

I had a text that I really wanted to work with. We heard it earlier – from Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai, called “The Place Where We Are Right.” Born in 1924, and having died in 2000, he experienced much of Israel’s struggle for self-definition over the first 50 years or so of its existence – arguably a good case in point relative to the issue of discerning what is “right,” and who is “right.”

And then today is Palm Sunday, of course, which Amanda spoke of earlier. It deserves some attention in anticipation of both upcoming Jewish and Christian holidays and how we understand them in this tradition.

And then there were the marches yesterday – millions of people of all ages all over the world getting out to support our youth – our children who are SO VERY CLEAR they need to be heard. I saw this sweet little boy who can’t have been more than 6 or 7 carrying a sign that was nearly as tall and way wider than he was. “Never again,” it said. Can you imagine what he might have been thinking, walking with his parents and watching – from his not-very-tall vantage point – the numbers of people around him, and why he was there?

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Well, we have to start somewhere – so let’s start with Jesus. We don’t always cover the details of his story especially well in our Unitarian Universalist environments. (If you’re interested in a direct read, try the Gospel of Mark, who does a sort of hour-by-hour coverage of the week.) We likely know the basics. Jesus had been in the desert, struggling to decide a path forward – that’s what the season of Lent is all about, right? He is tempted by Satan and has to make a decision. He chooses to return to Jerusalem to confront the power authorities – in today’s vernacular, “to speak truth to power.” We are mistaken if we imagine his criticism was about Judaism. His nemesis was the empire. And HIS march was likely not all that big, and attended primarily by peasants who were following him. He rode in on a donkey – not exactly a majestic beast, by some standards, though I heard a quote recently in a TEDx talk about the American Dream. “You might be a success by standards you have not yet honored.” So we’ll hold off on judging the donkey just now.

Jesus was there, in Jerusalem, to represent an idea. In the context of the culture of domination that was first-century Jerusalem where the poor suffered (let’s see if this sounds familiar) political oppression and economic exploitation, he represented a different way of being, one that turned a mirror on inequity and said all people are worthy, all people deserve love, respect and compassion. We can be a kingdom of peace.

On the other side of Jerusalem was another march. It was Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, representing the power of the empire by returning to Jerusalem during the days of Passover – not to be there out of respect to the Jews and their religious practices, but to make sure nothing went wrong, that there was no trouble. We are reminded by Marcus Borg, co-author with John Dominic Crossan of *The Last Week*, “There often was, especially at Passover, a festival that celebrated the Jewish people’s liberation from an earlier empire.”

So, on one side of Jerusalem is this humble, ragtag march of poor people, following a man who claims there is kingdom of God available here among them, preaching peace to the nations. And on the other side of Jerusalem is Pilate, “at the head of a column of imperial cavalry and soldiers,” representing all the power and violence of the ruling empire.

The two processions “embody the central conflict of the week that led to Jesus’s crucifixion.” The question that Borg and Crossan offer us in their explication is which march, which procession might we choose to be in? Would we find ourselves celebrating with the powers that be – with the nice horses and familiar power structures – or trudging just ahead of the donkey, laying down palm fronds for this construct of love and hope for the poor and oppressed?

Does this sound like a trick question to you? Or an easy one? Because we’ve got some similar choices in the present tense, don’t we?

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Let’s go back and take a look at Yehuda Amichai’s poem for a minute.

There’s a gathering thing that was pretty popular in UU circles a while back. We would start services or get-togethers by saying, “It is good to be.” And then, “It is good to be here.” And finally, and poignantly: “It is good to be here, together.” It was dramatic, you know, after a fashion, and one could offer it quite emotionally, though I confess . . . it had its day.

But I guess I was thinking of that when I came across Amichai’s haunting poem, “The Place Where We Are Right.” The poem itself lingered with me because it feels so familiar to our current environment, so many of us having claimed a side that we defend as “right,” so often unwilling to consider the claim of the other who also (by the way) feels, without hesitation or apology . . . right. And if Amichai’s poem makes sense to us, we are both or all left on cold, barren, unfertile ground –

*From the place where we are right
flowers will never grow
in the spring.*

*The place where we are right
is hard and trampled
like a yard.*

We can imagine this poem reflecting the political struggle that plagues Israel still, and yet it applies beyond Israelis, I think, and is also a deeply personal statement.

Do you feel that place? The place where we are right? Have you been there? Either in your political thinking, or even, sometimes, oh, maybe just one time – OK, maybe two – in your personal life? Maybe in that space of solid knowing, unequivocal, hard-wired, take no prisoners . . . right! I am right!

And just as Amanda suggested, it actually feels pretty good, doesn't it . . . for a while, maybe a long while . . . until it doesn't. Until it feels – after the self-righteous part fades – a little lonely. Perhaps we hear the whisper of the ruined house.

Remember the subtitle? On the balance of certainty and doubt.

What if we took off the last word? What if we took off “right” and simply considered The Place Where We Are.

Doubts and loves dig up the world like a mole, a plow, Amichai says.

Ironically, THAT place – possibly – feels more solid, more grounded even in its messiness – and not quite so righteous. Here's the place where we are . . . where we are committed and determined . . . and it's rich and fertile and good.

Why do we so often insist on adding that pesky last word? It makes it all feel so . . . inflexible!

If we left that last word by the wayside, might this be the possible “way” that unfolds – when we are willing to listen to each other? Is it possible to feel grounded, centered, and yet not insist on the righteous “rightness” of our being?

Many of you know I was visiting my mom last week, and when I'm home, I spend a fair amount of time in conversation with her friends. So I'm sitting at lunch with a group of women and for some reason-

and-I-don't-know-what the woman next to me allows that she voted for our current president, and she's really pleased – he's doing a great job draining the swamp. And, he got Gorsuch in there.

I'm a little taken aback, actually. She doesn't know my politics, but for some reason-and-I-don't-know-what I apparently felt that I needed to let her know all the reasons she was mistaken rather than letting her tell me her reasoning and trying to find common ground. No, I wanted to get – quickly – to the place where I was right . . . not just share my self-location but add thoughts about the “right” part, too. That was important.

And why was that, exactly, harbinger of peace that I am? Not. Was I going to change her mind?

Seriously? No. But in truth there was only one of us insisting on stomping the ground, smashing the flowers, leaving the yard hard and trampled – and it was me.

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Let's go back to the procession question. When I asked earlier which procession, which march, you would choose, how did it feel? Did it make you uncomfortable thinking that you had to choose a side to march with?

I know that some of us are marchers. I know that there were many of us on the Boston Common yesterday, or perhaps at another march in another town.

But let's imagine a less literal approach to the question posed by our Palm Sunday event. Our bodies are important vehicles for expression. They're not the only vehicles available to us.

This is where we live our values, right here in our hearts. This is where I live mine. This is where you live yours. And this is why we have spiritual practices, right? To strengthen our hearts for our choices, to solidify our resolves to be – with every part of our being, not just the feet part, and maybe not even my feet marching – creating the kingdom of love right here on earth. Isn't that the parade we would choose?

I have a question on my bulletin board: Are you a chaplain to the empire, or a prophet to the resistance? It's kind of like asking which procession we would choose to be in, isn't it?

It's one of those questions that determines the place where we are, not the place where we are right.

And if we choose the humbler path, the path of love and doubts that digs up the world, then in whatever way we choose it, we can BE with those children, those youth, who need us to hear them and act on their behalf. Cameron Kasky was the first student speaker in D.C. yesterday. “My generation has spent our entire lives seeing mass shooting after mass shooting.” That statement is chilling.

There are so many ways we can be a part of the procession that proclaims, proudly, this must end now. These are our values. This is where we are.

When you put your body in a march, you are choosing.

AND

When you spend time with our guest in Sanctuary, you are also choosing a procession.

AND

When you teach our children on Sunday morning that the path to love and justice has many points of access, you are choosing.

AND

When you make coffee and set out the table for our nourishment after the service, you are choosing.

When you spend time praying or meditating, or practicing whatever spiritual sustenance brings you peace and a heart more filled with love, more open to compassion, you are choosing.

When you sing on behalf of a more just and loving world, you are choosing.

When you pledge your funds for the health of this congregation, you ARE choosing.

When you come here to this place of question and journey to challenge your mind and spirit, you are choosing the donkey over the horse (and I don’t mean elephant!). You are choosing the humble path of doubts and loves, forgiveness and compassion on behalf of a better world.

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Sheila asked me yesterday what image I would like on the cover of our orders of service. I looked at numerous ones, and then this one said, “choose me:” Love, it’s simple. At the time I thought, well, not really. But in fact . . . that is our choice. Because love is boundless, because it is messy and complicated, it resists the certainty of empire, it resists the insistence on “right” in favor of each and every other of us.

It’s the only choice we can make. It’s about being, in every way, in the place we know we need to be – on the messy side. Forget “right.” Let’s just be looking, always looking, for the march of love.

Amen.

Hymn 95 “There Is More Love Somewhere” African American hymn -

Intro from the words by Dr. Glen Rideout, a musician of color whose words remind us:

“When we inhabit the music, the forms of expression of people who lived their lives along the margins of notice (whatever margin of notice that is), WE must notice that we have entered holy ground, a sacred space of learning; a sacred space of relationship.”