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 Arlington Street Church  
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## Take Heart

What happened in Charlottesville last month terrifies me. Just when we don't want to think that things can get any worse, David Duke, former Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, announces that his people are "going to fulfill the promises of Donald Trump" and "take ... [back] our country."

I'm terrified by the Klan and neo-Nazis. I'm terrified by white supremacists waving Confederate flags and by militia carrying assault weapons, brandishing torches.

I'm terrified, and I hope you're terrified, too. There's no pretending that our physical safety and wellbeing aren't threatened. But it's more than that – much more. I'm afraid our fear will undo us; that we'll swallow our anger and be rendered powerless; that we'll auto-anesthetize and fail to disrupt business as usual.<sup>1</sup>

My friends, these times are calling us to be very, very brave. We are called to *take heart*. Courage: from the Latin *cor*, meaning heart. Courage doesn't mean we aren't afraid. It means we do what we have to do anyway.

Clarissa Pinkola Estés, a Mexican American author and psychoanalyst specializing in post-trauma recovery, writes,

"My friends, do not lose heart.... I urge you ... to please not spend your spirit dry by bewailing these difficult times. Especially, do not lose hope. Most particularly because the fact is that we were made for these times...."

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<sup>1</sup> My deepest thanks to Rev. Michael K. Marsh, who serves St. Philip's Episcopal in West Texas. Michael's sermon on August 13<sup>th</sup>, 2017, entitled *I Look at Charlottesville and I Am Afraid – A Sermon on Matthew 14:22-33*, broke in on my despair.

For years, we have been learning, practicing, been in training for, and just waiting to meet on this exact plain of engagement....

“In any [difficult] time, there is a tendency to veer toward fainting over how much is wrong or un-mended in the world. Do not focus on that. There is a tendency, too, to fall into being weakened by dwelling on what is outside our reach, by what cannot yet be. Do not focus there....

“There will always be times when [we] feel discouraged. I ... have felt despair many times in my life, but I do not keep a chair for it. I will not entertain it. It is not allowed to eat from my plate....

“We are needed; that is all we can know.... Ours is not the task of fixing the entire world all at once, but of stretching out to mend the part of the world that is within our reach. Any small, calm thing that one soul can do to help another soul, to assist some portion of this poor suffering world, will help immensely. It is not given to us to know which acts or by whom will cause the crucial mass to tip toward an enduring good.

“One of the most calming and powerful actions we can do to intervene in a stormy world is to stand up and show your soul.... The light of the soul throws sparks, can send up flares, builds signal fires, causes proper matters to catch fire. To display the lantern of soul in ... times like these – to be fierce and to show mercy toward others – [is an act] of immense bravery and greatest necessity.”<sup>2</sup>

Over and over, let’s keep repeating,

*We were made for these times.*

*We were made for these times.*

Let’s say it until our faith is burning brightly – until we believe it enough, as Clarissa Pinkola Estés says, to ignite our souls and shine, shine, shine.

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In her book *Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation*, African American Buddhist teacher Angel Kyodo Williams<sup>3</sup> says of Buddhist

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<sup>2</sup> from Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *We Were Made For These Times*

<sup>3</sup> She un-capitalizes the A and W in her first and last names (angel Kyodo williams). I apologize for my spellcheck, which has other ideas.

communities something that can and should be said of Unitarian Universalist communities. She writes, “Our challenge, our responsibility, ... is to be at the forefront of this overdue evolutionary [move] forward. Why? Because we [choose] to position ourselves as the standard-bearers of an ethical high ground, ... and we have the ... [tools] to do so.... [Our work] is to kick the habit of racism, cultural dominance, and upholding oppressive systems.... [And if our spiritual] practice is not attenuating greed, hatred, and ignorance – the social expressions of which are the delusions of supremacy, racism, and oppression – then [we] need to change [our] practice.”<sup>4</sup>

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The Dalai Lama exhorts us to be “a force for good,” and offers a three-step strategy – a spiritual practice – for that. I think of this as His Holiness’ tool kit for courage. Those three steps are

1. Gain inner composure.
2. Follow your inner guide to compassion.
3. Act now, in whatever way you can.

*One, gain inner composure.* One way to do that is to get really, really quiet: quiet in body, quiet in mind, quiet in spirit. The way I know to do that is through spiritual practice, and we’ve been cultivating that in this beloved community for many, many years. If you’re brand new, just two words about spiritual practice:

*Pay Attention.*

Mindfulness lessens distractedness and strengthens concentration. It calms the kneejerk amygdala – that trigger for reactivity we later regret. Practicing paying attention builds the inner foundation for physical, mental, and spiritual strength and resiliency.<sup>5</sup>

*Two, cultivate compassion.* Compassion: literally, to feel with another person. Leah D. Schade is a harpist who transfixed a group of children – and me – speaking to them about white supremacy, using her harp as the teaching tool. “Which of these strings do you think is most important?” she asks them. Some children say the white strings, and some say the strings of different colors. No, she corrects them, no string is more important than another; the harp needs every single one of them to make beautiful music. And just so, when you have a group of white supremacists saying that they

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<sup>4</sup> Angel Kyodo Williams, “Where Will You Stand?” in *Lions Roar*, 8/18/17

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Goleman, *How to Be a Force for Good*, 8/29/17

are more important than anyone else, that other people shouldn't even be allowed to live, do you know what happens?

As that terrible question hangs in the air, she takes out a clipper and severs a string on her harp. It feels shocking, this disfiguring. The string makes a terrible, loud twang as it breaks.

“The string is gone,” she continues. “And do you know what happens to all the other strings around this empty space? *They all get out of tune....* Each string exerts a certain amount of pressure on the soundboard. If a string is broken or missing, the pressure of the whole soundboard gets out of whack.”

“Do you understand?” As she speaks, Leah Schade begins putting a new string on the harp. The children are mesmerized. “We need to do everything we can to restore the string. Because if we just leave that spot empty, the tuning of the whole harp [is destroyed].”<sup>6</sup>

*Gain inner composure. Cultivate compassion. And three, act.*

Nigerian poet Ijeoma Umebinyuo<sup>7</sup> writes, “Start now. Start where you are. Start with fear. Start with pain. Start with doubt. Start with hands shaking. Start with voice trembling. But start. Start and don't stop. Start where you are, with what you have. Just ... start.”

Once we have steadied ourselves, we can attend to thinking of others, praying for others, and giving generously of our time, talent, and treasure. In any given situation, a great question to ask is, *How can I help?* Consider your resources – take stock of mind, body, spirit; your special sphere of influence or skill set. If you feel you have nothing to give, start with a smile. Between a rock and a hard place, one brave smile can make all the difference.

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On the evening of December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1955 – nearly 62 years ago – Rosa Parks sat down for what she believed. She was arrested for disobeying the Alabama law requiring black people to relinquish their seats to white people

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<sup>6</sup> Leah D. Schade, *The Harp Sermon: A Response to Charlottesville and Racial Hatred*, preached at Gethsemane Lutheran, Lexington Kentucky, 8/14/17

<sup>7</sup> Ijeoma Umebinyuo on *Tumblr*, 9/27/14.

when the bus was full. Her arrest sparked a 381-day boycott of the Montgomery bus system, and, ultimately, to the 1956 Supreme Court decision banning segregation on public transportation.<sup>8</sup>

I appreciate the voices naming this the “back of the bus” moment of this time. If we’ve ever wondered how we would have shown up when Rosa Parks refused to stand in the back of the bus, now would be a good time to find out.

Now is a good time to pour out the content of our character – the depth of our spiritual practice and our capacity to embody our faith – and put it to great good use: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all people. The reality of armed Nazis tromping around this country we suddenly do not recognize has awakened us with a hard slap; now we are wide awake, but we are not alone.

We are not alone  
and there are more people of good will than people of evil intention  
and we have more resources  
*and we are standing on the side of love.*

Beloved spiritual companions,

May we not be undone by our fear.

Remember inner composure:  
quiet in body, quiet in mind, quiet in spirit; pay attention.

Remember compassion:  
Every string is needed.

Remember to act:  
Stand up; show your soul; and shine, shine, shine.

Remember:  
We were made for these times.

*Take heart.*  
In the end, love always wins.

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<sup>8</sup> Please see [www.americaslibrary.gov/jb/modern/jb\\_modern\\_parks\\_1.html](http://www.americaslibrary.gov/jb/modern/jb_modern_parks_1.html)

If love hasn't won,  
it's not the end.

*Love always wins.*