

Patience Has Hopeful Eyes...and Vice Versa
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Rev. Dr. Leon Dunkley
North Universalist Chapel Society

[Shuffling papers] Did you guys ever see that movie...I think it was called A Time To Kill. It was based on a John Grisham novel. It starred Sam Jackson and Matthew McConaughey, Sandra Bullock and Ashley Judd. It was a mid-90s film about a two murder cases and the penalty of death. One case was racially charged and the other was racially motivated. A black man in the South had avenged his daughter and taken the law into his own hands. Lawyers argued and jurors deliberated in order to find the meaning of justice. Did you see that one? I keep thinking about it these days. Well, anyway...

Good morning and good Sunday. I hope that this new days finds you well. Today is Sunday, July the 3rd and tomorrow is the 4th of July. The title of this morning's reflection is Patience Has Hopeful Eyes...and Vice Versa...because hope has patient eyes...and she really has to have patient eyes...because it takes a while for the good things to unfold. Hateful things come quickly. They force urgency upon us. Hope is different. Hope lingers when she's at her best.

There is a song I sing by Jonatha Brooke. The song is called The War. I sing it to myself every now and again.

Every morning, I get up and I watch the war
And every morning, it upstages all my favorite shows
Donahue, Hogan's Heroes

You remember The Phil Donahue Show, right? And you remember Hogan's Heroes, the sitcom set in a Nazi camp for American prisoners of war? A lot of the humor was lost on me. I did much better with M*A*S*H...but I still watched Hogan's Heroes show...when I was young and when I was sick enough to stay home from school.

Art helps us to process the old wounds. It takes us a while. Hogan's Heroes helped us to process the trauma of World War II. M*A*S*H helped us to process Korea. The song I like helps me to process the war in Bosnia. The poet makes light of wartime inconveniences. She's terse, ironic and intentionally naïve, reducing lethal conflict to triviality. She sings,

But it's the American Way, the New World Order
We hold these truths to be self evident

...which is a Jefferson quote.

And in the American day, you must give and I shall take
I will tell you what is moral and what's just
Because I want, because I will
Because I can...so will I kill

What drives us to war? What leads us to conflict? Is patience useful here?

It is so much not enough to be inconvenienced and annoyed the syndicated TV shows are displaced by the realities of war. But it's so easy to numb ourselves to

the impacts of national distress, so easy to dumb ourselves down and stay distant...unless, of course, we are serving in the military, or our friends and families are involved. Society breaks down into experiential camps. We can become divided from one another as a consequences of war. This is what the song is pointing out.

Danelle Simms read a poem at last week's Ukraine fundraiser—which was a truly exquisite event...thank you, Peg Brightman and everyone who participated. During this event, Danelle offered a poem—Clickbait by Lynne Byler. The poem is about becoming divided from oneself by commercial powers of distraction. Byler writes,

It's not new;
the contrast between life here and there.
What is new are the cookies and embedded trackers telling
[a particular clothing company]
that I am a viable customer
and 30% off could capture my attention.
I'm affronted.
The Times headline reads *136 civilians killed in the first five days*
and immediately below [the clothing store] tells me to *Shop Now*

As bombs fall in Kharkiv, we are asked to shop for better sweaters...and we are asked to ignore the casual brutality of that request. Byler continues, noting that the marketing agents at the clothing company somehow...

...knows or bets
that there is a point where my affront will wane,
that weary of a war in Ukraine;
my eye will wander
and I will imagine the sweater I see on the woman in the ad
will look as good on me.
Odds are good, or so someone must believe,
that before long I will pull the trigger.

Maybe, unwittingly, we are less distant from war than we think. Maybe in some deeper sense, we are so desperately close sometimes, so dangerously close sometimes...to the "buy" buttons...to the clickbait...to the triggers that are so easy for us to use, so easy that even a child could do it...and they do...when we lose hope, when we lose patience, when we don't slow down enough to know one another, slow down enough to realize what we are doing and how tense we've become.

A great power that is in our hands that has nothing to do with being online. There is no discount and there can be no discount for the kind of power that I'm talking about. I'm talking about patience which I think is a kind of bravery.

If I had been brave years ago, I might have started off by singing The War.
Every morning, I get up and I watch the war
And every morning, it upstages all my favorite shows
Donahue, Hogan's Heroes

If I had been brave, I would have done that. But I wasn't brave. I was afraid. I was nervous about playing my first solo concert in the Beaufort, South Carolina. I was a Northerner out of place...afraid of the shadow, afraid of the legacy of life beneath the Mason-Dixon.

I had real and ridiculous reasons to be afraid at the time. So, I started off safely. I started the show with a song that was most familiar to me. I started off the show with the same song I always started off shows with back then. I played Angel from Montgomery by John Prine. I did it in G with the guitar wide open, like we always did at camp. Playing this song helped me to open my heart to those good people.

Life is so crazy these days. It seems like such hard work sometimes to gather the courageous spirit, to gather in the spirit of peace, to gather the spirit of love and life and justice all as one. The artists are doing this for us, the wise ones all around us. The artists, they are like flowers. They love first and unconditionally. They are like flowers, lifting their eyes to the sky...and the sunlight and the water, they respond in kind—quenching, nourishing, strengthening us, ennobling us. Sunlight and water... They respond to the flowers longing. The sunlight that builds up within us responds. It says 'yes' to the flower. And the water that we store inside responds, saying 'yes' to life...saying 'yes' in the quietest of ways.

Low Lily reaches down with both of her gentle arms and lifts us all in challenging times. Low Lily does. I mean that in two ways. The low lily is a flower that has not yet reached its height and can easily reach down for us and help us to rise AND Low Lily is a singing group that recently performed in Barnard. They sing a song that I love—Hope Lingers Here. Powerful in its simplicity.

My mother, when hope is gone
My mother, when hope is gone
In our darkest hour hope lingers on
My father, when peace is gone
My father, when peace is gone
In our darkest hour hope lingers on

The second and the third verses repeat the form and draw us further in.

My sister, when equality is gone
My brother, when tolerance is gone...

My love, when honor is gone
My country, when justice is gone
[singing] My country, when justice is gone
In our darkest hour hope lingers on

I will not hate
And I will not fear
In our darkest hour, hope lingers here

And it's true. She really does. If you don't believe me, just look at your Orders of Service. There she is. Lingering.

Low Lily performed at Feast and Field a week and a half ago but I was late getting over to the show. I missed their performance of this song and I was sad about that. So, when the concert was over and Low Lily was relaxing off-stage, I pestered them. I asked if they might just sing a few seconds of that song so that I could feel the music, live and directly, without a recording. They were gracious enough to do so and when they did, I quickly realized that I was hearing only three voices. There are four on the song. So, humbly, I sang the fourth part and, luckily, I got in right. Chloe caught it on her camera and she posted a video on her Facebook page, best post ever.

Such joy surrounded us all. It was like we had known each other for a good long time, even though we hadn't really met. They didn't know me. I didn't know them. We were all just singing to together. We were all like flowers in a garden, gently singing, loving first and unconditionally, lifting our eyes to the sky...and the sunlight and the water responded in kind—quenching, nourishing, strengthening us, ennobling us....teaching us, reminding us...how to say 'yes' to life.

It's pretty scary to say 'yes' to life. You have to be brave if you're gonna do it. It's pretty scary to step into that energy, into the best part of ourselves. It's delicious and it's fantastic but it can be really scary but I think that we are learning something. I think that we are learning that if a young woman like Cassidy Hutchinson can do it, then why can't we? Cassidy Hutchinson is the 25-year-old, low-level White House staffer who was just interviewed by the January 6th Committee. She offered explosive testimony. She blew the doors off of the place. She blew the doors off of the nation by stepping into her power and by saying 'yes' to life.

I wasn't able to be that brave at the beginning of my solo concert in South Carolina. I got there eventually...when I finally relaxed, when I finally unclenched my teeth and let my shoulders down...when I softened my belly and laughed a little and stopped breathing so shallowly.

When we're afraid, we hardly breathe at all—as little as possible...which only makes matters worse. It's a flaw in human programming but it can be overcome. Not easily, but it can be done. You just have to be intentional about it.

When we're tense, we miss things. When we're scared, we put on blinders. I was tense when I played that solo concert in Beaufort, South Carolina. I was scared. I couldn't see what was really going on...and what was going on was fascinating, but only if you're a die-hard Unitarian Universalists.

UU congregations in the continental United States used to be divided into nineteen districts. The names of the districts roughly described where they were. Sometimes, you can kind of tell. Alphabetically, those districts were Ballou-Channing, Central Midwest, Clara Barton, Florida, Heartland, Joseph Priestly, Mass Bay [which is in Boston, obviously], Metro New York, Mid-South, Mountain Desert, Northern New England [which is us], Ohio-Meadville, Prairie Star, Southwestern, St. Lawrence, Pacific Central, Pacific Northwest, Pacific Southwest and Thomas Jefferson [which was Virginia, the eastern half of Tennessee, the easternmost part of Georgia, all of North Carolina and all of South Carolina, too. That district was considering a name-change at the time.

I was playing a concert in Beaufort, South Carolina, in the Thomas Jefferson District. The concert was part of a three-day gathering of Unitarian Universalists

from that region who were trying to change the name because Thomas Jefferson had owned slaves. Leaders of that effort were deeply uncomfortable with that history and the way in which it figured in our faith. Informally speaking, Thomas Jefferson was Unitarian—and here’s a tough one for the Supreme Court/extreme court originalists—it was Jefferson’s understanding that, in short order and as a matter of course, the entire country would soon be Unitarian. Jefferson thought that was inevitable. He was not right about that. Let me know if I’m mistaken here but as far as I know, the United States of America is not predominantly Unitarian. In fact, according to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, Unitarian Universalist account for 0.3% of the U.S. population.

So, are we out on a limb here? I’m really asking. It’s a real question...because if we are not, we have just disproved the idea that the Founding Fathers were infallible. Indeed, the originals were not originalists. They knew that they were flawed.

Thomas Jefferson said things that were true and he said things that were not true...just like each of us. And Thomas Jefferson did things that were so good and he also did things that were not so good—just like all of us. And Jefferson knew—as do we all—that life is beautifully complex. It changes. We grow. We all evolve somehow...and we mature...we all get better...and we’ve enshrined this process, this dynamic, this sense of growth and change. We have enshrined it—monumentally, in fact—in the marble of the Jefferson Memorial that stands proudly at 16 East Basin Street SW in Washington, D.C. Quite literally, we’ve written Jefferson’s words in stone. I want the so-called ‘originalist’ Supreme Court lawyers to read them carefully...because Thomas Jefferson deeply believed in change. His words were these:

I am not an advocate for frequent changes in laws and Constitutions. But laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths discovered and manners and opinions change, with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times. We might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy...

We do otherwise. In grace, we grow beyond our elders. We outstretch the shadow cast by “barbarous ancestors.” We choose freedom and we dignify that choice. Today, we must hold fast to this. We have to cleave to this, mustn’t we, Clarence, Samuel, Neal, Brett and Amy and sometimes, John? Don’t we need to find the good way forward as one?

My love, when honor is gone
Oh, my love, when honor is gone
In our darkest hour hope lingers on
My country, when justice is gone
Oh, my country, when justice is gone
In our darkest hour hope lingers on

Beneath the breath we trap inside of us when we are bound in fear...beneath that breath, there is a flower, a lovely lily that is growing up brave and free...and the sunlight and the waters respond...slowly...often too slowly...but this is why we must be patient, patient as we protest on the street of our country, patient as we power down the systems of oppression. Martin Luther King spoke of “the fierce urgency of now” and he was right. Having patience is not to believe that this ‘fierce urgency’ is not upon us. It surely is. Having patience is not a form of waiting. It is the decision to remain whole-hearted. It is a commitment to be loving and true. It is the wise determination to be brave [] because it takes a while sometimes for good things to unfold.

So, you didn’t tell me earlier, whether or not you remembered the film that I was talking about? ...the mid-90s film about the court case about the man who, avenging his daughter, had taken the law into his own hands. The battle cry went out and there was fighting in the streets. Warring sides were arguing for opposite outcomes from the court. Both were passionate. One side was dressed in black, black T-shirts with white lettering. The other side was dressed in white, white T-shirts with black lettering. One side was chanting, “Free him!” which was written on their shirts and the other side was chanting, “Fry him!” which was written on their shirts. And smack-dab in between them, servicing them both, was a van stocked to capacity, chock full of black and white T-shirts, live-action clickbait. In between the warring factions, a group of people was making a killing, having figured out how to benefit from both sides without truly helping either one of them.

This is how it is for us these days. I had to watch the movie twice before that part made sense to me. I was too distracted by other things. We have to learn to be patient because the first time through the story, we might be too reactive—too triggered, too anxious and afraid. We might be more likely to choose sides and less likely to allow ourselves to be patient. We have to be patient. We have to be patient enough to understand the fierce urgency of now. We cannot find our hope until we linger.

My mother, when hope is gone
My father, when peace is gone
Oh, my country, when justice is gone
In our darkest hour hope lingers on

I will not hate
And I will not fear
In our darkest hour, hope lingers here

And it’s true. She does. If you want proof, just look at the covers of your Orders of Service and there it is.

Hope lingers here. It’s larger than the houses that we make for it sometimes but it’s here. And patience lingers. Patience can be deeper than the ocean when we allow it to be...when we let it not replace our senses of urgency—for the hour is upon us, make no mistake about that. Patience is deeper than the ocean when we let it inform our urgency. We don’t need to vanquish the enemy. We don’t need to fight with one another in disagreement. We need to outgrow the clothing that was made

for us when we were younger. We need to get on the move, finding ourselves and one another on the journey, the journey of becoming even more beautiful than we already are? Flowers can do it. Why can't we? May it be so. Blessed be and amen.