

A Message from Rev. Steve

The Quiet Opportunity and Cost of Catastrophe

It is almost too cliché to say that we are presently “living history,” but it is so overwhelmingly true that it must be said.

Every e-mail, every newscast, almost every new advertisement, even, has to connect to the virus or risk feeling out of touch. The Coronavirus storyline is so strong, we barely notice it’s spring, that Passover and Easter are right around the corner, that baseball season would have started Thursday, or that the Dems haven’t even completely figured out their candidate yet. This new reality has left most of us working through our day with a mix of “I’m bored” meets “What’s the next shoe to drop?” I don’t need to tell you that the present drama in which we are trapped has an element of fear in it, a through line of certainly some isolation, but also some down time.

Living in any culture, or at any given time in history is always, mostly silently, a little like being a character in a script. In normal times with a thousand stories and our own lives pulling in different directions, we don’t feel it so strongly, but who we are down to our souls is always greatly both affected and effected by our surroundings. Mostly, however, it is really only in times of great tragedy or celebration that we feel absorbed. As I said last week, these days feel like we are reading the same script, but it’s a fresh, unfinished script that has no clear ending. It is a moment when the sense that all is lost can rub shoulders with a sense that humanity could turn the page on a lot of false divisions and inequality. Part of the underlying anxiety is that we know this moment could go a few ways.

Naomi Klein in her 2007 book “The Shock Doctrine” lays out how a

modern cadre of capitalists have come to understand that times of natural disaster and/or political turmoil is when to implement new economic rules and, essentially, a new normal. As Klein documents across a full handful of countries, when these now well-practiced ideologues see chaos, they use the uniqueness of the situation. Essentially, they use the chaos and shock, and add their own disturbances where necessary to exploit the moment. While the fires are lit, wires are down, and order is in freefall, these profiteers re-write the economic rules in ways that undermine whatever collective will and social safety nets exist. I trust these very smart and opportunistic free marketers are onto a truth that it is easier to get your way in a storm than when there is time to deliberate. What I think they are onto is that in chaos, change is easier.

In case you have been distracted by stories of insufficient test kits and closed beaches, from the shards of news that have been released about the more than \$2 trillion bailout, it is clear that at least some of what I think most of us would agree is opportunism is happening, or perhaps has happened. We won't know the facts until the ink is long dry and the votes are cast. While there are those looking to keep afloat Uber drivers, small-restaurant owners, and every other player in the economy who lives with their foot on a banana peel, there are smart people with lots of zeros in the checks they write and receive in line, too. Writing into a legislative bailout package benefits for companies and non-essential industries essentially places millionaires and billionaires in the same soup line as low-wage workers. The main press will likely not lay bare exactly who gets what, for a number of reasons. The news is dark. Obscure, powerful economic forces will not want that narrative pushed, and we citizens don't have the patience for gloomy details.

Disasters are times when getting things done quickly can be exploited. When this happens, let's be the people willing to call it out. That is part of what we need to do in between washing our hands

and keeping six feet apart. The other part of standing up to cruise ship conglomerates is to push our finger down on the scale on the side of right. See, as I know you have thought and felt, there is an opportunity in the present chaos to have a wake-up call to many things that we UUs have been talking about for generations.

There is the opportunity for us to embrace the interdependence of our global health system. There is the opportunity to see and claim that the borders between us are pretty arbitrary. There is the opportunity to see that biology and nature really do rule, that there is no real difference between what we call “the races.”

We have been more or less stating this since U’s and U’s separately started way back in the 1800’s. As UUA President Susan Frederick-Gray wrote in a recent e-mail to churches, “our fundamental values as Unitarian Universalists – to affirm the inherent worth and dignity of all people, to promote justice, equity and compassion in human relations, and to honor and care for the interdependent web of which we are a part – these haven’t changed. They are guides for us at this time.”

She says what I think better than I can, so I will step back, nodding along with you, and listen. “This pandemic brings into sharp relief the systemic issues undermining the overall health of our country and planet. Millions of people were already grappling with the housing crisis, poverty, food insecurity, inadequate health care, mass incarceration and immigrant detention, and the climate crisis. We were already ill as a society when this pandemic hit. And it means the impacts are that much worse.”

“The overall injustice and vulnerability of our economic and social system is so clear. It matters that our leaders hear from us as religious people—a moral conscience for our country. The federal decisions made in this moment need to center care for all people and a stronger social fabric that really can hold us all.”

“Our mission has never been more important- to be sources of pastoral care, spiritual resiliency, and prophetic imagination. As Unitarian Universalists, we know that salvation is not individual. A theology of interdependence and mutuality reminds us that as we care for ourselves, we must also ensure the health and well-being of the most vulnerable.”

Amen, President Frederick-Gray. Amen.

Prompted by our own Vivian Hao, we are going to engage these very forward-thinking issues on a Zoom conference call on Sunday, March 29th at 3pm. The title of this meeting on the video conferencing website “Zoom” is titled Transcending Covid- 19

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/986832574> . That link will take you to Zoom. The meeting ID number you will need to type into the bar requesting it is **986 832 574** please join us.

This is a virtual meeting of Pacific Unitarian Members and friends who want to find meaning in the world after Coronavirus. At this meeting we will ask, is this a wake-up call from Mother Nature? Will we finally realize that we need to change our ways before we destroy the earth? What are people of faith called to do/say in these troubled times?

We are caught in a moment, one that has the power to shift almost everything. And that is an opportunity. A fear and an opportunity. Let’s see if we can help humanity take it.

Rev. Steve Wilson