

## **What Makes Surviving the Pandemic Possible?**

**Rev. Rita Capezzi—UUFM**

A piece of jasper, shaped to look like an apple, with a brass stem and leaf. A couple of touchstones from Soul Matters Sharing Circles—on one I wrote “Generosity,” on the other “Trying to keep on.” A carved balsam wood elephant from India. A small paper monarch butterfly on fishing line. A mala, a string of beads, I bought from a Buddhist nun. A clay all-seeing “Eye of Horus” one of my children made. A peace dove brooch made from a bombshell. A crane pin made by a former congregant. A humped-back whale statuette, like the kind you might have gotten from a box of tea back in the day. A silver and turquoise ring of my father’s. A twist of moss from our camp in Pennsylvania. The window from which I see eagles rising out of the river valley.

All these objects help get me through the pandemic. All these little objects and more throughout my house, these objects help get me through isolation and frustration, through sadness and loss. Not because they have any special powers, not because they are magical in some way. Rather, they help get me through the pandemic because when I look at them, handle them, they remind me of who I am. These objects enable me to be in touch with all the people and experiences that have shaped my life, even people who are gone, even experiences that have ended and cannot be repeated. These objects are like talismans, but the magic is not in the object. Rather the magic is in it what is called forth from within me.

I have faith that you have such talismans in your life. I have faith that you can call upon them to bring you back to yourself when you are anxious and weary, when you feel all the wrongs of the world settling down on your head and on your shoulders. And like our beloved Sandra, our beloved Gail and Bob, your talisman might not be a thing or an object at all. It might be a vista out a window. It might be a place where you are connected to the natural world, a way that you come to “The Peace of Wild Things,” as Wendell Berry described:

When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children’s lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

I have faith that you have resources to draw on because there have always been hard times. There has never been a human time without hard times. There is nothing new about hard times. You are here,

testament that you are resilient and capable, even if scuffed and feeling a bit beaten up, even if angry and feeling frustrated, even if tired and feeling like going on for one more day like this is just impossible.

Lao Tzu, the ancient Chinese writer and founder of the philosophy Taoism, he poses a question for us: “Do you have the patience to wait/Till your mud settles and the water is clear?/Can you remain unmoving/Till the right action arises by itself?” I ask myself this question in one form or another every day, because I am determined to survive in this pandemic. Sometimes I thrive, learning new things and finding new connections. And sometimes I flail about as if I were born yesterday, wailing and out of control. I don’t always know what I am doing. I am not sure of what to do next. I regret some things I’ve done—last year, last month, last week. Maybe even today already, but it’s still early. I struggle within the restrictions of life and constraints on possibility. I stir up a lot of mud. All those objects, all these talismans, I turn to them to anchor me in myself, to return to myself, the selves I have been through time. And I am still here. Those objects slow me down. Those objects give me the patience to wait, even just a wee bit more, till my mud settles, even if it settles incompletely and the water is not yet quite clear. I’m still here, practicing being unmovable in the midst of tumults, my own internal ones and all those external ones around me, practicing patience so that I may become patient, so I may remember to have faith that right action can arise. That I may keep focused on reaching the higher ground.

You, too, are still here. You are out there and all in here, and there, able to see each other’s faces and names. Maybe you showed up this morning because Sunday morning in worship, even Zoom worship, because worship is a talisman. Worship is a way to remember what you *do* know. That no one needs to go it alone. That nature heals. That all are precious. That each has something to offer. That change is possible. That love will lead the way. We may not yet be in the same physical space, and yet we are connected. We may yet remain uncertain about the future. And yet we are grounded in our faith in each other as a community of care and compassion.

Remember when we had services in the sanctuary, making room for each other in the pews, moving freely up and down the aisles to greet each other, to touch each other’s hands and elbows, to touch each other’s cheeks and backs. Remember when we dodged to avoid running children. Remember when we tilted our heads in gratitude for the gifts of our choir, a perfect note and some not so perfect ones too, still grateful. Remember how we strained to hear someone speaking too quickly into a microphone. Remember how cute and distracting the children were when they came up to hear the story read to them and couldn’t sit still or pay much attention. Remember the candles being lit, the rocks and shells being dropped, for the sorrows and joys of our hearts as we stated them aloud. Remember navigating the stairs to the Fellowship Hall, the coffee and snacks, the heavy chairs and happy conversations.

And . . . some of us enjoy Zoom worship more, because we can be together even when we are out of town, because this format works better for the shape of our lives, because it is quieter and less chaotic, easier to hear what’s going on and to find a comfortable seat. And some of us remember none of this, because they joined the congregation during the pandemic, seeking the community that so many have built in the physical space, community which is much more than the physical space as well as firmly and lovingly anchored in our building.

We all know that no one currently in the Fellowship was present at the founding of it. Many of you can remember the presence and the effort of departed members who co-created this ongoing Fellowship. Even in my short time here, just beginning a fourth year, I can call upon beloveds who were and remain the Fellowship to me: Scott Theim and Nancy Allan, Hal Walberg and Jan Klages, David Allan and Jean Lovett. The past is not past. It lives on in us. It lives on among us and between us. And so, as long as there are people to build the Fellowship, I have faith that none of us here today will be present at its ending. I know, I have faith that in this religious community. I have faith that you will continue to support and uplift each other even when it feels like you have to dig very deep to do so. In the words of Marge Piercy, "it starts when you say *We* and know you who you mean, and each day you mean one more." It starts with the recognition that there is no community without a "We," and we must be inclusive and expanding. Rumi reminds us that "There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the earth." How we include, how we expand. So very many ways that we could do this, knowing our history as a Fellowship and having faith in a future that is yet unknown.

Yesterday, this Fellowship built community—between us and among many others—in a way that it has done for many years. We moved together in the Pride Parade, as UUFM and as a UUFM that moves in a larger community of those with shared values and those seeking to open themselves to shared values. Affirmation and celebration of all queer lives—in the past, in the present, in the unfolding future of this Fellowship. Affirmation and celebration as part of a broader community. It is in community that we become resilient, whether we battle oppression or gather to love and to grieve. None of us clings alone to a crumbling cliff. It is in community that we know who we are as a people, always helping each other to feel belonging and compassion. Today we thank Nancy Cramblit, Cheiron McMahill, Shiroh Moriya, Mae Gagnon, Nancy Blethen, Diane Langland, Deb Fitzloff, Diane Dobitz, Penny Herickhoff, Christina Rubie, and Barrie Evans for representing UUFM at Pride, and joined by Allison Wyeth of MUUSJA, bringing in UU partners in all part of Minnesota. It is in community that we express our commitments to each other and to a world that seems to be falling apart and lost in so many ways.

Yesterday, I lifted a quotation from our beloved Crista Bohlmann's Facebook page—"We're all messy. We're all struggling. We are all flying high in some ways and falling flat on our faces in others. Nobody has it all figured out. It's our job to cheer each other on, lift each other up, and push each other to keep giving our best. We need to be better to each other. We're all we have." We are all we have. That we can be sure of. And that is a lot. Together today, part of an enduring past and an unfolding future, our community is here as we listen to each other's hearts and sing our love and our longing to each other, siblings all. As a people, I know, I have faith, we can go on.

Today, yes, even today, in this weird and fraught, this broken open space, this hybrid reality, beauty may find us, gentleness may soften us, care may reach us, spirit may soothe us, life may meet us, each of us, all of us in this broken open world, broken open like a seed and ready to grow into something new. May you break open, not to destruction and devastation but to becoming something new, held tightly and caringly in the community of this Fellowship, as you remember, today and every day, that you are loved,

your are worthy, you are welcome, and you are needed. May you feel it so. May it be so. And may we say together, Amen.