

***Grounded in Resilience: Born for the Storm***  
**Sunday Service**  
**First Unitarian Church of Oakland**  
**November 25, 2012**

**Rev. Kurt A. Kuhwald**

I come to you this morning with a full heart. I am so ... damned glad ... to be standing here, standing here in this little cabin of truth telling, this deep chamber where the authentic heart-mind speaks, this radical cauldron for honest talk, this trumpet place for the prophetic. In my love-hate relationship with Unitarian Universalism, that's gone on now for 27 years ... *THIS* is the love part ... the part where justice and celebration take center stage, where the intersection of all that's corrosive in our lives, and in this beleaguered world—and all that's admirable, and strong, and compassionate and good—intersect ... and we get to look into the heart of what matters, we get to look into the complexity of it all ... and we get to experience some shift of mind, some healing at the soul level, the deep self level ....

Here in this precious hour, we get to experience a sense of renewal, a sense of renewal that is grounded in “Thank god I’m alive! Thank god I’m alive ... here ... now ... in *this* world, this outrageously beautiful, savage, and wondrous world.” In this brief moment in the daily round of our lives, we tap into the realization that we’ve got a chance to make it better, to make it righter, and brighter and to make it more beautiful—to heal it, in some way, some essential way.

It makes me happy to be here, because I get to be with *you*. I get to be with you ... for one whole undistracted hour when we can touch into the center of our lives, touch-in, down where the Deep River Runner Path is strong, sure and wild with life. We get to be with each other in ways that are rare in this world. We get to be with each other ritually—where ritual means creating space, and time, for the authentic transformation of our lives to take place—means entering an alternative moment, a time-altered moment, when we can touch what we are *really* made of, where we can let the truth speak . . . unafraid of any consequences, unabashed, unsullied, unrepentant, unvarnished, unruly, unlocked, unhinged and unstoppable.

Let me say that again: Here we enter an alternative moment, a time-altered moment . . . where we can touch what we are *really* made of, where we can let the truth speak . . . unafraid of any consequences, unabashed, unsullied, unrepentant, unvarnished, unruly, unlocked, unhinged and unstoppable.

Church, you see—ritual church on Sunday mornings at First Unitarian of Oakland, you see—is where we get to meet our Maker, the Maker of our lives. We get to meet the deep sources that give us energy, feeling, consciousness . . . and most of all . . . love. Some people call that complex Maker God or Goddess, some call it Evolution, some call it Spirit, or Force, or Nature, or Community . . . some people refuse to call it anything at all.

I don't call it, it calls me, it calls me in ways that are mysterious and compelling, in ways that help me realize just how stupendously amazing this thing called life really is.

Would you feel it with me now. Feel it with me, and maybe you can also feel the gratitude rise, the gratitude that comes when we breath deep into our bodies and realize, even if just a little, our aliveness. We are alive! Praise Be!

Let us just for a moment, feel that aliveness, together.

***Jamie Sieber (Lush Mechanique) CD . . . . . play from the first piece (two minutes) . . . . .***

Thank you and hallelujah.

There's a famous quote I've used from this pulpit before, a quote by Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman, the founder of All People's Church in San Francisco, the first truly racially mixed congregation in the U.S., that taps that sense of aliveness, and leads to its logical conclusion, our active life in this world. Dr. Thurman said, "Don't ask what the world

needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”

So don't be fooled into thinking that this hour is a nice time to be together. Don't be fooled by that bromide, that Country Club nonsense, that consumerist superficializing blather. It's not nice in here ... it's Real. Real ... that's spelled H – O – L – Y, Holy. Real ... that's spelled S – A – C – R – E – D, Sacred.

What that spells is a different kind of Reality, a reality different than consumerism; a reality that stands against hyper-masculine militarism that has drawn this country into war with its bloated military every decade since 1945; a reality far different than the one, that until two weeks ago and Hurricane Sandy, continued to have some kind of board-based traction that denied that the Earth's climate is changing, continued to deny that indeed the whole living body of the Earth is changing.

The reality that we enter here is a cauldron for our aliveness and that aliveness is sourced in the powerful impulses of the deep heart—that great engine of our goodness—impulses that compel us to give to others, to truly engage in work that heals, to choose work that challenges the destructive powers that abuse the Earth and all her creatures and systems—the deep impulses that dissent from human ugliness raw with greed, the deep impulses that unrelentingly transform our tentativeness into courage, that build new and resilient ways of living. That is the reality we enter here ... if we dare. (Please understand that coming to church, being in here for the service is NOT a passive activity where you come in and sit and receive. It requires that you are active internally, working with your own consciousness and heart, and reaching out to the others here!)

We need the reality that is met by those deep impulses for aliveness and engagement ... we dearly, desperately need them. We need them because we are in trouble. We are in deep, deep trouble as a human species. Do not be fooled. We are in the kind of trouble that stirs the archetypes of apocalypse, that stirs subterranean fears ... because this massive intertwined tangle of problems that is strangling the life of the planet threatens

the human project, threatens the very survival of the human species, at least in any form recognizable by us now.

Last weekend I attended the American Academy of Religion in Chicago. I was there along with 10,000 other professors and students of religion (that's right, I said 10,000)—students of the anthropology, sociology, and philosophy of religion and its practicability in today's world. There was one main theme that kept reoccurring: Life is complex. Living life on this planet as human animals is enormously complex. Facing the issues that are sweeping across this earth in this planet time, in all their wildly, ever more frequently violent, intersections, is complex.

Complexity, in fact, is one of the most powerful and defining characteristics of human life, of all life, and of all Earth's dynamic systems—and that has never been more true than it is now.

You all know the litany of difficulties that are intersecting now around us and through us—you all know the list of social and environmental problems that are so intense it is almost impossible to stay cognizant of their power and their presence in our lives. The reality of these compounding problems, nevertheless, has taken up residence in the depths of our beings . . . but they are hidden from our full awareness, due to their enormity and the radical pain they stir when we allow them to be fully present in our consciousness: from the horrible tragedy of Gaza to the irradiated waters of Fukushima to the bulldozed forests of the Amazon to the vicious gulag of the American prison system (hidden from the mainstream that assaults communities of color systematically and viciously) to the growing chaos of the global weather system, spawning killer storms with ever ferocious regularity and on and on . . . and they all intersect, spasmodically yet surely, virulently yet treacherously like flailing strands of razor wire. You know them, and so much more. You know them and can't keep them visible and sensible on the table of your awareness. The painful power of them drives us into numbness where we disassociate from the pain they cause us.

And so we need to do a number of things to build the tensile, moral and collective strength to keep our vision open, compassionate and functional, today I particularly want to turn toward the question of what we can possibly rely on to face the fate we and mostly our children and our children's children will inevitably be forced to encounter.

I want to return to that amazing book, *A Paradise Built in Hell*, by San Francisco resident, Rebecca Solnit that I referenced in another sermon two years ago.

Solnit's task in the book was simple: to uncover how people really respond to disasters, to catastrophic, destructive events such as the 1906 San Francisco and 1985 Mexico City earthquakes, and such as Katrina and 9/11. She reveals that contrary to reports from media and governmental agencies that depict people turning into criminals—or worse, into some kind of rabid or crazed animals (picture the distorted and false story that people of color turned into a lawless mob in the Super Dome during Hurricane Katrina; check the facts, it was media driven, supported by the Machiavellian intentions of those in power)—contrary to that story, people are self-organizing for survival and courageously and compassionately engage in mutual support; people show a high degree of selflessness—even when desperately in need of the basic materials for life.

One description of the book stated: “The most startling thing about disasters . . . is not merely that so many people rise to the occasion, but that they do so with joy. That joy reveals an ordinarily unmet yearning for community, purposefulness, and meaningful work that disaster often provides. These spontaneous acts, emotions, and communities suggest that many of the utopian ideals of the past century are not only possible, but latent in every day life. A disaster can be a moment when the forces that keep these ideals from flowering, these desires from being realized, fall away.”

Fall away . . . revealing what? Fall away revealing the core of the human heart, the central driving vision of the human project, embedded in the human heart-mind.

What is most important to me about her findings is what it implies about human nature itself that inspired this Sermon's title: "Grounded in Resilience, Born for the Storm." That is, human evolution, as a function of the Earth's natural processes and those of the vast and mysterious Universe itself, has given us the resilience and the power to survive . . . through our innate love and compassion, courage, inventiveness, authentic altruism and willing sacrifice—and further than we ever imagined, to use all these with dignity and Joy.

Surviving the coming global storms, that many wise people believe will inevitably unravel civilization as we know it, is not a matter of technology (forget the Google boys who believe that all that is needed is a technological fix), it is not a matter of technology, it is a matter of the human spirit . . . the human spirit come alive. Fully facing disaster makes us come alive. Dr. Thurmond's ringing words echo again: *"Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."*

Then let *this* be the message we carry as we step in to the unknown dynamics and consequences of the great storm into which we travel ever more deeply: We are Grounded in Resilience. We are Born for the Storm.

Let us, then, be about the work of facing the facts before us. Let us honestly and fully face our reality, not only with clarity, but with dignity. And, then, let us tap the personal and collective strength that is our natural inheritance, from a stance of maturity and courage that sings with our deepest aliveness. This is the great work we have been called to do.

The time of denial and retreat is at an end.

The time for a radical commitment to life and this planet is at hand.

Every one of us is needed.

*Mitakuye Oyasin.*

Ashé. Amen. Ameen. Shalom & Blessed Be.

Spacibo. Gracias y Namasté.