

**Lift Every Voice**  
Rev. Luke Stevens-Royer  
Sunday, January 14, 2018

**First Unitarian Universalist Church**  
Rochester, Minnesota

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## **REFLECTION**

*From the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.:*

*"I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate.  
I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion  
that the Negro's great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom  
is not the White Citizen's Council-er or the Ku Klux Klanner,  
but the white moderate  
who is more devoted to "order" than to justice;  
who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension  
to a positive peace which is the presence of justice;  
who constantly says "I agree with you in the goal you seek,  
but I can't agree with your methods of direct action;"  
who paternalistically feels he can set the timetable for another man's freedom;"*

*Why make all the fuss? The question often comes.  
What's the big deal?  
Do something constructive, not destructive.  
There are better ways.*

*"When is the right time for black people to protest?"  
Asks Trevor Noah on comedy central's Daily Show.  
Speaking of the #takeaknee protests in the National Football League,  
Noah says of government officials:  
"They don't mind protest, they just don't want them to do it  
when everyone is watching.  
Think of if they gave advice to Rosa Parks, saying –  
hey, Rosa, don't protest on the bus – people have places to be.*

*Take the bus home, sit on your own couch, and protest from home!  
No inconvenience, and boom, racism solved!*

*“Those who profess to favor freedom and yet depreciate agitation,”  
wrote Frederick Douglass in the late 1800s,  
“...are people who want crops without ploughing the ground;  
they want rain without thunder and lightning;  
they want the ocean without the roar of its many waters.”*

As people gathered  
a few years ago at the Mall of America before Christmas,  
disrupting capitalism and holiday festivity,  
to raise issues of police brutality and mass incarceration and systemic racism –  
and then as people gathered on Interstate 94 in St. Paul,  
disrupting business as usual to raise conversations about racial disparity –  
then, as people gathered  
at the 4<sup>th</sup> precinct in Minneapolis, again to protest the death of a young black man –  
they were all met –  
in commerce, in public highways, at the police precinct –  
by armored force, ridicule, heckling, threats, anger, and vicious language.

During the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s,  
as people gathered,  
disrupting business as usual to raise conversation about racial disparity –  
in commerce and restaurants, on public highways and buses, at the police station –  
they, too, were met  
by armored force, ridicule, heckling, threats, anger, and vicious language –  
and dogs, and fire hoses, and physical violence.

It is true that things have changed since the 1960s movement for civil rights.  
It is also true that we still live in a society and within structures  
that consciously and unconsciously  
privilege people still based on their skin color, among several forms of oppression  
that operate in increasingly subtle ways –  
and maybe not so subtle in recent months.

But one of the most important reminders about this work –  
about any work for justice that shows up

as disruption and agitation of the status quo –  
is somewhere between the heavy armor and the news headlines  
and the drama of the moment –  
are people.

I saw, there at the mall, people –  
babies and children and dreams and tears and laughs and hugs.

A member in my previous congregation,  
after the protests at the 4<sup>th</sup> police precinct in Minneapolis  
following the death of Jamar Clark,  
wrote this about the humanity in the midst of the 18-day protest:

*At the 4<sup>th</sup> precinct,  
Tents sprang up, then food service,  
then winter clothing giveaways.  
Sisters Camelot pulled their bus right into the camp  
and unloaded hundreds of pounds of fresh produce  
over the days of the occupation,  
most of it flowing out into the community.*

*Some days, the lines of cars stretched for over a block,  
each one pulling up to donate firewood and propane  
to keep protesters warm day and night.  
For eighteen days,  
campfires burned in a line down one block of Plymouth Avenue.  
They were carefully tended: logs laid in careful formation,  
coals stoked to a new blaze,  
water and sand at the ready nearby,  
ashes diligently swept away.*

*The miracle of this string of lights wasn't the fuel needed  
to keep those fires burning;  
it was the community that formed to keep the whole occupation  
bright and steadfast.*

*And I'd like to believe that, in the seasons to come,  
the smell of woodsmoke*

*and the feel of yarn  
and the sight of tents  
and the greetings of new and old friends  
will remind everyone of what the uncommon,  
beloved community we built together at the 4th Precinct.*

How easy to forget –  
how quickly we ignore –  
the humanity, the uncommon beloved community  
that we create when we put hope into action.  
The 4<sup>th</sup> precinct in Minneapolis had been, in years past,  
a community center – for classes, and learning, and food.

And for a time, it turned into that again,  
even in not the most neat and conventional way.

To lift every voice,  
is to lift up the truth that revelation –  
truth and wisdom and insight and inspiration –  
comes from, sometimes, the most common everyday sources –  
from lived experience, lived pain, lived hope –  
and sometimes revelation comes  
when we pay attention to the particular voices  
that are often, and historically, ignored -  
that might make the status quo feel a little uncomfortable.

There are many voices to listen to, many voices to be lifted –  
and I leave you with this voice, this prayer –  
African American minister and professor, Yolanda Pierce:

*“Let us not rush to the language of healing, before understanding  
the fullness of the injury and the depth of the wound.  
Let us not rush to offer a band-aid, when the gaping wound  
requires surgery and complete reconstruction....  
Let us not rush past the loss of this mother’s child, this father’s child...  
someone’s beloved child.*

*Let us not value property over people;  
let us not protect material objects*

*while human lives hang in the balance.  
Let us not value a false peace over a righteous justice....  
Let us be silent when we don't know what to say.  
Let us be humble and listen to the pain, rage,  
and grief pouring from the lips of our neighbors and friends...  
Let us pray with our senses open and our feet [our souls, our lives]  
firmly planted on the ground..."*