

## **Sermon: Moving from Grief to Justice)**

(In remote forests in Madagascar there is an orchid that is somewhat star shaped, a delicate branching of white petals called 'the star of the forest.' They may look delicate, and one may think its name comes from its shape, but it is also the 'star of the forest' because it grows in complete darkness. This isn't just a survival technique the orchid THRIVES in the darkness.

The orchid gets nutrients from underground fungus, does not have chlorophyll for photosynthesis, but cuts through the forest dirt every so often to attract pollinators such as ants. I loved reading about this orchid. I love knowing that there is thriving in darkness. This orchid is a reminder about the ability for life to survive and thrive in unexpected and possibly difficult places. Beautiful, delicate, thriving orchids that live happily and healthily in the dark.

I have been in need of the possibility that exists within thriving orchids. A year ago I found myself as a leader of UU Mass Action, working alongside organizers on legislation, advocacy, and change in the areas of climate and environmental justice, indigenous justice, decarceration, immigrant, and economic justice. With the mission of organizing UU's to confront oppression, I think there is a great possibility of thriving when we find ourselves in darkness.

In these movement spaces, doing this work I find myself standing in that awkward space of not being very hopeful, but having hope for the possibility of hope. I know that people have the capacity to do better even when people do not act on it. When thinking about what blocks my ability to move from having hope in hope to just hope, I think about grief. I feel these days so many of us are wading in grief, thick seas of grief that feel unending. I at first feel overwhelmed, but then remember the spaces grief carves and our ability as humans to grieve and how important that is.

I believe that if we take time and space to grieve we have a greater capacity for joy, for delight, and we need joy, we need delight, to continue on in these movement spaces, to continue to remember why we fight.

This past summer, Joni Mitchell who is now 79 made a surprise guest appearance at the Newport Jazz Festival and sang 'Both Sides Now' with Brandi Carlile. This is a haunting, definitely sad sounding song, and when I watched the video I did not weep, I sobbed. I am sure many of you have experienced songs, art, moments that feel that they are breaking you open. I think this song for me both in its melody and the lyrics, about knowing life and actually realizing you don't at all and that's ok and maybe not the point. Do people know this song?

Rows and flows of angel hair  
And ice cream castles in the air  
And feather canyons everywhere  
Looked at clouds that way  
But now they only block the sun  
They rain and they snow on everyone  
So many things I would have done  
But clouds got in my way  
I've looked at clouds from both sides now  
From up and down and still somehow  
It's cloud illusions I recall  
I really don't know clouds at all  
Moons and Junes and Ferris wheels  
The dizzy dancing way that you feel  
As every fairy tale comes real  
I've looked at love that way

But now it's just another show  
And you leave 'em laughing when you go  
And if you care, don't let them know  
Don't give yourself away  
I've looked at love from both sides now  
From give and take and still somehow  
It's love's illusions that I recall  
I really don't know love  
Really don't know love at all  
Tears and fears and feeling proud  
To say, "I love you" right out loud  
Dreams and schemes and circus crowds  
I've looked at life that way  
Oh, but now old friends they're acting strange  
And they shake their heads and they tell me that I've changed  
Well something's lost, but something's gained  
In living every day  
I've looked at life from both sides now  
From win and lose and still somehow  
It's life's illusions I recall  
I really don't know life at all  
It's life's illusions that I recall  
I really don't know life  
I really don't know life at all

Part of me sobbing in this moment was part too beauty, part loving joni mitchell and seeing her still singing, and part of it was I just needed to cry.

I was reminded of the Adrienne Maree Brown quote; "Remember you are water. Of course you leave salt trails. Of course you are crying."

I think these tears are speaking to living in a time, a world, that often doesn't honor or have space for grieving. We have lost spaces to grieve. Many of us continue to see our families, our co-workers on screens, so much of our general space has become virtual, less catching someone crying in the bathroom, more faces going in and out of screens. There are less opportunities for people to just be present, to be present to one another's grief. As a leader of UU Mass Action, as an organizer, part of accepting grief, wading into it is necessary to staying in the work, to staying connected to the world.

Not only do we need to grieve, we are grieving in the midst of so many losses and circumstances that persist, that continue. We are tired of making so many decisions that are not flippant decisions, but that relate to our survival. We are tired of making decisions about a pandemic that persists and continues to kill. We are tired of the lack of justice for indigenous peoples, we are tired of war, of impending climate disaster. We are tired of living through uprisings and seeing racism viciously persist. We are tired of deportations continuing and the rampant injustices against the immigrant community that seems to be never ceasing. We are tired of fighting for a future that is often hard to see as a future of joy. We are tired. Of course we are crying.

I cry all the time these days. I cry when I am in a meeting for ending solitary confinement, listening to stories of survivors, I then cry at poems, I cry when I hear fellow ministers who are so anxious about our climate, our earth and also oh so hopeful. I cry at songs, I cry when I talk about the numerous losses that we all have collectively incurred, the ones I personally have felt, the ones still to come. I let myself cry and most often I feel somewhat better, or at least more attuned with reality, I feel a release, and then I feel more ready, more grounded in the world, more ready to wade through the grief, and to wade through with hope.

In a recent conversation with an organizer we talked about the fear we encounter when trying to organize, the fear of everything going up or already being in flames, the fear that it is already too late. We talked about how to move from this fear, leaving this place fear so we can actually move. We talked about what it meant to move from this fear and recognizing that part of this move is seeing the new beginnings, the hope and possibility that when systems, when what we saw as 'normal,' changes, when it breaks down, when it ends, there is possibility, there is hope for new systems, new potential, new hope. Whether or not we are able to build new and better systems remains an unknown, but that possibility, the possibility that as our world shifts there could be better systems and ways of being is something I think needs to be felt more. But first, we have to grieve. We have to grieve and accept our tears, tears that are just a part of us and an expression of our love for life and beauty.

In an article about eco-anxiety entitled 'How can I stay hopeful as the world burns?' Aisha Mirza interviews Robin Wall Kimmerer, author of the beautiful book 'Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants,' Mirza asks Kimmerer how she stays hopeful and she

says: 'The grief is heartbreaking. But what I try to do is to feel that deeply. We can't look away from it, because to me, grief is that measure of how much we love the world. Grief can paralyse us, it can bring us to despair and hopelessness, but when we recognise that the pain we are feeling is ecological compassion, it's love, it's a love for the world that is strong and fierce and lets us say, 'not on my watch.' Kimmerer goes on to say 'I always ask myself and others, 'what do you love too much to lose?' Commit to that, and know that it's our responsibility to pick that up and carry it through the narrows of climate change. That's what the world will look like on the other side.'

It is no joke to feel grief deeply, especially when there is so much to grieve. But I think it helps when we know that in part to grieve is to love. As bell hooks reminds us; 'to be loving is to be open to grief, to be touched by sorrow, even sorrow that is unending.' Even if sorrow is unending I think we can take comfort that so is our love. To be touched by sorrow is to know you love and to love is to grieve.

The Adrienne Maree Brown reading we heard earlier ends on how despite it all 'we are excellent at loving.' that the heart is a front line and the fight is to feel in a world of distraction. that death might be the only freedom. that your grief is a worthwhile use of your time. that your body will feel only as much as it is able to. that the ones you grieve may be grieving you. that the sacred comes from the limitations. that you are excellent at loving."

Our broken hearts certainly have a lot of territory to cover, but I have hope and knowledge that our frontline hearts can cover it. I think it is going to take work, but not more than we can handle. To want to survive in itself is a beautiful thing. To want to survive in a broken world is even more beautiful and perhaps is at its core, hope. I have found spaces to grieve, and as the new Executive Director of UU Mass Action, I continue to grieve, and I continue to move, moving from meeting to meeting, from legislative action to legislative action, crafting and creating moments of joy and delight where there are none, and treasuring them when they do just come along.

Let us nurture our longing to survive. Let us remember why we fight and let us remember this by creating and finding joy. Let us find and enjoy the orchids that grow in complete darkness, let us let ourselves cry and grieve. Let us remember that our pain is love and that we have always had more than enough of that. Of course you are crying. Of course we are crying. Let us let the tears flow as reminders of how deeply we are in love with the world.