



Awake in the Dark

BY CECILIA KINGMAN, MINISTER FOR FAITH AND JUSTICE,
EDMONDS UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION, WASHINGTON

I have been lying awake in the dark a lot lately. I lie there, really hoping to go back to sleep, wishing there was some way to forget what I know. But the darkness keeps calling me.

In these long winter days, it can be hard to keep faith. In the night, fear and despair can come creeping into our hearts. There are gifts to be found in this winter season, if we will wait, and yet it is so hard to watch and wait in the darkness.

Perhaps the darkness scares us, and we want to hurry into the light. Or perhaps we want to go back to sleep, want to lull ourselves back into a kind of not-knowing. The darkness around us is deep, and if we are not watchful, we will sedate ourselves with material things in order to quell our anxieties.

For me, every winter requires a spiritual discipline to sit in the gathering dark and notice my impulse to stuff material things into the aching places of my heart. I have to watch my desire to rush away from any uncertainty or despair. I feel desperate to fill that empty, often aching place inside myself. Some people call this empty place within us the God-sized hole. Buddhists call it a hungry ghost.

I face an annual struggle to keep myself from stuffing the mouth of that hungry ghost. Every year I have to tell myself to stay awake in the dark, and see what I might learn. It is never easy, but it brings me gifts of understanding and clarity. I learn about my deepest anxieties. I also learn that the imagined realities of my fears can be transformed into deeper wisdom—and sometimes into action.

It is always very difficult to keep myself awake in the dark, to sit in the quiet rather than rush to fill January with the busy self-improvement scurry our society lauds as necessary. It is always hard to keep myself in the stillness—always hard, and always worth it.

But this year is different. This year it is even more important to stay awake.

This year, certain powers are at work to distract us from the current reality. Powers of hate and greed know that the despair and anxiety we feel is nearly unbearable, and they are counting on that, counting on our weakness. They will stoke our fears so that we cannot bear it, and they are certain that we will forget to keep watch in the dark.

So I suggest several practices for these winter days. These are spiritual practices that will help us to stay awake and aware in the days ahead. I call these practices the four Rs: Reflection, Repentance, Resistance and Resilience.

The first is Reflection. In this season of stillness, we must begin in silence. Let us keep quiet, be still and listen inside ourselves, and see what wisdom rises. We must take breaks from the constant distractions and noise of our lives, and create moments of reflection. Yes, our modern lives make this hard. But it is imperative that we ground ourselves. Meditate, pray, just sit quietly with your tea and let the hub-bub inside you quiet down. Feel your feelings. All your feelings. Cry if that is what comes. We need reflection in the stillness if we will be clear in our actions.

After we have listened to what is inside us, we must listen deeply to the quiet voices around us, the ones that are buried. How do things look through the eyes of the poor, the young, the immigrants, the persecuted minorities? Our faith also asks us to see from that angle. In these weeks of quiet, let us reflect on what our society looks like to those who are most vulnerable.

Quest

Vol. LXXIII, No 1

January 2018

Whenever you see
a board up with
“Trespassers
will be prosecuted,”
trespass at once.
—Virginia Woolf

A monthly for religious liberals

THINKING ABOUT RESISTANCE

- AWAKE IN THE DARK
Cecilia Kingman
- DISOBEYING HEROD
Thom Belote
- RESISTANCE AS PROPHECY
Emily Wright-Magoon
- FROM YOUR MINISTER
Meg Riley
- RESOURCES FOR LIVING
Lynn Ungar
- RESISTANCE IS FUTILE
Jennifer Toon

The second practice I invite you to engage is Repentance. Sometimes we struggle with repentance; it is hard. In a culture that hates failure, that sees admitting wrongdoing as some kind of weakness, repentance can be very difficult for us. And yet, we do have some things for which we should repent. When we glimpse the story of our society from the underside, we begin to grasp the limits of our own vision. We can see the things we failed to understand before, and places where we failed to act.

Once we see where we failed, we can decide how we will change. We can decide we will act in new ways. For example, when I listen to the voices of people of color, I see where I failed to act against racism and bigotry. My heart aches to see how unaware I was of the suffering of others. Though I am embarrassed and ashamed, I repent of my previous ignorance and inaction.

In the quiet darkness, what can we admit to ourselves? Can we admit that we did not listen enough to those who were crying out in pain? Those of us who are male, can we admit that we did not fully grasp the reality of misogyny in our society? And those of us who are white, can we admit that we were unaware of the depth of racism?

Can we admit that we failed to adequately care for our fragile democratic institutions? Can we all admit that we have not struggled hard enough to protect our planet from climate disaster? Can we confess, quietly, in our own hearts, that we have not really resisted the forces of autocracy and repression that threaten our nation?

These are painful admissions, aren't they? I lie awake in the night and weep for the things I did not do and the warning signs I ignored. In this season of quiet, may I repent of these errors.

It would be so much easier to gloss over our mistakes. It would be so much less painful to stuff some food and

drink and Netflix into the aching emptiness within us.

And yet, that is how we have done things for so long. The powers are counting on us to do it yet again. We cannot give them what they want. We cannot go back to sleep.

Therefore let us repent, so that we stay awake. And after we repent, let us engage this third practice: Resistance.

To begin, we ask an important question: What are we resisting? Resisting begins inside ourselves. We are resisting our own shallow longings to hide from the painful things. We are resisting distraction and numbness. We must try to resist despair.

We must also resist the temptations of hatred. It is easy to succumb to hatred in these hours. But hatred feeds off itself. Hatred is a parasite that consumes its host.

Instead of hatred, in these days we must practice a revolutionary love, the love that Jesus taught and that Gandhi, Romero and so many martyrs practiced.

Instead of hatred, in these days we must practice a revolutionary love, the love that Jesus taught and that Gandhi, Romero and so many martyrs practiced. We must love our enemies, as fiercely as we can. Now, I am talking about a revolutionary love, a love that demands justice. This is loving with our eyes wide open. Our love declares that all beings are within the vast circle of love, even those who oppress others. Because we love all beings, including those who do evil, we will demand that the powerful repent their ways. This is a courageous and ferocious love. And this love is more powerful than hate.

Revolutionary love also gives us the strength to resist forces of hatred that are outside of us—that surround us. There is much to resist in the days ahead. Revolutionary love will concentrate our minds on the most useful actions. We must not flail about, but continue to center ourselves and clarify our purposes.

In these days, we must resist the attempt to normalize things that we know are wrong. We must raise our voices against every erosion of civil society, and every attack against the personhood of another group of people. We must keep alive the structures of resistance we have built, and continue to strengthen the ties between us in this struggle.

These are difficult days. We are being tested. We will be tested ever more greatly. My friends, I do not know if we will succeed. But I do know we must try. As writer Chris Hedges says, paraphrasing the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre: “We don’t fight fascists because we think we can win. We fight fascists because they are fascists.”

This will be a long struggle. We must gird ourselves for a long effort. But when I grow weary in this struggle, I think of my friends in Eastern Europe, particularly my Unitarian friends in Transylvania, Romania. The Unitarians in Romania are a double minority—they are part of the ethnic minority of Hungarians in that country, and they are also a religious minority as Unitarians. Under communism the Hungarian Unitarians were bitterly persecuted. Ceausescu’s dictatorship in the 1970s and 80s was one of the most brutal in Eastern Europe.

And yet, though they suffered terribly through decades of a totalitarian regime, the Hungarian Unitarians survived by using tactics of resistance. First, they managed to keep their faith and their communities intact under the dictatorship. They did so in spite of great peril. And one of the ways that

they survived and endured was by deepening their practice of our Unitarian faith. Though they were persecuted, they continued to tell their stories and teach enduring truths to their children. They concentrated their efforts on passing on traditions to the next generation.

So they taught, surreptitiously, freedom of conscience, compassion, and the value of reason to each new generation. They often used Bible stories like codes, to pass on ideas that were otherwise too dangerous to talk about openly. The churches were places of quiet resistance.

Indeed, the revolution that finally toppled Ceausescu's regime in 1989 was born in a church, not Unitarian but a Reformed Protestant church, where a congregation was courageous enough to name out loud the evil that ruled the land. Dictators hate and fear religious people because they know that the enduring message of compassion and freedom is a threat to their powers. They know that religion calls things by their true names and unmasks evil. Dictators know that when people have their hearts set upon the deepest truths, courage abounds.

The Hungarian Unitarians clung to another important religious practice: Resilience. They cared for one another and their communities with deep practices of resilience. They kept up their common life and practiced joy in the face of oppression. They celebrated the seasons. They cooked and ate meals together. They grew food in small kitchen gardens. They preserved the old ways—like farming and food preservation. They passed on the old skills—woodcarving, weaving, and other crafts—in order to remember their own culture, and thus remember that they were not just citizens of a dictator. They remembered that they were a people, together, with a history that transcended any particular historical moment.

They even preserved the old folk dances, and taught them to their children. Much of folk culture was suppressed under communism. Identity and diversity is a threat to totalitarianism, and so the dictatorship tried to get rid of all forms of folk culture. And yet the folk dances and folk arts were taught, and even revived in the last years of that regime.

In the face of totalitarianism we must remember who we are. We must ground ourselves in our faith. We must cherish our children and tell them our beloved stories. We must practice daily acts of resilience.

These are the four practices I commend to you: Reflection will help us see the whole picture. Repentance will keep our hearts and eyes clear. Resistance will move us into action for the greatest good. And Resilience will keep us strong for the long fight ahead.

In this winter season, don't go back to sleep. In all the seasons to come, don't go back to sleep. Stay awake in the dark, my friends. Stay awake. I am awake, too. Let us be awake together. ■



Our CLF community around the world is full of “resistors” and “capacitors”: people committed to resisting injustice and people committed to increasing the capacity of individuals and communities to respond with compassion and love in a difficult world. Our community is fueled by the contributions of so many who choose to be conduits for connection and growth.

Please join in bringing your energy to the CLF by making a donation of \$100, or whatever is right for you, by visiting www.clfuu.org, or by calling 1-800-231-3027. ■



Disobeying Herod

BY THOM BELOTE,
MINISTER,
THE COMMUNITY
CHURCH OF CHAPEL
HILL, UNITARIAN

UNIVERSALIST, NORTH CAROLINA

While we tend to think of the Three Wise Men as part of the Christmas story, Epiphany—a holiday honoring the visitation of the Magi—is celebrated in January. Which might not be the only reason that contemplating this story could be timely. It is worth noting that in both the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke the story of the birth of Jesus is situated within a particular *political* context. In Luke, what causes Mary and Joseph to set out and travel towards Bethlehem is that the Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus, has called for a registration.

In Matthew, the political context is an awkward and fraught moment in foreign relations. Foreign dignitaries have arrived in Judea, gone to King Herod, and told him: *We're here to meet a newborn child, a child who is the rightful King of this land and this people, for we've read the signs in the heavens and those signs announce that your reign, Herod, is illegitimate. We want to meet the King. It's not you.* (I'm embellishing a little bit here.)

And Herod responds, deviously: *You know, I'd like to meet him, too.*

Historians' opinions of Herod as king are polarized, though few deny that he was a tyrant and a brutal despot. His critics describe him as a madman, an evil genius, someone who would do whatever it takes, no matter how immoral, to pursue his own limitless ambition. Herod was intolerant of dissent. He deployed secret police to spy on the population. He banned protests.

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

He used his power to brutally persecute opponents.

In Matthew, wise men come from the East, following the star. They're identified as magi. We might imagine them as Zoroastrian priests, learned scholars, astrologers. Though the text in Matthew is silent, later tradition would embellish these descriptions, with different branches of Christianity telling the story in different ways. There were three wise men, or twelve. They're given different names in different sects of Christianity. They are said to have all come from Persia; or from India, and Babylonia; or from Europe, Asia, and Africa; or even from China. They are imagined as sorcerers, wizards, kings, saints.

The wise men...are warned in a dream not to return to Herod. So they disobey. They disobey Herod and take a different route home.

But, in the Gospel story, they come from the East. They visit Herod. With profound insecurity and devious cruelty, Herod enlists the wise men in reporting the identity of the child. The wise men journey to Bethlehem, visit the child, pay him homage, and present him with gifts. And then, they are warned in a dream not to return to Herod. So they disobey. They disobey Herod and take a different route home.

The text tells this part with one short sentence, "And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road." But, you can easily imagine all kinds of questions:

- What were the risks of disobeying Herod?
- Did the wise men put their own freedom on the line?

- Did they risk their own lives?
- And, most importantly, how did they find the courage, conscience, conviction, and commitment to say, "No. We are not going to do this. We will disobey"?

People who study authoritarian regimes write about what is necessary for people to resist and to disobey. For instance, researcher and consultant Sarah Kendzior offers the following advice for those facing life under authoritarianism:

Write down what you value, what standards you hold for yourself and for others. Write about your dreams for the future and your hopes for your children. Write about the struggle of your ancestors and how the hardship they overcame shaped the person you are today.

Write your biography, write down your memories... Write a list of things you would never do. Write a list of things you would never believe.

Never lose sight of who you are and what you value. If you find yourself doing something that feels questionable or wrong a few months or years from now, find that essay you wrote on who you are and read it. Ask if that version of yourself would have done the same thing. And if the answer is no? Don't do it.

Perhaps it is as simple as this and as difficult as this. Perhaps what gave the wise men, the magi, the strength and courage to take that other road, to disobey and not return to Herod—and not reveal the identity of the child born in Bethlehem—was simply that they each possessed a strong moral compass. They knew who they were, what they valued, what they could never do and what they could never believe. They knew this deeply.

Another scholar of authoritarianism, Yale history professor Tom Snyder, offers this advice about obedience:

Do not obey in advance. Much of the power of authoritarianism is freely given. In times like these, individuals think ahead about what a more repressive government will want, and then start to do it without being asked... Anticipatory obedience teaches authorities what is possible and accelerates unfreedom.

For Professor Snyder disobedience is a conscious choice that we need to remember we always have.

As I think about the wise men, another source of strength and resilience comes to mind that may have been helpful in causing them to resist, to disobey Herod. Remember, traditions tell us that the wise men came from Persia, India, and Babylon; or from Europe, Asia, and Africa. The wise men are often depicted as coming from different cultures, as having different skin tones, different religions. And maybe you'd think with their different ethnicities and different languages that one of them would cave in, one of them would falter and say, "If I take the road back that Herod told me to take, I could get on his good side. I could earn all his favor for myself."

But, that's not what happens. The three of them walk *together*, take the other road *together*. Today we'd use the term *solidarity*. We'd say they practiced solidarity with one another. I think of Rev. William Barber, so active in North Carolina and beyond. I'm pretty sure if William Barber met the three magi he'd tell them that they are the beginning of a *fusion* movement!

For a fusion movement to work we can't sell one another out. We can't be in it only for ourselves, our own well-being, our own rights, our own survival. We have to realize that our fates, our freedoms, our lives are tied together; none of us can be free until and unless all of us are free.

I recently went to Raleigh, NC, for a Justice and Unity rally. We had more than 1,000 people gathered in a park to

protest a Ku Klux Klan march that was happening in one of the distant corners of our state. We proclaimed our resistance to the march, our resistance to white supremacy, bigotry, and hate in all its forms. The speakers at this rally were mostly people of color, mostly young people. They included immigrants, Muslims, LGBTQ folk.

Like the wise men of the ancient story—like the wise ones through all history—let us pledge to disobey.

It was inspiring.

These gatherings are important. I'm convinced that we are being called to show up, that we are all being called to show up in numbers one hundred times as large. One thousand times as large. Being there and hearing those speakers reminded me of all the people to whom I am accountable, the people for whom I would disobey Herod. The people *with* whom I would disobey Herod.

Remember those words of Tom Snyder. "Much of the power of authoritarianism is freely given. In times like these, individuals think ahead about what a more repressive government will want, and then start to do it without being asked." Obedience, consent, going along are like oil lubricating the gears. Disobedience and dissent grind the gears down.

Like the wise men of the ancient story, like the wise ones through all history, let us pledge to disobey, to resist. Inspired by the words of Edna St. Vincent Millay, let us pledge that,

*[We] will not hold the bridle
while [Death] clinches the girth.
And [Death] may mount by
himself:*

[We] will not give him a leg up. ■

Resistance as Prophecy

BY EMILY WRIGHT-
MAGOON, MINISTER,
UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST CHURCH
OF MIDLAND, TEXAS



One of the most powerful images I have encountered to describe the symbolic location of the prophet is Richard Rohr's concept of living on *the outside edge of the inside*. At the edge, you have not renounced the world, nor are you blindly loyal to it. You have one foot in and one foot out. Or perhaps both feet in but leaning out. Or both feet out but leaning in. Or coming and going, tending the doorway between.

On the outside edge of the inside.

Jesus was a Jew critiquing Judaism. Buddha had awakened from the world but remained within it, teaching to king and beggar alike the Middle Way between the two extremes of indulgence and asceticism.

In our history, Unitarians and Universalists were always on the edge because of their Christian heresies—that all are saved, that God is good, that divinity is within us. And now Unitarian Universalist churches are full of doubters and questioners who nonetheless show up to church—on the outside edge of the inside.

Many of us probably know what it feels like to be on the outside edge of the inside—circles we navigate where we don't quite fit in, but can't quite give up on completely: a teacher trying to transform the educational system; a consumer trying to minimize their ecological footprint and question the system itself; a citizen in an imperfect democracy working to fix it by protest, by voting, and by organizing; an artist who learns the rules to break them, and then puts their work where those who most need to see it can see it.

Richard Rohr says:

[The prophet] is always on the edge of the inside. Not an outsider throwing rocks, not a comfortable insider who defends the status quo, but one who lives precariously... It is a unique kind of seeing and living, which will largely leave the prophet with "nowhere to lay his head" (Luke 21:16-17)... You can only truly unlock systems from within, but then you are invariably locked out. When you live on the edge of the inside, you will almost wish you were outside. [But] then you are merely an enemy... a persona non grata, and can largely be ignored or written off. But if you are both inside and outside, you are the ultimate threat, the ultimate reformer and the ultimate invitation.

It takes courage and strength to live on the edge of the inside. All of the prophets said, "Why Me? Who am I to do this? What if I get it wrong? What if they don't listen? Choose him/her instead."

But they do it, because they are called by God. For non-theists, imagine it as a longing, a knowing, a fire in the belly, a gnawing at your conscience, a spark in your mind... and then an *action* on that pull.

We all have the power to be prophetic—or at the least (and this is not small), to do our part to support prophets. Unitarian Universalist Rev. Dr. Rebecca Ann Parker says, "It is a mistake to see [the prophet] as an isolated, heroic individual. It is better to see [them] as the crest of a wave."

We, as individuals and as a religion, can be part of that wave.

If we do our part to stay awake, to question, to act up, who knows what great prophecy—what great vision—might rise to the top of our collective wave? ■



From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY
SENIOR MINISTER,
CHURCH OF THE
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

There are many ways to resist. Some folks are in the streets or other strategic places, engaged in direct actions to shut down oppressive systems, and that kind of resistance is getting a lot of attention these days—for good reason!

But in the course of every day, everyone is resisting multiple things in multiple ways. Basically, any time someone wants us to do something we don't really want to do, our (expressed or unexpressed) patterns of resistance emerge. Just as oppression is perpetuated through millions of acts of injustice, large and small, so resistance can take place at any scale.

There are many ways to resist.

Take, for instance, the baby I live with. He's not yet into the full throes of tantrums that two-year-olds are famous for, such as yelling "NO!" and refusing to do what is asked. But if he doesn't want his diaper changed he can corkscrew his body faster than an Olympic gold medalist so that I can barely get a fresh one fastened.

His older sister, on the other hand, is much more prone to passive resistance. When the eight-year-old's mother says something like, "Time to set the table!" this child's general response is to say "OK" and then to keep doing exactly what she is already doing. Often it takes two or three louder and louder demands from her mother to move her to whatever the new activity is. That's passive resistance!

As I contemplate ways to resist injustice, I'm open to learning what I can from people of all ages and from other species—plants, insects, mammals.

How do we manage to keep ourselves whole despite the intention of others that we bend to their way of being? I practice a wide variety of forms of resistance.

Many of the ways that I resist are located in my social identities of privilege and presumed "harmlessness," which I am keenly aware are not shared by all. Others will need to employ different methods. But here are ten ways that I practice resistance in a range of situations. Words in quotations are things I might say that are, if you look at them, all forms of resistance. (As the numbers below get smaller, I am increasingly direct and more challenging of authority.)

10. "I'm not sure what you're talking about." I pretend not to have gotten a bill or email or voicemail I didn't want to see. You can say this to someone's face, too, if they say something you don't like. Blinking helps.

9. "Is what you're saying kind of like the War of 1812 / eggplant parmesan / lizards?" This one was well practiced in junior high—asking irrelevant questions to teachers who were occasionally delighted by our curiosity enough to forget about the planned quiz. Distraction can be resistance.

8. "Silly me; I just can't figure out how to type / yodel / change tires." Incompetence can take you a long way! My friend Pam worked at MacDonald's, where she was instructed always to ask people if they wanted more. (If they ordered a burger, would they want fries? Etc.) She used the "Silly me" form of resistance very well. If someone said they wanted a burger, she'd say, "How about five?" If they wanted a happy meal, she'd say, "Why not feed your kid something more substantial? How about a super-sized meal?" Finally her boss told her to stop, believing that she was very, very thick-headed, when truly she was a genius.

7. "I'm super busy; can we talk about this next week / month / year?" Busy-

ness is so normalized in our culture that this one can buy you a lot of time.

6. "That's not making sense to me; can you explain it again?" This is a question to make someone line out, over and over, things that don't make sense, until they (perhaps!) begin to realize themselves that what they are saying is nonsensical or irrational.

5. "What you're saying has not been my experience / the experience of people I know. Would you like to know what I've observed?" This is a way to resist oppressive statements by other people without directly challenging them. Asking them to say yes or no to your question puts them into the hot seat and takes you out of it, at least for a minute. If they say no, they'll need to admit they don't want to know what you've observed.

4. "This doesn't feel like a real conversation." You've said you don't care about my experience, but you expect me to care about yours. Do you think only your experience is real?" Again, this shifts the onus onto them.

3. "You say that you care about X but when you do Y it feels like all you care about is Z." This is a formula that can work with elected officials or other public figures about decisions they make which contradict their espoused values. Again, it hands them back the need to explain themselves.

2. "I won't be spending my money / subscribing to this publication / using this platform / joining this group so long as you continue to XYZ." Use this one with extreme caution—you can only have credibility doing this once! Make sure you have a new bank / news source / political organization that will work better for you before you dramatically leave.

1. "NO! HELL NO!" Full-on stop business as usual obstruction. There are times when it's the best choice.

Good luck honing your own techniques for resistance. We need them all! ■

January 2018

REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR, MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN LEARNING, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP



One of the important ways of understanding this month's theme of resistance is in terms of resisting injustice, or fighting back against the powers of evil, like the Resistance in the *Star Wars* movies. We practice resistance any time we push back against oppression.

We also, however, practice resistance when we push back against things that are not evil, unjust or oppressive, and in fact might be just what we need to learn and grow. Psychologists use the term resistance to describe the ways people actively avoid insights that challenge the stories they tell themselves. We resist uncomfortable truths that push us to change how we act, or how we see ourselves in the world.

This kind of resistance is natural, and maybe inevitable. People tend to want to keep things stable, even if the way things are isn't working very well. Many of us have at some point stayed in a friendship or a job or a romantic relationship or a religious community that really wasn't right for us, because we just couldn't face the change involved in leaving. And most of us have probably clung to stories or ideas about ourselves or history or how the world works even in the face of evidence that the stories we are holding on to just aren't true.

Plenty of people were upset, for instance, when astronomers decided that Pluto wasn't a planet, just a big ball of ice hanging out in our solar system—and not the only one, at that. *But...but...I learned in school that our solar system has nine planets! What do you mean there are only eight? I liked our littlest planet out there in the far reaches of our solar system. Why do you have to take it away from me? That voice of protest? That's resistance.*

Of course, resistance shows up in ways that are far deeper and more personal than how we feel about a planet getting down-

graded. Have you ever thought that you'd love to run a 5K or try painting with oils or join a robotics team or audition for a play—only to have a voice inside insist that it would never work or that you would just make a fool of yourself? That's resistance pushing against the idea that you could change the story of who you are or what you can do.

But there are also ways, just as deep and just as difficult, that we resist changing stories of who we are as a nation or a community or a culture. In the US resistance has even gone as far as violence, when people have pushed back against acknowledging that statues honoring confederate heroes have been placed in the public square in order to glamorize and excuse a history of slavery and white supremacy.

When we resist knowing and acknowledging the full complexity of the stories that shape our identity, whether those are family stories or national ones, we disconnect not only from the truth of the world we live in, but also from the complex truth of who we are and how we are in relationship with others. Resistance to the truth narrows our world and limits our ability to respond creatively.

For instance, resistance to the painful truth of climate change leads to policies that refuse to engage in a wide range of practical things we could do right now to reduce the impact of climate disruption.

Uncomfortable truths are, well, uncomfortable. There's no way around it. But we can learn to recognize what it feels like—the tension in the chest, the sinking feeling in the gut, the denials in the mind—and sit with them long enough that we become able to respond in the spirit of curiosity rather than fear or anger.

Resistance, for better or for worse,

Resistance needs to walk hand in hand with curiosity. A faith that unsettles us may also be what moves us forward into the land of possibility.

We get attached to stories that foster pride in who we are and where we came from. It's only natural to cherish and repeat those stories, and in many ways it's a good thing. But the real picture is often more complicated than we were led to believe.

Jefferson was a brilliant architect of democracy and a slaveholder who chose his economic interest over any kind of justice for the people whose lives he controlled. Margaret Sanger was a pioneer for birth control and reproductive rights and she embraced eugenics, holding a deeply distorted view of who should be born and who should not. Pioneers for women's suffrage were courageous heroes fighting for women's rights and many of them were willing to throw the cause of abolition under the bus to get there.

means pushing back against something. At times, pushing back is the best thing that we can do. Some things need to be pushed back before they overrun us all. But at other times we push back against the very things that might save us. And so resistance needs to walk hand in hand with curiosity. A faith that unsettles us may also be what moves us forward into the land of possibility. ■





Church of the Larger Fellowship
Unitarian Universalist

24 Farnsworth Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02210-1409 USA

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BOSTON, MA
PERMIT NO. 55362

Did You Know

that you can read blog posts from our ministers Meg and Lynn, as well as other UUs, on our website at www.clfuu.org?

Quest Monthly Editorial Team: Stefan Jonasson, Janet Lane, Kat Liu, Beth Murray, Meg Riley, Jaco ten Hove, Arliss Ungar, Lynn Ungar, editor

Copyright 2018 Church of the Larger Fellowship. Generally, permission to reproduce items from *Quest Monthly* is granted, provided credit is given to the author and the CLF. ISSN 1070-244X

CLF Staff: Meg Riley, senior minister; Jody Malloy, executive director; Lynn Ungar, minister for lifespan learning and *Quest Monthly* editor; Jorge Espinel, Latino ministries; Jeremy Nickel, minister of SacredVR; Mandy Goheen, director of prison ministries; Joshua Claudio, director of development; Lori Stone Sirtosky, director of technology; Beth Murray, program administrator; Judy DiCristofaro, fiscal administrator; Hannah Eller-Isaacs, social media coordinator and administrative assistant; Andrea Fiore, webmaster.

Learning Fellows: Kevin W. Jagoe and Jessica Star Rockers



Web Site www.clfuu.org — Email clf@clfuu.org — Toll-Free Line 800-231-3027 or 617-948-6150

CLF Jewelry at *inSpirit*, The UU Book and Gift Shop 800-215-9076

CLF Unitarian Universalist, 24 Farnsworth Street, Boston MA 02210-1409 USA

When Resistance is Futile

BY JENNIFER, CLF MEMBER INCARCERATED IN TEXAS

The term *resistance* is a highly charged word for any prisoner. We are reminded daily by authority figures that to resist our situation is pretty pointless. As the famous line from *Star Trek: The Next Generation* goes, “Resistance is futile.” We know that authority can abuse power, but for the most part the struggle against our incarceration really does make our lives worse.

A better way to cope is to stop resisting, let go, and allow experience to teach us. That’s a valuable spiritual lesson, too. Many of us fight so hard, not against injustice as we should, but against the things that life presents to us that we do not want. To resist and struggle constantly about everything unpleasant in life diverts our attention from the deeper lessons that the spirit yearns to learn. There is a time to resist and a time to surrender. Without both, change and growth is impossible. ■

