

## **We are All in this Together**

a sermon by

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The Humboldt Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

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Good morning fellow students – and welcome to another session of Love Bearing and Justice Making 101!

Our classmate Parker Palmer says he believes in order to heal our organizations and our larger democracy we must develop the habit of suspending our condemnation of other people. He says we must make room for them in our hearts and understand – despite our differences - “We are all in this Love Bearing and Justice Making course together.”

He says good words about this effort are fine – but our ability to actually relate with open hearts and minds is what makes the difference. Our thinly veiled disdain for people we think are slow learners – reveals that we ourselves are slow learners.

Brother Parker –as some of my Baptist friends might say – is on dangerous ground here. He’s gone from preachin’ to meddlin’. He’s gone from talking about other people out there who aren’t very understanding – to asking us to take a look at ourselves.

And darn it! He’s right.

If we’re going to change what ails the world and if we are going to evolve as a species, we’re going to have to seriously increase our compassion for ourselves and everyone else.

Let me begin by saying what I do not believe this compassion requires of us. I don’t think it requires:

That we give up on all our own needs.

That we condone hurtful, harmful, violent behavior.

That we assume responsibility for running other people’s lives.

That we deny facts that we know are facts.

For me, at least, admonishing myself to remember that “we are all in this Love Learning together” sometimes might get confused with making excuses for other people or confused with co-dependence.

I've already done that far too much in my life and I don't want to do that any more.

What I believe living with more compassion does mean – is that you and I do our best not to kick others out of the human race and fixate on their errors. What I believe it does mean is that we do our best to not pre-occupy ourselves with other's faults and make monsters out of people with whom we have conflict.

Instead, in conflict compassion calls us focus on our needs and on carefully listening to the needs of others – as we leave our hearts open to our shared humanity. Because it is a fact, sisters and brothers, we are all in this interconnected web of life together. We all are just trying to make our way. And life is quite a challenge for all of us.

Yesterday, I worked with Jan Rowen and others in the Fellowship to create a Memorial Service for Ginger Gardner.

Ginger was a sailor and a weaver - and among her many gifts to us were the metaphors of sailing and weaving.

In both of those activities there are certainly natural rules and laws – but there are innumerable variables as well. – You have to pay attention to the wind, the weather and the capabilities of your sailing vessel. You have to pay attention to the qualities of your threads and the size and set of your loom.

So what you do is - you take into account all the laws and all the variables you're capable of dealing with – and then you forge ahead – God help you – and you learn a lot as you weave your way and sail your way along.

And it's not just you who does this – we all do. So can we have a little compassion for ourselves and one another? Can we engage the world with our concern – and with some gracious understanding too too?

That kind of engagement is what Parker Palmer says is needed for us to truly develop the habit of understanding we are all in this together. But it requires a lot from us.

So I'm going to talk about that with you now – and invite you to think about it with me.

Around the world and right here in the United States we find ourselves in various tribes pitted against one another in conflict. Some of the tribes are ethnic, some are cultural, some are religious, some are ideological. At their foundation, most, if not all of the conflicts are economic. But conflicts between various tribes often have long histories and have developed some amazing complexities.

One of the things many conflicts have in common is that the participants dehumanize people in the other tribes thereby justifying their acts of physical or emotional violence.

The Civil War in this country may seem like a long time ago – but the thunder of its canons is still reverberating in our souls.

Our Civil War pitted North against South, Industrial Urban Life against Agrarian Rural Life, Manufacturing against Raw Material, Those who practiced Wage Slavery against those who practiced Chattel Slavery.

Of course Chattel Slavery was an abomination. It made our human capacity to dehumanize and abuse one another painfully and grotesquely visible. Our Unitarian and Universalist forebears were courageously involved in bringing chattel slavery to an end and we are rightly proud of them for that.

What they did not accomplish, though, was an end to wage slavery. Nor did they adequately examine the huge Northern financial profits reaped from chattel slavery and the war. Nor were they too aware of their projection of the deep human struggle with greed and violence onto Southerners.

Ralph Waldo Emerson called his fellow Northerners on this. In his essay *Self Reliance* – he said: “If malice and vanity wear the coat of philanthropy, shall that pass? If an angry Northerner assumes the bountiful cause of Abolition, and comes to me with his last news from the South, I wish I could say to him, 'Go love your infant; love your wood-chopper: be good-natured and modest: have that grace; and never varnish your hard, uncharitable ambition with this incredible tenderness for black folk a thousand miles off – when your love afar is balanced by spite at home for the poor people living right at your door.’” (adapted)

Being a student in Love Bearing and Justice Making 101 – understanding that we are all in this course together does not mean that we don't work to stop slavery. It just means that we forego the self-righteous notion that we are not connected to it ourselves. It just means that we refrain from projecting all the evil in the world onto other people.

What southerners and rural people have resented for over 150 years now is the disdainful, degrading way they are often perceived and portrayed in the more educated, more urbane, more affluent northern culture.

That resentment is then played upon by right-wing corporate interests to create Tea Party Rebels – Anti-Immigrant and Anti-Gay Activists – Pro-Prison, Pro-Military, Pro-Fundamentalist, Pro-Big Business Partisans.

*Why should we be kind to immigrants, the homeless, people getting out of prison, the injured or the unemployed? – a number of people with Southern roots ask. The Northern Educated Elite has never been kind to us? They've treated us like White Trash.*

One time, when I was at Stanford I came home with two college friends and my mom fixed a big dinner we shared with a high school friend and his wife. My high school friend had Oklahoma Dust Bowl background. He was bright but not very academic. His wife was both bright and academic, though, so the dinner conversation swirled around literature, world issues and theater. My friend was not really included. He happened to be farming at the time – so on toward dessert he said with a glint of tears in his eyes – *You know what? – Give me a shovel and I'll bet I could work you three college guys under this table in a minute.*

We three college guys were stunned at our own stupidity. We all sat at that table together, but we hadn't seen that. We were charmed by my high school friend's beautiful wife and none of us had asked him what life was like for him since he manned up and married the girl he'd gotten pregnant in high school and made a caring home for her and their little boy and supported their home by the very demanding and risky business of growing cotton and soy beans, sugar beets and alfalfa.

Do you wonder why sometimes white working people resent the hell out of educated elites? We're in different tribes and so often we forget we are fellow students together in Love Learning and Justice Bearing 101.

And Right Wing ideologies and Left Wing ideologies work really hard to keep us from seeing and trusting that reality too. God help me, I am a Leftist and when I have my Leftist glasses on – which I often do in political situations – I do not see people with right wing views human beings and fellow love learners – I see them Dangerous, Mean Spirited, Right Wing Sons of Bitches.

So I've tried for a long time to not get stuck always wearing my Left Wing glasses.

When I was in Fresno, I worked with a guy named Jim Grant, a wonderful Catholic Christian. We started a television show called *A Forum for a Better Understanding*. That show brought interfaith religious leaders from different tribes together to listen to one another as human beings. Jim manages the TV station for the Diocese of Fresno and he's still running the *Forum* long after my departure from it.

Because of the TV show and my energy for dialogue and listening, Alan Autry, when he was Mayor of Fresno, asked me to help him set up a dialogue between him and the GLBTQ community whom he had offended with a rally to supposedly protect traditional marriage.

In addition to belonging to the Right Wing tribe, Mayor Autry was the son of Oklahoma Dust Bowl parents. He grew up working in the cotton fields of Fresno County and went on from there to play professional football and then act as “Bubba” in the TV Show “In the Heat of the Night.” When he did not have his Right Wing Ideologue glasses on – he really did see and relate to the humanity of lots of people.

So I accepted his invitation and what ensued for me was yet another lesson in Love Bearing and Justice Making 101.

What I learned is that it is unrealistic to expect any quick political victory or concessions when ideologies of Left and Right are at play. Because I had hoped that the Mayor and his friend Pastor Jim Franklin would change their Right Wing – Anti Gay Marriage political stance I felt very disappointed in the outcome of the dialogue.

My Ego got no reward at all for my efforts and in fact I felt embarrassed in front of my friends from the GLBTQ tribe and supporting clergy who I had encouraged to attend the several sessions.

In their presence, after the dialogue I vented my frustration and one of the activists called me to stop. She cautioned me against demonizing the Mayor or the Minister.

*Our victories are small and our progress often seems slow – she said. But the Mayor said that he would welcome me, my wife and our children into his home anytime. And both he and Pastor Franklin said they would speak out against any bullying of children because of their perceived sexual orientation or because of the sexual orientation of their parents.*

*We showed the Mayor and the Minister pictures of our families. We talked about our values and what we care about – and the Mayor and the Minister listened. I think they began to see and understand us more as human beings. I’m hoping that’s true and I’m working to return the compliment, Bryan. I think your efforts will go better if you work at that too.*

I said – *I know that’s true – But I’m so mad it’s really hard for me to do.*

She said – *It’s hard for me too. But I think the only way we’ll ever make progress in this world is if we refuse to think of one another as alien enemies. I think the only way we will ever make progress is if we remember we are all human beings and we really are all in this together.*

PLEASE STAND NOW AS YOU ARE WILLING AND ABLE – AND JOIN IN SINGING  
#112 – Do You Hear

**Extinguishing the Chalice  
Closing Words and Closing Song**

The Closing Song will be Go From Here in Peace – Go with Love

**These Closing Words** are from My Personal Re-Write of the Hail Mary Prayer:

Holy Earth Home – Mother of All -  
The Power of Creation is with you.

Blessed are you among planets – And blessed is the fruit of you womb,  
The Web of Life.

Holy Earth Home – Mother of All,  
Pray for us Love Learners now and in the hour of our death – Amen

**Song** – Go from Here in Peace – Go with Love