

THE UNITARIAN FELLOWSHIP OF PETERBOROUGH  
AND THEN POWER WILL BE WEDDED TO COMPASSION  
THE REV. JULIE STONEBERG  
MAY 27, 2018

**OPENING WORDS**    *Let There Be*    with a nod to B. Hamilton-Holway

Let there be a spirit in this place, among us, that would have us see that we have the chance—in every moment—to live like we wish the world would live – and to find within ourselves the courage to be who we are.

Let this be a place where we learn to listen when it is time to listen, to speak when it is time to speak, and to do what needs to be done.

Let us settle into the knowledge that we can trust one another, knowing that we are all connected; we depend upon one another more than we know.

Let us here know that though we cannot change some of what life gives to us, we can choose how we deal with what we are given.

We are coming into our power, and together, with compassion, we can make possible a just and sustainable world.

Let this be a time and a space that affirms this in each of us.

Come, let us turn our hearts and minds to that which matters most.

**STORY FOR ALL**    *The Happy Prince*    ~ Oscar Wilde, Elissa Grodin (adapted)

In this story, a little swallow lands on a gilded statue of a prince, who from his raised position, has seen the troubles of the city. The swallow helps the statue give all of his gold and jewels to those who need it.

**READING**    *Where Do We Go From Here?*<sup>1</sup> ~ Martin Luther King Jr.

In August of 1967, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave a speech at a convention of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference that directly addressed how power and love ought to be connected. Here are a few excerpts, edited to broaden what Dr. King had to say to apply beyond the Negro and Civil Rights issues of his time.

Now, in order to answer the question, "Where do we go from here?" which is our theme, we must first honestly recognize where we are now... in spite of a decade of significant progress, the problem is far from solved. ... the plant of freedom has grown only a bud and not yet a flower.

With all the struggle and all the achievements, we must face the fact, however, that [Black, Indigenous and People of Colour] still live in the basement of the

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/where-do-we-go-here-address-delivered-eleventh-annual-sclc-convention>

society...And so we still have a long, long way to go before we reach the promised land of freedom.

[A] basic challenge is to discover how to organize our strength into economic and political power. Power properly understood is nothing but the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political, and economic change.

... often we have problems with power. But there is nothing wrong with power if power is used correctly.

What happened is that some of our philosophers got off base. And one of the great problems of history is that the concepts of love and power have usually been contrasted as opposites - polar opposites - so that love is identified with a resignation of power, and power with a denial of love.

It was this misinterpretation that caused Nietzsche, who was a philosopher of the will to power, to reject the Christian concept of love. It was this same misinterpretation which induced Christian theologians to reject Nietzsche's philosophy of the will to power in the name of the Christian idea of love.

Now what has happened is that we've had it wrong and mixed up...And this has led [the marginalized] in the past to seek their goals through love and moral suasion devoid of power, and [for whites] to seek their goals through power devoid of love and conscience. It is precisely this collision of immoral power with powerless morality which constitutes the major crisis of our times.

[But] I say to you, I have decided to stick with love, for I know that love is ultimately the only answer to [our] problems. And I'm going to talk about it everywhere I go. I know it isn't popular to talk about it in some circles today. And I'm not talking about emotional bosh when I talk about love; I'm talking about a strong, demanding love.

Now, we've got to get this thing right. What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic.

Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love. *(pause)*

**MESSAGE**

*And Then....*

*~ Rev. Stoneberg*

Do you like the songs we sing from the grey hymnal? Or do you prefer the teal, paperback one?

As much as I appreciate and enjoy the old, I like to sing newer songs. (Truth be told, I like best the music of my own young adulthood, so I must also face the fact that I really am stuck in the past.)

When I was a kid, we got a 'new' gospel songbook, which, while not put in the pews, was the kind of songbook that, had the Occasionals been part of that church, they might have used for today's music. As the minister's family we 'had to' regularly offer special music, and that songbook made that somewhat tolerable!

I remember one of those songs well. It was "Mansion Over the Hilltop." Google tells me that it was written in 1949, and that it was a popular country song...Elvis Presley even recorded it. Do you know it?

I'm satisfied with just a cottage below  
A little silver and a little gold  
But in that city where the ransomed will shine  
I want a gold one that's silver lined

I've got a mansion just over the hilltop  
In that bright land where we'll never grow old  
And some day yonder we will never more wander  
But walk on streets that are purest gold

It's hard for me to believe my parents knew we were singing something from the country charts in church!

But that song came to mind because it's a song about a dream...about a time in the future when things will be different. And a person can hardly think the word 'dream' without also thinking of Martin Luther King Jr.

"I have a dream...I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up, live out the true meaning of its creed: "we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream ... I have a dream that one day...right here in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today ... I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low. The rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight. ... With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony

of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

... So let freedom ring...

When we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every city and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last, Free at last, Great God almighty, "We are free at last."<sup>2</sup>

I have a dream.

Change a few words, update a bit of gendered language, and broaden the location, and King's words are just as inspiring today as they were in 1963. I have a dream.

There is, for me, a mighty difference between the future dreamed of in the song about a mansion over a hilltop, and King's dream. The song is about a place not of this world...a city of gold somewhere else...encouraging us to be satisfied with how things are here...with just a cottage and a little gold. That's enough because it'll be better when we're over that hilltop.

But King spoke of something else...something right here...in this place, something that he wanted to see during the lifetime of his children. He very intentionally mentioned specific places where freedom must ring. He didn't hesitate to directly name what must change, and spoke of the potential for compassionate human experiences...holding hands, and sitting at the same table.

These are indeed two very different dreams. And as for me, I'm with King. My dream is for the kingdom of god to be in this place, and for heaven to be created here on earth.

So how can we make that happen?

Power must be wedded to compassion.

Again, I turn to Martin Luther King, Jr.

In the same speech from which Ian quoted earlier, he used the rhetorical device of repeating the same phrase over and over. In that case, not "I have a dream" but "Let us be dissatisfied." Let us be dissatisfied. In order for things to change, we have to be dissatisfied with how things are. We have to get uncomfortable with the status quo. We have to be in a place of dis-ease... disturbed... unsettled. Let us be dissatisfied. We have to see that until the world is a place where all are free, where all have enough to eat, where all live in right relationship with the earth, there are none of us who are free. We have to come to that place, that breaking point immortalized in the 1975 movie

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.archives.gov/files/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf>

Network, when we finally say, “I’m mad as hell, and I’m not going to take it any more.” Let us be dissatisfied.

We have to ‘get woke’ ...like the Happy Prince,<sup>3</sup> who had experienced a life of ease and luxury, and then one day, from a new vantage point, saw the suffering of others and looked for what he could do about it. And he did it with the help of a friend, a little Swallow, who to begin with, wasn’t so interested in getting involved because it was pretty satisfied with its life...until, in relationship, it began to ‘get woke.’ In relationship, the Swallow saw through another’s eyes, and was changed.

There’s such a tension, isn’t there, between our 1<sup>st</sup> principle and our 7<sup>th</sup>? Our 1<sup>st</sup> principle ensures us that we are whole and complete, and that we don’t need to ‘fix’ ourselves. The shadow present in our 1<sup>st</sup> principle is that it might cause us to be a little too satisfied with who we are and what we’re doing. But our 7<sup>th</sup> principle calls us to see, as part of an interconnected web, how privilege and oppression operate to maintain injustices. So, the 7<sup>th</sup> principle, while offering the comfort of connections, also tends to ‘dissatisfy’ us.

As I was pondering the Happy Prince, and his decision to give away his outer ‘beauty’, I saw a post from my sister with a quote from Iain Thomas that says...

*“And every day, the world will drag you by the hand, yelling, ‘This is important! And this is important! And this is important! And this is important! You need to worry about this! And this! And this!’ And each day, it’s up to you to yank your hand back, put it on your heart and say, ‘No. This is what’s important.’”*

And at first I thought...ah geez...I’m on the wrong path again. I’m advocating for looking outside ourselves and getting ‘woke’ to injustice, when what we need is to pay attention to our own hearts.

Then I remembered. Both the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> principle are true. Looking in and looking out are not polar opposites at all. Like the heart of the prince, which once broken open could not be destroyed, the force of love, for ourselves or for others, does not choose sides. Love does not ask us to protect ourselves to the exclusion others, nor to take care of others at the expense of ourselves. True compassion, the deepest form of love, is a leveler...it spreads across and through all boundaries and walls, making ‘the rough places plain, and the crooked places straight.’ All the valleys shall be exalted!

Last month, when exploring the theme of power, we learned that it is not a bad thing. It’s just got a bad rap, because we’ve allowed it to be associated only with oppression and violence and structural racism. We’ve let go our power in those times when we need it most.

So if we are to affect change in the world, if we are to let freedom ring, we are going to have to claim some power in order to do that, and to build a strong alliance between

---

<sup>3</sup> Story by Oscar Wilde about a statue of a prince, who after a happy and luxurious life, now placed on a high pedestal, sees the realities of poverty and suffering across his city.

power and compassion. We can talk to power. Power, we can say, we love when you are available to be used with compassion. Power, we can say, you are a lovely thing that will help us to ensure that our world is a just and safe place. Power, we can say, thank you for coming into our hands to be of use to us in shaking up the economic and political and social structures that bind us.

And power, let us not forget the ways in which you also can corrupt. We're going to be watching you, power. We will check and double check that when we flex our muscles, we are flexing them for good. We're not going to fall into those places where we think that power is ours alone, and that we can do with it what we want.

Parker Palmer has said, "The broken-open heart is a source of power as well as compassion – the power to bring down whatever diminishes us and raise up whatever serves us well."

If power is to be used compassionately, it must be done in the way of the Happy Prince...with eyes open... 'woke' to the realities of the world but at the same time in alignment with the truths that our hearts know...the truths that raise us up. The truth that everyone is already saved. That every life is precious. That it takes each voice for the whole to be spoken, and each ear for the whole to be heard. The truth that our strength is in our diversity. That none of us is free until all of us are free.

So what exactly is our power? It is the intention with which we use what we have. It is the commitment with which we bring who we are. It is the collective strength we have when we come together in common purpose. It is the ability to hear that small voice within, as well as the voices of those without...those who might be struggling, those who might see the world differently than we do. It is the belief that we have agency and that what we do matters. This is our power.

I have a dream...that compassion can be wedded to power so that love is the active force that makes the world go 'round, spinning with peace and freedom. I have a dream, that as a human community, we wake up to our potential to live heart-centred, heart-full, heart-broken-open lives, so that we live in respect and appreciation for and with one another. I have a dream, that we can find ways to effectively share and use our power for good.

Near the end of the service, we're going to read Judy Chicago's poem about her dream of Eden. One line in that poem inspired today's topic..."and THEN power will be wedded to compassion."

But I take slight issue. Power must be wedded to compassion NOW, not THEN. We can't wait to use our power with compassion. It cannot be left until THEN.

I see you doing this all the time...in the way we welcome, in our willingness to uncover our own prejudices and privilege, in your generosity, in your commitments. I would simply nudge you to be less afraid of your power, to join forces in loving community, and to let your compassion soar on the wings of that power, so that our dreams for a

just and sustainable world can be realized NOW. Let us wed power to compassion, NOW.

And all the people said...AMEN!

**RESPONSIVE READING** *And Then (Merger)* #464 (Judy Chicago)

And then all that has divided us will merge  
And then compassion will be wedded to power  
And then softness will come to a world that is harsh and unkind  
And then both men and women will be gentle  
And then both women and men will be strong  
And then no person will be subject to another's will  
And then all will be rich and free and varied  
And then the greed of some will give way to the needs of many  
And then all will share equally in the Earth's abundance  
And then all will care for the sick and the weak and the old  
And then all will nourish the young  
And then all will cherish life's creatures  
And then, all will live in harmony with each other and the Earth  
ALL: And then everywhere will be called Eden once again.

**\*CLOSING WORDS** *When All the People* (#601) ~ Mo-Tse

When all the people of the world love,  
Then the strong will not overpower the weak.  
The many will not oppress the few.  
The wealthy will not mock the poor.  
The honored will not disdain the humble.  
The cunning will not deceive the simple.

And I would add:

When all the people of the world use their power to do the work of compassion, THEN we can say, "Free at last, Free at last, Great God almighty, "We are free ALL at last."

So be it. Amen.

**EXTINGUISHING THE FLAME**