

Witnessing a Piece of Mike's Mind... *by Rev. Mike Morran*

As I write, it is the day after a large group of white people briefly took over the Capitol building in Washington DC, where a joint session of congress was taking place. The seditionists were attempting to slow or stop certification of the presidential election that all reliable authorities had confirmed was legitimate and decisive.

Thinking about this, the entire event was predictable. The president and his many enablers in politics and the press have been fanning the flames of racism, nationalism, and lies, for months if not years. We live in dangerous and uncertain times, not just different politics, but different realities. For example, there is no definition of patriot I could come up with that would include the seditionists at the capitol yesterday, and yet, "patriots" is how the president and his enablers repeatedly described them.

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Show Up in Love *by Erin Kenworthy, DRE*

"I've got peace like a river, I've got peace like a river, I've got peace like a river in my soul..."

We have arrived surely into the year 2021. It is here. I've pinched myself just to be sure this is not a dream, even though recently, my sleeping dreams have been a surprising smorgasbord of peace and wonder.

Our global pandemic is not over, nor will it be for many months to come. Our President-elect and his team are not yet installed. Our community remains physically separated. My children continue to learn from home as we navigate the stress of too much time together and the truth that absence does indeed make the heart grow fonder.

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What is less predictable, at least to me, is what happens now. Will this serve as a wake-up call for the Republican Party, the far-right media, and their millions of followers? Will they tone down the racist, nationalist rhetoric and lies? Or, is this the beginning of what many other countries around the world live with; in-house terrorism, a baked-in group committed to bringing down their own government by any means necessary?

At this moment, despite encouraging statements from some of the worst enablers (way too little, way too late in my humble opinion) it doesn't look good. More lies, excuses, justifications, and bizarre theories about the event are already flying around social media, the Qanon people, and (undoubtedly) other groups I don't even know about. Already, it's being said that the seditionists were really deep state operatives dressed up to look like Trump supporters all in an effort to make Trump look bad. It would be hard to make this stuff up, yet here we are.

Here's where I land. I don't know what the future will bring, but I know there needs to be truthful, faithful witness. There needs to be critical, clear-eyed, insistent, and yes, compassionate witness.

In the gospel, Jesus says, "If someone strike you on the right cheek, turn the other also." But this is not, at least in my reading, an invitation to more abuse. Rather, it is an invitation to witness. As in..., "See!" "See what violence is!" "See the truth of this injustice!" "See the results of oppression!" "See how it destroys relationship, community, and trust!" "See!" "See this for what it is!"

First Unitarian Denver has a long history of witness. We understand the need for witness. We understand that silence only benefits the oppressors, never the victims. We will continue to speak the truth. In faith, in Love, in lasting commitment to a better world.

See you in church, friends,

Mike

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Love from page 1

How fond I am of you, dear reader. I delight in my knowing that many of you are reading this and perhaps similarly feeling relief, hope, joy, lightness, renewal, determination, and purpose alive within your internal workings. I am, and while it feels a little peculiar and unfamiliar, these feelings are welcomed and celebrated. Mixed in there is anticipation of when we might gather again, see one another's smiles, and maybe even hug our friends. As I write this, I imagine an entire Sunday morning service where we move around the room greeting one another, greeting each other over and over again in an attempt to make up for the greetings we've missed over the last year. Hugs, handshakes, laughter and probably a few tears are in my vision, though I know that in reality, our first gathering will absolutely include masks, elbow and ankle bumps, muffled joy, and a new appreciation for eye contact.

We are beginning to allow ourselves to engage the conversations about re-convening this beloved community in-person. For a long time now, I've not turned my mind toward that abstract possibility. It's just in the last few days that I've allowed myself to consider what a return to in-person RE will require, and I don't have any concrete plans. Like any Unitarian Universalist, I am full of questions. Amidst all the considerations, community safety and health are at the top of the list. This discussion demands patience, flexibility, and commitment to serve all of us and each of us.

We wait for medical vaccinations as part of our plan to safely gather. But in the meantime, it is my belief that our relationships with each other serve to vaccinate us from the isolation, loneliness, and frustration that accompanies our prolonged separation. Reach out, check in, communicate, and play as much as possible. Freely and frequently give and receive joy. Seek out multiple doses of friendly interaction per week. Let's inoculate one another with additional love.

Through all of the challenges in our recent past, our emerging present, and our hopeful future, I know without doubt that this community remains present to the work at hand. We show up for one another in love. We share connections that sustain us through the joys, challenges, and sorrows that make up a life. We evolve with the times, and face whatever the river is bringing into our path together. I've got peace, like a river in my soul.

The Board Beat *by Mary Sullivan, President, First Unitarian Board of Trustees*

Well folks, here we finally are: 2021. So far, it's not feeling a whole lot different from 2020 yet. But wait, "we've only just begun" (you older folk will recognize this lyric.)

Many of us are looking back over this past year of 2020 to see if we can take any valuable morsels of illumination into our new and highly anticipated new year. I have learned one very big and important lesson about myself. I am a . . . BACKSLIDER, i.e. "def: relapse into bad ways or error"!

This is a unwelcome revelation, but a true one nonetheless. Although I am not able to produce a very impressive list of projects I have completed during this time at home, there is one resolution I've been able to stick to. Since January 1, 2009, I have been successful so far in eliminating all alcohol from my life. I'll hold on to that as I peruse all the intentions I have not been so stalwart with.

At the beginning of the "stay at home" restrictions, I developed endless lists of things I could accomplish while staying within my four walls. Just a smattering of the list includes:

1. Check emails daily
2. Respond to all emails within 24 - 48 hours
3. Finish favorite recipe books for my children
4. Cleanup and organize music playlists
5. Cut sugar from diet
6. Eliminate paper clutter from my desk (and floor)
7. Walk daily
8. Do aerobic exercise 5 times a week
9. Call friends regularly
10. Curtail my sometimes-biting tongue
11. Learn how to sell on eBay
12. Organize "to read" book lists
13. Set up reading time schedules
14. Catch up on "required" (not fun) reading
15. Read more nonfiction
16. Complete tablecloth and dining tables size chart

Let it suffice to say that I haven't been a total failure in completing these projects. I've begun, attempted or thought a lot about each and every one of them. However, I've only actually finished 6 out of 16. This list tells me two things: 1) I can't be accused, by any stretch of the imagination, of leading an overly exciting life and 2) my higher math skills informs me I've accomplished less than 50%!

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So . . . what does this lackluster performance teach me about myself, other than earning me the “backslider” handle? And what life lesson has this year brought home to me more than any other? Forgiveness . . . for everyone, myself included.

My laundry list is long for those I have endeavored to forgive: loved ones who disappoint, friends who don’t follow through, family members who neglect, those who voted differently from me, and on and on. Forgiving those folks was a way easier task than forgiving myself; I’ve been working on that for a lifetime.

This very difficult year has taught me to rejoice in the 6 projects I completed and forgive myself for the 10 I have not (yet.) This year has also helped me to always look for those things to appreciate in those around me and to give a wide allowance to their failings, which are certainly no greater than my own.

I am very much looking forward to 2021, as are many, but not as a panacea for our country’s problems, or my own. I expect to still earn my well-deserved title of “backslider” through this year and beyond. But instead of berating myself for my failings, I plan to be more forgiving with myself and others; and celebrate my accomplishments, along with those of my country and loved ones.

Quarterly Finance Update *by Karl Jonietz, Treasurer*

Despite the pandemic, FUSD remains in good financial shape. This quarter’s highlights:

1. Our PPP loan has been forgiven! As you are aware, FUSD received a \$58,900.00 loan under the Payroll Protection Plan earlier this year. We complied with all of the loan conditions, submitted the required documentation, and were informed that the loan has been forgiven in full.
2. We are now receiving regular payments from the Kate Rogers’ Trust. FUSD is one of the benefactors of a trust created in 1927 by Kate Rogers, a long-time member. This trust is administered by UUA and we have successfully concluded discussions with their Treasurer so that we will receive quarterly payments from the earnings. Our first payment under the new arrangement arrived in November in the amount of \$11,435.
3. At its December meeting, the Board voted to give compensation increases – made up of salary increases, starting in January, and bonus payments. (This decision fulfills the commitment we made when the budget was adopted last May.) Our goal is to bring the salaries of our valued employees up to at least the mid-point of the compensation paid by similar-sized congregations within our geographic region. These increases get us closer to this goal, but we are not there yet.

As always, thank you for your continuing generosity to First Unitarian and please contact me should you have any financial questions at 720-360-1884.

Whole Souul Living

Peace is the Whole Souul Living Theme for January, and it represents a profoundly challenging hope. Pacifist A. J. Muste wrote: *We cannot have peace if we are only concerned with peace. War is not an accident. It is the logical outcome of a certain way of life. If we want to attack war, we have to attack that way of life.* In other words, as participants in that way of life, we need to work both outwardly and inwardly.

The questions below are for personal and communal reflection this month.



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- Even Muste uses the warlike word “attack” in his quote about peace! What does this say about our culture and language?
- The bible talks about, “The peace the passes understanding.” But what about the understanding that leads to peace? What is your Peace? And, what is your understanding?
- What have you learned about Peace in your lifetime? Is it teachable?
- What should your church be teaching children about Peace?

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