even back in November when she booked the flights  
This was all the airlines had left...a pre-dawn flight full of women  
And daughters jetting into the mouth of the Capital City  
To be counted, to march against the misogyny, the objectification of women,  
and the threat against reproductive rights,  
And march harkening all the way back the Suffragette movement of 100  
years ago on behalf of the principle that women's rights are human rights.

*"You know,"* Karyn says, the blue light from the mobile phone illuminating  
my face in the dark,

*"I thought the minister of our church made you promise you wouldn't be  
looking at that before you go to sleep,"*

A reference to one of the stories in my top ten religious news sermon  
Two weeks ago where I asked us to resist (to pledge!) consuming the news  
that is consuming us by limiting our intake to some prescribed portion of the  
day and instead read books, look at art, listen to music, or lay in the dark  
silence and talk to your partner.

*"Yeah, well that minister says a lot of things; what does he know?"*

*Did you read this headline, did you see that latest tweet,*

*...ARGHHHHHHH!!!*

*"Turn it off,"* Karyn says.

Which as good spiritual advice as any, because spirit means breath  
And if our addiction, my addiction, to refreshing the news feed

Is suffocating you, suffocating me;  
If 'staying informed' is choking our ability to be formed, to be shaped,  
To bless and be blessed by other parts of life,  
Then we must, indeed, change our habits. Or at least we must try.

And so there it is...that word 'try.'

Try to consume the news rather than let it consume me.

Try to practice the preaching more than be a preaching practitioner.

Try to answer what practicing our UU faith looks like and feels like  
Over these next four or more years with a president whose campaign  
Was so contrary to much if not all our faith calls us to be.

Try to march one more step, one more step against the unleashed racism, the  
xenophobia, the isolationism, the sexism, the wealth worship, the power  
worship, the prosperity gospel that equates blessing with financial reward.

Try to replace the scorched earth, bloviating, righteous political code  
With a moral code that tells us our faith has no borders, no party,  
That asks us to welcome the stranger, love our neighbors as ourselves,  
Forgive those who wrong us, and pray for our enemies.

Try to listen across the chasm of our differences, across the chasm  
Of our polarization...so that when we go to community other than our own,  
As I did last weekend in a visit to my extended family in Missouri  
And heard some of them all excited for the inauguration...  
We don't end up screaming and hating at each other over the pasta salad,

As tempted as I was.

Otto, one of resident Star Wars experts, can confirm,  
But I think it was Yoda who said, *Do or Do Not; There is No Try.*  
Which works, I guess, if you're a three foot green Jedi.  
But for the rest of us, trying to be people we say we want to be,  
Trying to be the person our UU faith asks us to be,  
Trying and failing, and then waking up and trying again to be moral  
resisters, Racial divide crossers, immigrant welcomers, stranger accepters,  
BLM button wearers, women's march marchers, enemy lovers,  
Across the polarization listeners, standing in solidarity with the voiceless  
standers, and hopeful in spite of the world hoppers,  
And loving parent-ers, and loving partner-ers, and loving parishioners...  
Trying and failing, and trying again to be the people we're called to be  
Is...sometimes all we've got.

And what this minister of our church wants us all to know  
Is that we must not stop trying, we must not get discouraged, or lazy,  
or lethargic, or hopeless...because there is too much work to do.

And because there is so much work to do, one of things I have begun to do  
since November or so on Sunday mornings to help prepare myself  
For our time together is that I try to get here early before anyone else is  
here...

And after printing off the sermon and unlocking the doors and refreshing  
The candles and testing the microphones...

I sit in one of the pews and call to mind your faces, your names,  
The new faces I will meet,

And the reasons you will be pry yourselves out of bed or from the paper  
Or morning sports to come here,  
so that I help make this time worthy of your reasons, your needs, your hopes,  
and so that I can be the minister you are calling me to be.  
If I'm honest, it can sometimes feel a little overwhelming...  
If I let me ego whisper into my ears that it's all up to me.

This morning, as I sat there and called to mind all of you ,  
I also called to mind the names and faces of those who have come before,  
The silent cloud of encouragers calling us forward,  
Reminding us to keep trying, keep trying to be the people we're called to be.

Among them....over here...the prophets, the teachers, the world religions  
That we heard our choir sing of this morning teaching us  
That into the many windows of our world there is one light....  
Teaching us lift all hearts, even our enemies.

And there, in hats with buckles, the pilgrims and puritans from  
Which we learned religion as covenant instead of creed,  
Covenant meaning religion as relationship with each other  
Instead of relationship with whatever the bishop or president might tell you  
to believe,  
Our religion not vertical facing up, but horizontal, facing out.

And then came Henry David Thoreau, he of Walden fame  
And back to nature simplicity, but who comes in reminding  
Us of how in 1846 he was thrown into jail protesting slavery

By refusing to pay his poll tax,  
and how his lecture on the subject of civil disobedience was  
what MLK was writing his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”

And then, up in the pulpit, there is Lincoln,  
Whose personal Bible President Trump swore on on Friday,  
Lincoln up in the pulpit telling us this morning the words  
From his own inaugural address that he gave hoping to avoid the Civil War,  
And the words I put for us at the top of the order of service.  
Will you read them with me:

*“We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not  
break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory will swell when  
again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”*

And here, from the back, comes Olympia Brown, Universalist,  
The first woman to ever graduate from a theology school and the first  
Woman ever ordained as a minister in 1863,  
The woman Susan B. Anthony looked to to fire up the crowds  
Before the suffragist marches,  
And who tells the story of deciding to pursue an education and enter  
Ministry after her chemistry professor told her in college – *you don't need to  
remember all this; just enough to sound intelligent during conversation.*  
And who, after that, did all she could to become the minister she felt called  
to be.

And over there the Unitarian minister James Reeb, who in 1965 heard  
MLK's call to fly to Selma to join the march for voting rights for African

Americans...and was killed during that march, a murder that Lyndon Johnson referred to as the final push he needed to pass the Voting Rights Act.

And in the side, reciting her poetry, comes Saint Mary Oliver,  
Who reminds us to open our fists of protest and bless, too...  
Asking us: *what will you do with your one wild, and precious life...*  
And the other door Wendell Berry, the farmer poet,  
Reciting his poem for the time:

*When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

And from all sides...with pink hats...come the women marching  
Yesterday...125k in Boston, 150k in Chicago, 500K in DC...  
Not protesting the President as much as demanding  
That they are seen, heard, that a woman's right are human rights.  
*'Thank you for helping us get here,'*

Karyn said in a text with a heart emoji.

Thank me? I wanted to say. Thank you for showing me and showing our daughter the kind of people we're called to be.

All these people, coming into our church for this morning from all sides,  
A cloud of witnesses and encouragement and resolve to help me  
And help you become the people we're called to be.  
Keep on keeping on, they say. Keep trying.

So on this inauguration weekend,  
A time of new beginnings and starting over and resolutions  
To try and fail and try again:  
May these be our promises we covenant together:  
Resist.  
Walk towards trouble.  
Bless.  
Praise the beautiful and broken world.  
Use 140 characters to write a poem instead of angry tweet.  
Turn off the blue screens and sit in silence with someone you love.  
Remind the president he swore on the Bible and not the Art of the Deal.  
Listen.  
Get out of our comfort zone.  
Plant flowers.  
Practice hope.  
Listen.  
March.  
Knit hats.  
Breathe, because breath is spirit and spirit is life.  
Recall our cloud of witnesses.  
Lean in.

Lean on.

Come to church for yourself, but stay for someone else.

Notice where and to whom you are called.

Practice our preaching.

Treat others not only the way you want to be treated, but the way they want to be treated.

Speak your truth.

Whatever you're afraid of, remember Audre Lorde's words: we were never meant to survive.

So risk. Speak your love. Practice your love. Remember love is not the same as being nice.

And then practice our love some more.

Because we together we can help each other be the people we're called to be.

Say with me: *Amen*.

I can't hear you: *Amen*.

We've got each other, which is why we say: *Amen*.