

*At this time in history,
we are to take nothing personally,
least of all ourselves,
for the moment we do,
our spiritual growth and journey come to a halt . . .
All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner
and in celebration.
For we are the ones we have been waiting for.
—from the Elders of the Hopi Nation*

To Surrender Like a Duck

The Covenant

(Read in unison)

L. Griswold Williams

**LOVE IS THE DOCTRINE OF THIS CHURCH,
THE QUEST OF TRUTH IS ITS SACRAMENT,
AND SERVICE IS ITS PRAYER.**

**TO DWELL TOGETHER IN PEACE,
TO SEEK KNOWLEDGE IN FREEDOM,
TO SERVE HUMAN NEED,
TO THE END THAT ALL SOULS SHALL
GROW INTO HARMONY WITH THE DIVINE—
THUS DO WE COVENANT WITH EACH OTHER.**

Opening Words

In her book, *Perseverance*, Margaret J. Wheatley reminds us, “The word ‘perseverance’ in Latin means ‘one who sees through to the end,’ ‘one who doesn’t yield.’ In English, it describes how we maintain our activity in spite of difficulties. Tenacity, steadfastness, persistence, doggedness—these are all common synonyms.

“In Chinese, the character for perseverance, often the same as the one used for patience, is a knife poised over a heart.

“Human experience is the story of perseverance. Throughout space and time, humans have always persevered. We wouldn’t be here without them. Think of all the people you know—family, friends, strangers—who have just kept going, who didn’t yield, who were tenacious, steadfast, patient.

“How would you describe them? What were some of their traits? Their capacities? What was it like to be around them, to listen to their stories? What do we all need to learn from them now?”

Chalice Lighting

(Read in unison)

Rev. Paul Sprecher

**WE LIGHT THIS CHALICE IN MEMORY OF THE COURAGE
OF THOSE WHO HAVE STRUGGLED FOR FREEDOM;
THE PERSISTENCE OF THOSE WHO HAVE STRUGGLED
FOR JUSTICE,
AND THE LOVE OF THOSE WHO HAVE BUILT
BELOVED COMMUNITIES
TO CARRY ON THE LIGHT OF HOPE.**

Time for All Ages

Sit In: How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down

Andrea Davis Pinkney and Brian Pinkney

Delivered by Joyce Duncan

[Text not available. Summary: This is a true story of four college-age friends—David, Joseph, Franklin, and Ezell—who in 1960, inspired by the words and deeds of Dr. Martin Luther King, sat at a “whites only” lunch counter in Woolworth’s, and placed an order for doughnuts and coffee with cream on the side, an order which was never filled—because they were black. The students and more of their friends returned daily to the lunch counter, only to be denied service. Unable to get food, they remained polite as they studied and read, and endured taunts and assaults from white customers.

As news of their quiet demonstration spread, similar actions by other students, black and white, ensued in other states and cities. Despite continued harassment and displays of hatred, the students remained courteous and peaceful, determined to adhere to Dr. King’s admonition to meet violence with non-violence. Even when they were arrested, they maintained their dignity.

Their perseverance in the face of hatred led to the creation of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which banned segregation in public spaces.]

Prayer/Meditation

Let us continue in the spirit of prayer with a meditation on perseverance by Mark Nepo entitled *Surrender Like a Duck*.

He wrote: “It was years ago, but I remember it clearly. I was walking along the shore of a lake in the middle of the day, and there in the sun, a good ten yards out, was a duck curled into itself, asleep. With its slick tufted head tucked into its body, it bobbed peacefully in the lapping of the water.

This little scene undid me, for here was an ultimate lesson in trust. Without any intent or knowledge of itself, this little duck, asleep in the womb of the world, was a deep and wordless teacher. If only I—if only we—could surrender this completely to the mystery of life, we would be carried and renewed.

It was obvious that the duck would wake and swim its little patterns on the water, but this little creature's

ability to let go so completely allowed its time on Earth to be filled and saturated—if just for a few minutes—with a depth of peace that only surrender can open us to.

Only rarely have I let go this completely, yet those moments of total surrender have thoroughly changed my life. When struck with cancer, I somehow fell from the ledge of my fear and entered the operating room like this little duck. It was the threshold to the other side. When lonely and afraid to reach out, I have somehow collapsed repeatedly into the ocean of another's love, and it has cleansed my weary heart. And in my search now for wisdom to live by, I stumble at times and surrender what I think I know, so completely, that I find myself adrift in a deeper way that is neither wise nor unwise, but simply life-affirming.”

Mark Nepo on surrendering like a duck.

In moments of silence, let us breathe deeply. Release whatever heaviness is weighing down your heart or spirit.

See yourself as that little duck, and feel the lapping of the mystery all around you. Feel its buoyancy.

For ten seconds, let the water of life carry you.

Stewardship Testimonial

Nancy Seligson

Good morning.

My name is Nancy Seligson, and by now I'm sure you've seen enough congregants get up to speak to guess that I have been asked to speak today, as a new member of TUUC, about stewardship and why I pledge monthly.

As I sat down to write something, I was mindful of what Clare wrote in our TUUC newsletter about the theme for the month of February being *Perseverance*, and a reminder that, while we can all shoulder that boulder endlessly back up the mountain, the whole idea of being here is that we do not have to do it alone. And isn't that the critical piece of the human experience that has brought us here?

My journey to the UU Church started the day I was standing in my privileged family's Episcopal church, looking around at all of the ladies in their hats, reflecting on my family's somewhat esteemed Baltimore history and what made us Episcopalian and therefore correct, when I realized that I do not believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth—nor in Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord—although his teachings are lovely. I came a step closer to being UU when I visited Europe one summer and came home with a new best friend—Debbie Biro from Brooklyn. I went to visit her family, and they introduced me to bagels the size of my head, and to a kind of family I had never encountered before. Nobody was being polite. Hands were in each other's plates. It was loud. It was so happy. There was a whole world of possibility out there for me to discover—for me to choose—which I had never even imagined.

Choosing powerfully is ultimately what led me to the miracle of the UU Church. You see, I created the church in my mind before I discovered it. After years of not attending church, while lying next to my Jewish husband one morning, I said out loud, “I want to find a place that teaches kids ABOUT religion but does not

indoctrinate them. Wouldn't it be cool if there were a church that delivered messages for us to think about that got us inspired—while pulling from all kinds of texts and teachings? And then I wandered into the Westport Unitarian Church and was simply amazed by what I had come up with.

We moved back to Baltimore to be close to my mom. It took me a while, but I finally made it down from our house in horse country to check out this congregation. And I must tell you, without taking a thing from Westport, what a spectacular place TUUC is. What Joyce and all of the teachers in RE are up to is beyond impressive. The choir—thank you for sharing your gifts with both services every week and for providing us with beautiful music. And Clare. Clare is my dream pastor. A natural leader. A deep thinker. A beacon of Unitarianism and a fabulous role model for my daughter, Claire. Week after week she delivers sermons that make me proud to be UU.

I found myself chasing Monica Sweidel with my checkbook. It is not a fat checkbook, and our family is about a million miles an hour with two jobs and long commutes—all to earn and save money for us. So we can retire one day.

Several weeks ago, my son, Nate leaned over and asked me why so many people in the congregation have grey hair. I thought about it for a moment and said, “Because chronologically gifted people know what’s important. We spend our lives running around, trying to make money and raise our kids, and then, when that is done, many people realize that the most important thing of all is being connected to other people and making a difference. So they come here.”

And don't UUs show up? Don't we band together and hit the street for what is right? Do we stand on the side of love? Together. Pushing that boulder up the hill—because it needs to get there. And we cannot do it alone.

I've taken a job that puts me to work on the weekends, and I am not here nearly as much as I would like to be. But it is my pleasure to share some treasure with this marvelous organization that stands for everything I know to be true, real and important. Thank you for welcoming me and my family.

Reading

(9: 30 service)

from *Perseverance*

Margaret J. Wheatley

In second service, Senator Jim Brochin will share his experience of perseverance as a legislator seeking to pass the Repeat Sexual Predator Prevention Act. But as we heard in our time for all ages, delegates and senators are not the only ones who persevere to make the world a better place.

[Text not available. Summary: Dr. Wheatley asserts that throughout history, people have always stepped forward to instigate change. Some succeed; some do not. But all change begins with an idea, and a willingness to serve, by speaking up, even when leaders are silent. And when stymied, those who would succeed assess their own failures and seek new opportunities. Refusing to accept defeat, they persevere without violence, stepping forward, together, and seeking “the energy of ‘Yes.’” These “spiritual warriors” make change happen in the world.

The Bad Acts Bill

(11:15 service)

Senator Jim Brochin

Margaret Wheatley writes: “Getting engaged in changing things is quite straightforward. If we have an idea, or want to resolve an injustice, or stop a tragedy, we step forward to serve.”

Senator Jim Brochin stepped up and was first elected to serve in the Maryland Senate in 2003. So he is well acquainted with perseverance. It’s a pleasure to welcome Jim back to TUUC to talk about persevering to pass legislation.

[Text of Senator Brochin’s remarks is unavailable.]

Homily

To Surrender Like a Duck

Rev. Clare Petersberger

This week, I had some unplanned time to think about the image of the duckling asleep in the water, trusting the water to hold it and carry it; to think about David, Joseph, Franklin, and Ezell sitting quietly while people reacted around them, trusting that non-violent disobedience would make a difference; and to think about Margaret Wheatley’s definition of spiritual warriors, who are brave and trust themselves to be of service. Most of all, I had some unplanned time to think about the relationship of perseverance and letting go.

If you had asked me about my image of perseverance before Friday morning, I think I would have cited an image from childhood—the little engine who chugged along with the mantra, “I think I can, I think I can, I think I can.” One who does not yield.

Then, Friday morning, I awoke with an ache in my left side and discomfort in my groin—warning signs in me of a kidney stone on the move—which I tried to ignore. I drank water to flush it out. The water came back up. The pain intensified. By early afternoon, I had to accept the reality that determination alone was not improving my situation. I was not going to be able to will myself into feeling better and staying hydrated.

Don and I headed off to Patient First. It was crowded with people who had to let go of their expectations and plans for Friday—because of flu, broken bones, cuts, and allergic reactions. Nurses and doctors moved gracefully among people and cubicles to offer healing. A friend texted, “Relax and let go.” I didn’t know how until the nurse gave me a shot of Toradol. Then I knew exactly how that little duckling felt bobbing on the water—trusting that everything was and would be all right.

Letting go is not often a quality that we associate with perseverance. So it’s good to remember that perseverance is not synonymous with permanence. Perseverance requires adapting to change and to the unexpected. Often it requires adapting to loss, betrayal, and setbacks.

David, Joseph, Franklin, and Ezell wanted a doughnut and coffee, with cream on the side. Instead, they had coffee, poured down their backs and milkshakes, thrown in their faces. They practiced being spiritual warriors. They did not respond with hatred or violence. They let go of expectations and judgment. They sat in silence. The world watched and was moved by their quiet dignity. Integration became the law of the land.

Letting go of a particular outcome helps our democracy to move forward. Compromise is not weakness; it is strength. Compromise is about what we can mutually promise one another about how to live out the values we identify as worthy of our collective commitment.

What has life taught you about the role of letting go of particular assumptions, expectations, and judgments in order to persevere? When, like David, Joseph, Franklin, and Ezell have you exemplified being a spiritual warrior in spite of set-backs and disappointments? What moral issues have claimed your devotion year after year, even when bending the moral arc of the universe towards justice feels excruciatingly slow?

As Nancy reminded us, this religious community helps us to persevere in the face of chaos in ourselves, in our families, and outside in the wider world. Whether you place your trust in God, goddess, or the spirit of life; or this community of people seeking to buoy each other up to leave a legacy of making a difference; or the currents of the democratic process, or the ebb and flow of existence, here, in your search for wisdom to live by, may you, like Mark Nepo, “occasionally surrender what you think you know, so completely, that you find yourself, like the duckling, adrift in a deeper and more life affirming way.”

And in so doing, let us continue to help one another to persevere.

Closing Words

Rev. Maureen Killoran

No matter how weak or how frightened we may feel, we each have gifts that can make a difference in the world. In this coming week, may you do at least one thing to support the broken; to welcome the stranger; to celebrate what is worthy; to do the work of justice and love.

Be strong.

Be connected.

Each day, act—so you may be a little more whole.

GO NOW IN PEACE