

## **“We Resist”**

**By Rev. Jane Smith, Channing Memorial Church, UU, Ellicott City, MD January 11, 2026**

Our reflection begins with a Greek mythological tale. Hercules, a demigod known for his superhuman feats, was tasked with killing a beast called Hydra. Hydra’s blood and breath were so virulent that any contact was deadly. Most unique to this monster was her many heads – nine hideous and dangerous heads in total. And in this gruesome fight, each time Hercules cut one off, two more grew in its place. Killing this beast seemed nearly insurmountable. In time, Hercules enlisted the help of his nephew, and together they worked to destroy the monster. Lessons gained from this ancient tale are abundant. Hydra was, to quote Rev. Cecilia Kingman, an “evil that cannot be overcome by a single effort.”<sup>1</sup> We kill the beast by acting together. We act on all fronts, remembering that myriad heads grow from one single body. Xenophobia, racism, fascism, homophobia. And that each one of these societal ills offers its own evil – its own Hydra – with multiple heads, of which each must be swiftly removed. This month’s worship theme is resistance. Today we focus on tyranny – and our collective response.

Tyranny is an unchecked use of absolute power. It is cruel, oppressive, and unjust. There is a dangerous disregard of laws and individual rights for the benefit of those in power. This essentially becomes a detrimental and unrestrained use of authority. We are called to remove each individual facet of fascism – each head of the Hydra – to overcome these dangerous powers and work to cultivate a more just, equitable, and loving society.

These acts of defiance are grounded in our faith and our values as Unitarian Universalists. In this climate, we cannot celebrate and honor our interdependence. Some of our beloveds are detained by ICE as others grow in unjust power and wealth. We cannot practice pluralism if differences in culture or experiences lead to unjust and detrimental violence. Our value of transformation feels thwarted. Instead of encouraging personal and societal growth, we see a dangerous abundance of power, violence, bigotry, and greed. As a people of faith, we are called

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<sup>1</sup> “My Little Pony Was Right: Fascisms Without and Within” by Rev. Cecilia Kingman

towards generosity as we cultivate a culture of gratitude, hope, and compassion in both our lives and in our actions. We are called to practice justice. To build a diverse and beloved community where all are welcome. We are called to practice love. So may each of our actions be grounded in this liberal faith tradition. May we be intentional, brave, just, and courageous.

This poses a fundamental, powerful, and necessary question: What can I do? What can I possibly do? How can I live my values and work to counter the horrors of fascism and tyranny? This past month we brainstormed just that in our Justice in Action Circle, a topic apropos to the moment we find ourselves in. As an introduction to this discussion, we were introduced to the book *On Tyranny* by Timothy Snyder. It is an ambitious book, highlighting a total of twenty ways to combat tyranny. I offer but a few.

First, Snyder offers, be aware. There are mistaken assumptions that if a ruler comes to power through trusted institutions, that this ruler cannot change or destroy these institutions. Does this narrative sound familiar? We see the antithesis of this narrative nearly each day on our news feeds. Our political systems are deteriorating through a direct use of power. So, defend institutions. Find an institution that is of importance to you – a newspaper, a law, a labor union – and support that with zeal.<sup>2</sup> Embody our value of love as a powerful force that holds our community together.

Second, “be aware of a one-party state.” Those in power who suppress their rivals were not inherently all-powerful or omnipotent. This grows as the party grows. Power grows exponentially. So? Support the two-party system. Defend the rules of democracy. Vote. Engage in local politics.<sup>3</sup> Transform the world through a defiance to being silenced. Live our value of generosity as our voices join in a powerful chorus of hope and action that serves as a catalyst to true and lasting change.

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<sup>2</sup> *On Tyranny* by Timothy Snyder pgs. 22- 24

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. pg. 26

Next, he offers, Investigate. Do research. Figure out what is real and what is fake. Take time with longer articles. Support investigative journalism by subscribing to print media. Discern what is true and what is produced to create harm and division. Educate oneself on what is propaganda and be intentional in what we share with others.<sup>4</sup> Embody pluralism. Seek to engage with those in your midst and learn from one another in a search for truth.

Finally, be active with good causes and life-giving organizations. Express your faith values and your own view of life. Donate, volunteer, engage, support. Use your passions as a catalyst towards a society that embodies love and justice and equity, whether you focus on immigration, gun control, transgender rights, bodily autonomy. Take the next best step to create a difference. In choosing when and how to act, we make a free and autonomous decision that supports a just community and directly helps the aching in our midst.<sup>5</sup>

Jewish theologian and philosopher Abraham Heschel writes of the act of a prophet. It is the prophet who screams amidst the shadows and the darkness. Who feels the powerful force from all that is sacred when others are detached and at ease. Who raises their voice during silent complacency. It is the prophet who counters callousness with simple and profound words. Prophets act to change inner personhood of those in our midst, through words and actions of justice, equality, faith and love. They act to revolutionize history. To dramatically alter what seems insurmountable and inevitable, rewriting the narrative of our country. It is the prophet who says, quote, “few are guilty, but all are responsible.”<sup>6</sup> Most of us have not directly contributed to the rise of tyranny and fascism. Many are simply quiet observers. Yet, though we did not cause this state of the world, we are each deeply responsible to change it. To enact all of those values we touched upon. To work together with intention to cut off the heads of Hydra so that, together, we work to kill the beast. We can each embody the teachings of a prophet.

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<sup>4</sup> *On Tyranny* by Timothy Snyder pg. 71

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. pg. 92

<sup>6</sup> Abraham Heschel quoted in “Abraham Heschel’s Prophetic Judaism” by John Dear

In doing my research I was directed towards an article entitled “The Rise of End Times Fascism.” End time fascism is a tactic of rulers predicting a threatening, menacing, and despondent future. They use this fear they cultivate to establish authoritarian rule by promising a new and blessed future for a chosen few. They gain immense power in the process. Authors Naomi Klein and Astra Taylor write that we are directly facing this ideology which has given up on liberal democracy. That has given up on a beautiful future of a shared world of people, nature, wonder, diversity. This is a dangerous “apocalyptic narrative” that we need to rewrite with a better, lifegiving story. A story of surviving difficult times by joining together; of surviving hardship without leaving anyone behind. Of carrying with us the most vulnerable. Not of quote, “end times, but of better times.” When a future of separation and supremacy is depicted, we counter it with one of interdependence and belonging. This bright and beautiful imagined world faces its own apocalypse, but a drastically different one. This apocalypse makes surviving and thriving possible because we have put an end to other versions of the world. We join together to counter tyranny, fascism, and their many pervasive societal ills. In order to survive, life-taking versions of this world need to end. We hold the potential for a more equitable, just, and compassionate society. We cannot let others inundate us with fear that scares us away from this blessed possibility.<sup>7</sup>

Between Christmas and New Year’s, I spent several days at a Quaker retreat center. I joined a group of individuals on a shared journey of faith and renewal. Through myriad conversations on grief, personal reflection, and transformation, a theme arose: the political state of our country and the world. Anxiety, fear, trepidation, and anger poured from the hearts of this community. While holding these emotions, each morning we engaged in ritual. To ground us in purpose, we placed a post-it on a wall with a sentence or two about our intentions. The wall grew and flourished throughout our days together. On the last morning of the retreat, we were asked to approach the wall and select an intention that we wanted to embody. Many stood out to me while scanning the wall. Cultivate calm, practice self-care, or pause in nature. But one immediately grabbed my attention, quote, “Remember, heaven is here.” We need this

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<sup>7</sup> “The rise of end time fascism” by Naomi Klein and Astra Taylor

reminder to not wallow in these political and societal ills that feel overwhelming and insurmountable. With action there is hope. There is resistance. There is potential. There is change. There is the promise of Beloved Community. This – this society we intentionally build together of love and faith and equity and interdependence - this is heaven. So do not give up. Do not stop acting. We can each influence society. Even amidst the growing fascist administration, even amidst the injustice we see to immigrants and American citizens, even amidst the hatred spewed in our media --we can still live our day with joyful moments. Even in our resistance, we still have to live, to be there for our loved ones, to work, to create, to tend our homes and communities. We cannot lose ourselves while fighting Hydra. We cannot let hell on earth consume our heaven.

So let us focus on this: the next best thing. Quote, “fascism thrives when good people hesitate. Democracy strengthens when good people act.” Action is an antidote to where we are as a country. Fascism depends on people getting fatigued in the fight and giving up in the process, becoming complacent observers no matter how angry or fearful they may be. The more we pull away in exhaustion, the more we wait, the stronger authoritarianism becomes. Act now – in this moment – no matter how imperfectly. Act even if we do not or cannot know the answers. Even if we do not have a clear leader. Move forward with courage and be persistent. Quote, “ordinary people make extraordinary commitments in ordinary ways.” Be that teacher who speaks up at a board meeting to protect LGBTQIA+ students. Raise bail funds online for protestors. Open your home for organizing meetings. Attend city council meetings. March, canvass, volunteer, vote. Do the next best thing, over and over and over again. Do not give up. Act for a blessed and beautiful future. This is what makes a movement.<sup>8</sup>

So, beloveds. Ours is a faith of love and it is a faith of action. It is a faith of good people held in the embrace of a loving entity. Of interdependence and pluralism and transformation. Of justice and generosity. Through the values of our faith, tyranny and fascism cannot survive because our basic tenets counter every aspect of these social maladies. We are called to

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<sup>8</sup> Video Essay – “The ONE THING You Can Do to Fight Fascism RIGHT NOW” by The Ripple Effect Institute  
Rev. Jane Bennett Smith January 2026

embody the love of all that is sacred and holy to do the next best thing. We are called to promote that future of diversity, beauty, people, and divinity. Our faith calls for us to act because we are all interconnected – until all of us are free, none of us are free. We act because we celebrate diversity in cultures and experiences and theologies, we do not use it as a catalyst for fear or hate. Because Beloved Community is our goal. Because we want to transform the world into one of growth, not regression or stagnation. We know what we need to do, even if we do not have all the answers. Even if perfection will always evade us. We need to act now, thwarting the rise of that which seeks to destroy us. Hydra is raising her menacing, many heads, poised to attack, growing stronger in the process. So, we call upon one another, just as Hercules called upon his nephew, and, together, we attack the beast. We strike, as a society, many facets simultaneously. We do this until, through perseverance and commitment, she weakens. We overwhelm her and she retreats. That is what we are building today. A future where resistance works to destroy the beast, and a better, brighter future is possible.

May it be so, and Amen