



Justice Sunday 2017

Sample Worship Service

SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES UNDER SIEGE

Table of Contents

- I. Chalice Lighting
- II. Suggested Hymns and Readings
- III. Sample Sermon
- IV. Offertory

Justice Sunday Theme

Given heightened hostility, violence, and possible deportations in the U.S. - and escalating violence toward the Rohingya Muslim minority in Burma - right now is the time to come together in support of global human rights, in new and innovative ways. That is why this Justice Sunday, we are coming together to support communities under particular threat because of religion, race, and immigrant or refugee status.

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) is a 76-year-old human rights organization that advances human rights in three core areas: Rights at Risk, Environmental Justice & Climate Action, and Economic Justice. Powered by grassroots collaboration, UUSC partners with innovative, locally-led organizations around the U.S. and the globe to support communities responding to natural disaster, humanitarian crisis, and climate change displacement, and those working to build sustainable livelihoods.

I. Chalice Lighting

Our church is a house of hope and hospitality.
Our church is a harbor of refuge and a beacon in the storm.
Our church holds the faith of brave adults.
Our church holds the dreams of children who are wise and strong.
Our church is built on love, and its open heart can hold us all.
I light the chalice for the light we shine together.

II. Suggested Hymns and Readings

Singing the Living Tradition Hymns

- #108 My Life Flows On in
Endless Song
- #134 Our World Is One World
- #346 Come, Sing a Song with Me

Singing the Living Tradition Readings

- #461 We Must Be Saved
- #661 The Heart Knoweth
- #713 Corinthians 16

Singing the Journey

- #1030 Siyahamba

Justice Sunday 2017

Sample Worship Service



III. Justice Sunday Sermon: "Saved by Love"

Adapted from a sermon written by Rev. Victoria Safford, White Bear UU Church

A member of youth group called their minister the day after the election. They said, "I'm not sure what's going to happen. I'm not sure what to do." They used the word "afraid." The minister said, "You mean you're scared right there at school, right now?" They said, "No, I mean: what's going to happen to us? What's happening to everything?" The minister wasn't sure quite what to say.

So the minister said: "Hold what you believe in. Take a breath and find it. Hold it in your mind. Hold our church—a picture of our sanctuary, filled with people, filled with light, picture all the faces, and know that we're all holding you. Hold what you believe in like a chalice of light before you, and move on toward it. Hold what you love, what matters most, and know that you're not alone."

The Quakers say: *Walk in the light. The light within a sliver of the light of God, a primordial light older than the planets and the stars.* It is the same light people sing of in South Africa: *Siyahamba, we are marching in the light of God.* This is the light of love, and the shadow of evil, of tyranny, oppression and fear, shall not, cannot, will not overcome it.

That's an old, old song, that love song of freedom and justice, righteous rage and faithful courage. And the struggle for justice is even older. Who are we to say we're too discouraged, too exhausted, or too scared to go on singing anymore? Who are we to lay it down? Our lives are a pinpoint in a long, long arc of struggle and sorrow and striving and hope. Who are we to betray the elders, or the children, or our neighbors, by opting for despair?

That same day, the Wednesday after the election, the youth came over to the church to chat with the minister. It had been a long day for both of them, as it was for many: a day full of holding it together as bravely as they could. They sat in the church and talked a while, and then the young person—a kid filled with apprehension, tension, confusion and fear—glanced up and said, "But how are you?" It was said with such genuine, generous concern, that the minister broke down and cried. This young person, who grew up in the church, who was raised by its community, held out a strong, young hand and said, "It's going to be okay." They both laughed after that, shook their heads, and agreed, "Well, actually, we don't know that."

In the face of enormous obstacles—those known and those not yet known—we keep going, we keep trying, we keep singing, and we keep looking for the light. We do this for each other, and are able to do it because of each other. It's both the why and the how. This may be the clearest lesson that our faith has to offer: our utter interdependence, this saving, grace-filled interdependence that binds us each to each and each to all. Each of us, the great wide "us," is bound to all the others. So stay open, don't close down. And stay bright.

*My heart is moved, said the great American poet Adrienne Rich,
My heart is moved by all I cannot save:
So much has been destroyed
I have to cast my lot with those
who, age after age,*

Justice Sunday 2017

Sample Worship Service



perversely, with no extraordinary power, reconstitute the world.

This poem reminds me of a prayer or a piece of scripture. I want you to tuck her words into your pocket and hold them against your heart till the paper becomes soft and the words almost invisible, as if they've seeped into your skin, into the marrow of your bones. To remind you, when you feel most isolated in a personal struggle, some great and quiet thing, like loss or fear or regret or sadness or shame or worry or doubt, you are not alone. And to remind you, when you feel most desperate in the face of larger, more public devastations, you are not alone.

It's a reminder that people have been struggling for a long, long time, against destruction, against disappointment and despair, against desecration of the planet and desecration of each other, devastations of the spirit and the body and the body politic. People have been struggling, and people have been grieving, for a long, long time. And for generations those who came before us threw in their lot again and again, for hope, for compassion, for justice, for freedom, for human rights and civil rights—people with a lot more to risk than many of us here. They cast their lots for dignity and kindness, for beauty, truth and mercy. Against the odds and against powerful, normative rules and realities, people have always come together, people sometimes from very different places, circumstances, histories, in every age, to combine their ordinary powers and reconstitute this world. It is an honor and an act of love to sign on to that history and carry it on. This is about love, not politics—or the kind of love that is politics, the faith that unfolds in the public square and the private heart.

“It is midnight in our world and the darkness is so deep that we can hardly see which way to turn.” Martin Luther King spoke these words more than half a century ago. “If the church will free itself from the shackles of a deadening status quo, and, recovering its great historic mission, will speak and act fearlessly and insistently in terms of justice and peace, it will enkindle the human imagination and fire the human soul, imbuing women and men with a glowing and ardent love for truth, justice, and peace. People far and near will know the church as a great fellowship of love that provides light and bread for lonely travelers at midnight.”

I think of the early 1950's, when his ministry began—another universe, back then—and I like to think that if not King himself then someone, or many someones in his time, held in their mind quietly but clearly, the impossible vision of an African American president, a Latina woman on the Supreme Court, Muslim Americans in Congress, the impossible reality not just of marriage equality but of revolutionized understandings of gender identity and sexual politics. I imagine someone or someones looking back through the long history of the labor movement, the abolition movement, the suffrage movement, marking their place on that continuum, and then peering into the gauzy, unimaginable future—perceiving the streets of Ferguson, New York, Chicago, Orlando, Minneapolis, everywhere, filled with people marching for justice, led by brilliant, powerful, young, queer, black, millennial leaders.

I like to think that they squinted into the future from the church basements where they organized and sang, and even saw us, gathered here, not for sanitized and sentimental recitations of safely white-washed legends from the civil rights movement, but taking up the tradition of radical love: the heavy, gritty, sometimes risky, unglamorous work, casting our lot with other lovers of life and answering anew the same call in a decidedly 21st century key.

Justice Sunday 2017

Sample Worship Service



Many such calls to action have come to us recently. Immigrants, people of color, Muslims, women, and the LGBTQ+ community under threat in the U.S. We are living in the greatest crisis of forced displacement in human history. Refugees and asylum seekers have fled and continue to flee from Syria, Iraq, Honduras, El Salvador, and elsewhere, in unprecedented numbers. The Rohingya Muslim minority is living on the brink of genocide in Burma, and families fleeing violence in Burma are having trouble finding safety and refuge in other countries.

In the face of violent pushbacks, walls, and other barriers to human rights—other barriers along the long arc of struggle toward a more just world, we draw on the inspiration of those who came before us, the strength of community, and the history of Unitarian Universalism, to affirm:

All people have dignity and worth. In our beautiful, pluralistic country, every person has a place and a home in the beloved community. We will pay attention to injustices at home, and support groups threatened within our borders. We will pay attention to injustices abroad, and support groups threatened beyond our borders.

UU congregations stand in a long tradition of radical hospitality. From the underground railroad to this very day, we have welcomed the stranger, sheltered the refugee, offered safe home, resisted racism, fear and exclusion.

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, a human rights organization grounded in UU values, has been a key player in our efforts to support threatened communities, promote grassroots social change, and speak truth to power, for over 75 years. UUSC works eye-to-eye with grassroots organizations to advance human rights within and beyond our borders.

Given heightened hostility and increased deportation raids in the U.S., UUSC is adding new grassroots groups to the wide array of immigration justice and refugee resettlement organizations they already support domestically. With many NGOs withdrawing humanitarian and legal aid for refugees and shifting attention away from the global refugee crisis, UUSC is increasing funding for refugee support and resettlement organizations along the migration route out of Syria and Iraq. With the situation in Burma drawing nearer and nearer to genocide, UUSC is increasing support for local human rights groups that know best how to protect the persecuted Rohingya people within their specific political context. In February, UUSC staff traveled to Burma to meet with partners and develop a program and advocacy approach to the increased hostility and violence toward the Rohingya.

UUSC has built a network of grassroots organizations – creating, like we do in other ways, tangible, impactful connections within that great wide interconnected “us” of each to each and each to all. Please help support and join this network by becoming a UUSC member, and by joining UUSC’s and the UUA’s joint advocacy efforts here at home.

You can start by signing onto the Declaration of Conscience, a statement of our shared commitment to resist hatred and violence, protect our neighbors, and transform our society through collaboration and love. Please consider making a gift to UUSC and signing onto the Declaration if you have not already. Though there are things we wish we could control that we cannot, we are not powerless. “We do this for each other, and are able to do it because of each other.”

Justice Sunday 2017

Sample Worship Service



Some Americans are native to this land. All the rest have come here, somehow, from some far-off place. Some came in chains. And all the rest have come as migrants, seeking freedom of belief and freedom of conscience, seeking justice, seeking safety, seeking a way to survive and thrive and give back to the community, seeking the welcome our Statue of Liberty proclaims.

Our congregation will not stand by if our Latino/Latina, Mexican, Arab, Muslim neighbors, friends and family—or any neighbors, any friends—are threatened with deportation. We know that millions are at risk. We will not be silent if families are torn apart, children terrified, parents detained. We will not stand by as refugees and asylum seekers flee for their lives and encounter closed doors, circuitous asylum processes, and hate. We will not stand by as an entire ethnic and religious minority in Burma is at risk of being killed. We are not accomplices to hate or reactionary fear. Our calling is to love and justice and resistance.

We do not yet know everything this will entail. Led by courageous activists, led by grassroots partners, led by threatened communities in the U.S. and abroad, we are well companioned by people from many faith traditions all around us, and by scholars and attorneys. And in the end this is an act of love: intimate, personal, physical. We must imagine and inhabit the circumstance of someone else. We're called now to testify more boldly than ever before to a faith that sometimes we can't fully articulate. What do we believe in, deeply?

The answer comes in whispers, when we're most afraid, confused, unsure. It comes in mighty shouts and thunderous chants, a million voices strong. It comes from the trembling voice of a child on the phone, and the strength of that child's hand. It comes from our history. It comes from the resilient courage, moral clarity, and the tears and laughter in the faces of young leaders all around us. It comes from within us and among us as we're reminded once again: salvation is communal, always, and we are saved by love.

Rev. Victoria Safford is lead minister at White Bear UU Church in Mahtomedi, MN. A native of New York State, Victoria came to Minnesota in 1999, following a ten-year ministry at Northampton, Massachusetts and five years of work with the American Friends Service Committee as a community organizer and activist. Rev. Safford is a graduate of Vassar College and Yale Divinity School.

IV. Offertory

UUSC's Rights at Risk program supports marginalized communities during times of gross rights violations, natural disaster, and humanitarian crisis. By partnering with grassroots organizations on-the-ground in impacted communities, UUSC is able to reach hard-to-reach communities, respond to self-identified community needs, amplify local leadership, and provide services that are hard to find elsewhere.

This year, Justice Sunday contributions are restricted within UUSC's Rights at Risk program to support communities targeted by harmful policies of the U.S. administration, the Rohingya people living on the brink of genocide in Western Burma, and refugees around the world.