

## **Sermon: “The Faith that Guides Us” (service leader)**

I want to talk about ultimacy, the things of greatest power. The view from the mountaintop. The thing we decide is our North Star. In her poem, Amanda Gorman is making a statement about ultimacy, “we lift our gazes not to what stands between us, but what stands before us...while once we asked how can we possibly prevail over catastrophe, now we assert how could catastrophe possibly prevail over us” - she’s choosing a side and I think that’s why it’s so moving. Beautiful words only go so far - vision goes farther.

This, of course, is Martin Luther King weekend, and MLK was a pastor and a preacher and a person of faith before he became a civil rights leader. And that wasn’t incidental, it was critical to the way in which he led. He had a dream, he aligned his living with a certain understanding of ultimacy.

In one of his most famous sermons, *Loving Your Enemies*, Dr. King preached: “Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

Love, he’s saying, is a thing of ultimacy.

Maybe you call that thing god. Or maybe you call it mystery. Or maybe you don’t even want to go there. Maybe it’s hard for you to trust the dream and so you lean into what you can measure. Ultimacy isn’t measurable. It’s outside our grasp. And yet, our relationship with the thing of transcendence has a profound impact on how we live.

Last week we went over the proposed changes to our seven principles and six sources - the covenantal core at the heart of our Unitarian Universalist tradition. If you weren’t here, I recommend listening to the recording on our podcast, because it’s important information for our whole denomination. The podcast, in the interest of memorability, is now called “church talk” with two Us, obviously.

You might remember that the proposed principles begin with an ethic of love at the

center, around which the other six principles follow.

The proposed article II language begins with this: “Love is the enduring force that holds us together...Love inspires and powers the passion with which we embody our values.”

We are a people, a tradition, that chooses to align our living with a transcending principle of love.

Now, love is one of those words that is at once powerful and potentially vague. Love is something that we experience in the dailiness of life, in the details of the people around us. We know love is real. Hopefully love is part of what you experience in this place.

When we talk about ultimacy, we’re talking about power - the kind of power that cannot be stopped or contained or diminished. What would it mean to live like love is the most powerful force in the universe? Yes, pain and suffering and evil still exist, but love tips the scale.

As Gorman says, “one thing is certain: if we merge mercy with might and might with right, then love becomes our legacy and change our children’s birthright.”

I know we UUs like to be reasonable and a conversation about ultimacy is a conversation about faith, which inherently means we’ve gone beyond the limits of reason, gone beyond what can be measured and proven. There isn’t a right answer.

The question, then, of faithful living is this:

To what do you commit your power? What is your north star? What is the ethic at the center of your life, what sustains you even when you can’t tell if you’re making a difference?

Maybe you recall that MLK almost became a Unitarian Universalist, but ultimately decided that our tradition at the time couldn’t sustain the civil rights movement. This was right after the merger, when the Unitarians and Universalists had just joined forces and we were learning how to exist as one tradition. We can be so

reasonable that we struggle to be faithful, which is why I find the proposed update to our principles so compelling. To say that “love is the enduring force that holds us together” is to make a claim about ultimacy.

The great Cornel West once wrote that, “To live is to wrestle with despair, yet never allow despair to have the last word.”

What if despair can’t have the last word because we are committed to love having the last word, committed to living lives rooted in an ethic of love? Could that sustain us through it all?

As Gorman says, “Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true: that even as we grieved, we grew, even as we hurt, we hoped, that even as we tired, we tried, that we’ll forever be tied together victorious, not because we will never again know defeat but because we will never again sow division.”

We had a regional clergy gathering on Wednesday and the Rev. Adam Robersmith who serves in West Hartford, CT and is currently a member of the UUA board led us in a process of reflection. He asked us to consider this question, which I’ll leave you with today:

What reminds you to love the world?

What gives you the energy and courage and determination to help save the world and recreate it?

It matters that we know our own compass, that we know what returns us to our center so that we can live faithfully, so that we can commit our own power to that transcending power of love.

Again, the poet:

“we will rebuild, reconcile, and recover in every known nook of our nation in every corner called our country our people diverse and beautiful will emerge battered and beautiful, when the day comes we step out of the shade aflame and unafraid, the new dawn blooms as we free it, for there is always light if only we’re brave enough to see it, if only we’re brave enough to be it.”

May it be so. Amen.