

## **Sermon for Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Central Michigan**

**November 29, 2020**

**Rev. Andrew Frantz, contract minister**

### **Healing Community**

#### Introduction

I want to talk this morning about listening as a way of healing—healing the community. The society and the world in which we live are in need of healing. The election this month (can you believe it was just this month?) reveals again the deep rifts in our society, present everywhere including—tragically—in our COVID response. We can offer healing to those on both sides of the divide through listening, love, and compassion, asking “What hurts?”

#### Background: Division

This election revealed that Trumpism is alive and well. Some of thought that this wasn't the case, and that Trumpism was receding. The political division has become a cultural division, so that everything seems to be political. Pizza is political. You can guess if someone leans red or blue by the car they drive, the church they go to, the stores they shop at. Most tragically, our response to the COVID pandemic is politicized, so that your political party predicts your attitude and behavior in the face of this pandemic.

#### Background: BLM-ers

One side of this political and cultural divide that I'm calling the Black Lives Matter faction is defined by progressive views on environment and taxes, and most critically by an assertion of systemic racism. Police violence against black people, and the disproportionate COVID death toll among Black, Indigenous, People of Color are the most obvious examples.

#### Background: Trumpists

The other side, the Trumpists, are harder for me to understand and to define—and this fact itself, the challenge for someone like me to articulate and understand that side of the political divide, is part of what I'm talking about. And the importance of someone like me understanding it. This movement is defined by a politics of grievance, mostly white working class people feeling wronged. They feel that their status is being diminished culturally and economically. They blame immigrants for the economic diminishment of their status—and importantly for me and for Unitarian Universalists, they blame the cultural elite for the cultural diminishment of white people.

This is a key point about “cultural elites.” As I understand it, the cultural elite looks down on coal miners, factory workers, farmers, and soldiers. I am part of the cultural elite, and it's fair to say that Unitarian Universalism is part of the cultural elite. I know that's a pretty broad generalization, and it doesn't fit everyone who is Unitarian Universalist...you can see if it fits for you.

This is my summary of the moment we are in as a society. There's nothing terribly new in what I've said so far. And, I say that we can and must be healers in this moment.

### Healing: Self, then Others

My new mantra these days is: *Take Care of Yourself, Do No Harm, Offer Healing to Others*. In that order. For this whole month of November, we have taken Healing as our theme for worship, and two weeks ago we focused on healing yourself. I encouraged everyone to name the ways we have been wounded (wounds from personal life and wounds from society) and I said that we have the power to heal ourselves through self-care, through self-love, through spiritual practices. I remind us now that we have the power to heal ourselves. Last week for the Harvest Feast, we talked about gratitude as a healing practice. When we deliberately name our gratitude for others, it is good for our own well-being.

*Take Care of Yourself, Do No Harm, Offer Healing to Others*. We have to heal ourselves before healing others. We have to keep returning to self-care as we seek to turn our healing energy to the hurting world. And we can do this. As Rev. Angela Herrera said in the chalice lighting today, you should bring to the altar of life...

*Bring your loving,  
And your courage and your conviction.  
Bring your need for healing,  
And your powers to heal.  
There is work to do  
And you have all that you need to do it right here in this room.<sup>1</sup>*

### Listen to BLM-ers

I'm suggesting today that our power to heal is through listening and compassion and love. To heal the woundedness of this society, we have to listen better to both sides. I identify as a white person: I've been socialized into an identity of whiteness in this racist society. To heal the problem of systemic racism, as a white person I need to listen better to Black, Indigenous, People of Color. Their stories, their pain, their vision forward. That's hard work, but I can do it, and we can it with listening and compassion and love. I'm speaking to those of us who also identify as white.

### Listen to Trumpers

Even harder work may be the task of listening to the other side of the political divide, to the Trumpers. I have felt this challenge for four years. Four years ago, 2016, I was at General Assembly. General Assembly is the national annual gathering of Unitarian Universalists. In the

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<sup>1</sup> "Your Broken Heart" by Angela Herrera. #110 in *Lifting Our Voices, Readings in the Living Tradition*. Unitarian Universalist Association, Boston, 2015.

good old days when we could get together, thousands of us gathered in Columbus Ohio in June 2016 and the keynote speaker, the main speaker, the Ware Lecture was delivered by Krista Tippett. And four years later I still remember what she said. She said the key was, in listening to those you don't agree with, the key was to ask the question, "What hurts?"

What hurts?

Actually I looked up the transcript of her speech and Krista Tippett was quoting Ruby Sales. So it's a quote within a quote. Krista Tippett calls Ruby Sales "a mother of the civil rights movement." And Ruby Sales says that she has

*a question ... that has never failed her ... in opening a whole new encounter with someone who seemed to stand on a side that was evil. And the question is two words: what hurts?*<sup>2</sup>

Here comes the challenge, for me and maybe for all of us. This was in 2016 but it's maybe even more true today. Ruby Sales asked,

*how are you present right now to the pain and fear in our public life, a lot of it white pain and fear, that is manifesting in such ugly ways, looking like anger and hatred, seeming only to deserve anger and hatred back and threatening to undo so much of what is good and right and true?*

Let me pause. "The pain and fear in our public life, a lot of it white pain and fear, that is manifesting in such ugly ways, looking like anger and hatred." What's beneath the anger and hatred--that is the behavior--is the feeling of pain and fear. And that's why we need to listen and to understand and to ask, "What hurts?" The quotation goes on,

*[Ruby Sales] asked, behind the campaigns and the campaigners, how hard are you listening to the people in the crowd in and those are big crowds, so that means that's a lot of diversity of people. How are you listening for the people in the crowd who don't really want or mean to be haters, but are begging to be asked, what hurts?*

That's an important point. Big crowds? Yeah—70 million or more who voted for Donald Trump earlier this month. No, Trumpism has not gone away since 2016. I hear this challenge personally and as I said before, I identify as a cultural elite—therefore as part of the problem or the perceived grievance of the Trump movement. The last thing that I want to lift up from that quotation is that that crowd of 70 million people is very diverse. They don't all have the same reasons and the same pain and fear, so in our listening we need to listen to people

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<sup>2</sup> Ware Lecture by Krista Tippett, General Assembly 2016.  
<https://www.uua.org/ga/past/2016/workshops/ware>

individually. Now is the moment that is called for for healing, and I say that we are in a better position to do this than we were in 2016.

This kind of listening that is called for in this moment, asking the question *What hurts?* comes from a place of compassion and a place of love. This also reminds me of the reading that Roxanne shared with us a moment ago, the words of Marge Piercy.

*We must sit down and reason together.*

*Perhaps we should sit in the dark.  
In the dark we could utter our feelings.*

*In the dark we could propose and describe and suggest.<sup>3</sup>*

I like that because, like I said, when we see one another in society we immediately put each other into boxes. Whether you're wearing a mask or not, we know what side of the political spectrum you're on...or what car you drive, or all of these other things. In the dark maybe we could just listen to each other, like Marge Piercy says. She says,

*In the dark we could not see who speaks  
and only the words  
would say what they say.*

*No one would speak more than twice.  
No one would speak less than once.*

*Thus saying what we feel and what we want,  
what we fear for ourselves and each other into the dark,*

*Perhaps we could begin  
to begin to listen.*

I say that this is our power to heal, and that it begins in our close circles. I know that many of us have family members, Facebook friends, and other people in our close circle who are Trumpers. What would it look like to listen with curiosity and compassion, to seek to understand *What hurts?* To do this, what is most necessary is Love. As Krista Tippett says, "we dare to insist that love can be a public good." Isn't that what this religious movement is about? *We dare to insist that love can be a public good.* She says that what we know about love can be used in this kind of listening. We know that people we love sometimes drive us crazy, and we know when to talk and when to drop the subject, when to give space and when to follow

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<sup>3</sup> "Councils" by Marge Piercy. #585 in *Singing the Living Tradition*, Unitarian Universalist Association, Beacon Press. Boston, 1993.

up with another question. I say that we can do this, using what we know about love to listen to people on both sides of the political divide. I say that we can do this with those in our close circles who seem to be supporting racist, dangerous views—the Trumpers in our lives. But take care of yourself if you're going to try this!

*Take care of yourself, do no harm, offer healing to others.* In this context, that means pay attention to your own needs and the limits of your own compassion; don't lash out or insult anyone; offer healing as you are able, through listening and love and compassion.

Healing begins in close community and spreads outward to broader community. Healing the community, the state, the nation, might mean engaging in this same kind of listening with love, but on a more public scale. Ruby Sales asked us, *how are you present right now to the pain and fear in our public life, a lot of it white pain and fear, that is manifesting in such ugly ways, looking like anger and hatred?* A good question for all of us to consider.

And I'll end with this: going back the children's story that Kendra shared,<sup>4</sup> as she was reading it occurred to me that Love is the protagonist of the story. Another word for Love is Allah. Another word for Love is Jesus, if you're a Christian. Another word for Love is Mother Earth. Or Great Spirit. In that story that she shared, I thought the central message was that there is brokenness in this world. All the shards of the glass balls. That there is brokenness, and that Love heals. Loves mends. Love brings together. May we as individuals embody that love, and turn it into action to heal a hurting world. May we as individuals be strengthened by this congregation and by this religious movement, a movement for love and justice, to encourage each other in this life-saving work of healing.

May it be so.

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<sup>4</sup> The Shattering of the Vessels, A Free Retelling of the Shevirat haKeilim (from the Kabbalah) by Amy Petrie Shaw. <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/story/shattering-vessels>