

Songs of Courage and Hope

Rev. Luke Stevens-Royer

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First Unitarian Universalist Church

Rochester, Minnesota

READINGS

Where Everything Is Music by Jelaluddin Rumi

HOMILY

Stop the words now, declares the poet.

A good admonishment for a minister to keep the sermon brief.

*Stop the words now –
open the window in the center of your chest
and let the spirit fly in and out.*

*Even if the world burns up, there will be hidden instruments playing.
So the candle flickers, and goes out –
we have a piece of flint, and a spark.*

We each come into this world,
this strange, beautiful, broken world,
like a piece of flint –
and how we experience the world –
its beauty, its invitation to experience,
its people, its places, its moments of sun and wind and open sky –
are like sparks
for the soul to light up
and find its song.

Music and song have a way of finding their way into your heart –
sometimes it's as simple as an earworm –
a soundtrack, almost, to your life –
the songs you hear on the radio, or that you sing with your kids –
the songs that bring back memory of past places or people –
the songs that are woven into your soul
from your religious or cultural background,
or certain moments and times in your life.

There are also songs of movements –
songs that define a generation, or at least parts of it –
songs that define social change or revolutions.
Do you hear the people sing?

There is a core to song and music –
because it is about identity, and about community.

On the streets in Minneapolis,
activists of *Black Lives Matter*
created new songs for a new movement;
at times they danced and sang to Kendrick Lamar's *we're gonna be alright*
and other times they drew upon the wisdom and practices
of the civil rights movement –
with call and response,
songs easy for large groups to learn,
and what we call a *zipper song* – changing one word only of each verse -
like this one

*The day gonna come when we won't march no more –
The day gonna come when we won't march no more –
but while my sister ain't equal, and my brother can't breathe,
hand in hand with my family we will fill these streets –*

And then the zipper part –
*Can I get a senator – marching with me
Can I get a preacher – marching with me
Can I get some white folks – marching with me
we're gonna keep on marching 'til the people are free...*

The song, easy to sing and learn,
contains a poignant reflection on the sparks of the movement –
the *I can't breathe* mantra, in honor of Eric Garner in New York –
and a poignant asking
of who will join the song – those in power, those with privilege –
who will join and march together.

Because song is about identity – it's about community.
And the question, in church, and the question in homes –
is what songs will we learn by heart?
What songs will we teach our children?
What songs will become woven into the rhythm of our own hearts?

Sometimes,

*The earth keeps some vibration going
There in your heart, and that is you.*

writes poet Edgar Lee Masters,

*And if the people find you can fiddle,
Why, fiddle you must, for all your life.
How could I till my forty acres
Not to speak of getting more,
With a medley of horns, bassoons and piccolos
Stirred in my brain by crows and robins
And I never started to plow in my life
That some one did not stop in the road
And take me away to a dance or picnic.
I ended up with forty acres;
I ended up with a broken fiddle--
And a broken laugh, and a thousand memories,
And not a single regret.*

When we find our song,
and stop in the road where
someone, something, invites us into dance,
then we end up with forty acres
and we play our fiddle until it breaks –
a thousand memories become our song.

A colleague of mine once shared a story
about trying to choose what songs to sing to their newborn baby –
and they were reminded of the power that lullabies have
to create grooves of rhythm and memory for a newborn.

There is something sacred
about the songs we choose to sing –
to a newborn baby, to one another, as a church, or on the streets in protest.
They are anthems of identity and hope and strength.

And the song they would often sing was about the song that lives within a child the moment they are born, and the strength that songs have from our earliest days of life –

*When you sing, you've got to sing, with the strength of a lullaby,
you'll never know until you try.*

*When you sing, you've got to sing, with the strength of a lullaby,
you'll never know until you try.*

*Your songs inside you, let it guide you,
let it be your lullaby.*

When you love, you've got to love...

When you dream, you've got to dream...

Your song is inside you –
There are songs inside us –
even if the instruments break, it doesn't matter –
we have fallen into the place where everything is music.
May your song, our harmonies,
be like well-worn paths upon the heart
and may we play our hearts out –
until we have no regrets
because we have played our fiddle
until the very last note possible –
a broken fiddle is not the end of the song,
it means it has played enough melodies,
enough songs,
enough harmonies
to fill the sky
and to fill your soul.