



Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens

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“The Truth of Our Vulnerability”

© by the Reverend Alison W. Eskildsen

A sermon reflection delivered on October 8, 2017

At the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens, GA

Centering Thoughts:

If you keep a green bough in your heart surely the singing bird will come. Chinese Proverb

Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do children as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing. Helen Keller

Life is an ongoing process of choosing between safety, out of fear and need for defense, and risk, for the sake of progress and growth. Make the growth choice a dozen times a day.
Abraham Maslow

Reflection:

[This reflection followed a Stuffed Animal & Comfort Object Blessing, and congregational singing of #1002, “Comfort Me”]

When Kelli [Coordinator of Religious Exploration] and I planned to hold a comfort object blessing a few weeks ago, we had no idea how much comforting we might need today. After waking up to the tragic news from Las Vegas on Monday, my heart broke. In anguish I wondered how many more times must a story of mass murder be made real?

Before I knew of the attack, my husband, Paul, had driven off to the airport before dawn to head to Virginia for work. I was alone when I heard the news and I didn’t want to be alone. I wanted to be here.

I don’t usually come in on Mondays, but if any of you had felt a similar need for company, comfort, or just to be in this sacred space, I wanted to be here for you and with you.

Amber sings: “Comfort me, comfort me, comfort me, oh my soul.”

So many young lives lost in so short a time. I cannot imagine the level of rage or madness that prompts indiscriminate mass murder like this. I hope to learn something of the shooter’s motives or mental state so that, through understanding, I might move my despair and anger more

easily towards hope and forgiveness. And, it might highlight what went wrong and what needs to be made right so that something like this won't happen again.

But in truth, we will always be vulnerable. There likely will always be a misguided or mentally ill person who takes aim at innocent people. We live in a time of terrorism with too-easy access to bomb-making materials, people-killing high-powered weapons, and public places and events that make for too-easy targets.

And if it's not human terrorism, we have Earth's weather activity and humanity's climate-damaging activity to fear. This summer's hurricanes, earthquakes and fires have taken a terrible toll on life, property, and even our resilience. Right now we're experiencing yet another hurricane. And if that's not enough trauma and stress, we may be fearful that our nation's leaders are creating a new storm—war. This too would be a story of lives lost unnecessarily.

Amber sings: "Comfort me, comfort me, comfort me, oh my soul."

Long ago you might have lost or given up a revered cuddly object. And I suspect you have given or might give one to a young child. I think our own fond memories of beloved stuffed animals and blankets encourage these gifts. When my first grandchild greeted the world, I gave him a Carolina blue-and-white stuffed puppy dog. He's more attached to Dave, a different stuffed dog, but I'm glad he's found one to cuddle and love.

Psychologists believe comfort objects meet transitional needs for growing toddlers. When children realize their separateness from parents or caregivers, and when their demands aren't immediately or always met, a cuddly toy or security blanket offers consolation. Even for stressed teenagers and adults, in the absence of a well-loved cuddly object, animate or inanimate, hugging a bed pillow can give needed comfort.

Consider the benefits: a cuddly object offers no judgment on our behavior; it never interrupts our story; it doesn't tell us not to cry when we most need to cry; and it doesn't tell us to stop feeling whatever we're feeling.

Instead, it accepts whatever we share—and it never reveals our secrets. It allows us to express feelings that might not be safely expressed elsewhere. It listens. It's always there. We can even imagine it saying, "I love you." What's more, it asks nothing in return. Its simple presence comforts. It's the very model of a best friend.

Amber sings: "Comfort me, comfort me, comfort me, oh my soul."

Best friends. We may not be perfect in our care for one another, but as members of this community we covenant with one another to try. We have a Pastoral Care Team that works with me and Rev. Don Randall for extra support. But by making a commitment to this Fellowship, as today's new members will do, all of us promise to be here to share life's sorrows and celebrate life's joys.

I imagine some of you came here today for the comfort this community provides. I imagine you want reminding that the world is not irreversibly tumbling into chaos. I imagine you

ache for a word of hope. Then let me pronounce this truth: most people are good, here and elsewhere. People care about you, here and elsewhere. Love exists, here and elsewhere. And our good will and good actions can help return the world to sanity, to calm, and to greater love.

These truths are proved every time we see heroes rushing into danger; every time we respond to someone in need; every time we show up here, in this sanctuary for this community.

Life is not without danger and risk. We should consider our risk-taking and stay alert, but not all dangers can be avoided. Simply to live is to be vulnerable. If we fear losing our lives at every turn and then close ourselves off from the world, then we aren't truly living. Accepting our vulnerability opens us up to life and connections.

We may think we've outgrown security blankets, but we still need someone to comfort us, care for us, and love us. Think of all the smiles, hugs, and love we give and receive here. Look at each other right now and smile, share some love! It feels good and together.

When we cross the threshold into this sanctuary, we create one tremendous security blanket that envelops us all. And, when we leave, we take a little piece of that blanket with us in our hearts. Linus, the Peanuts comic strip character, said it best when he proclaimed, "Happiness is a warm blanket." He also said, "Happiness is sharing." Even better, I say, "Happiness is the warmth of a shared blanket."

Whether our Fellowship blanket or other comfort objects are real or only in our imagination, may we share their comfort and our love whenever we are together. May we live fully within the embrace and security of this community.

May it be so.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. Describe your sense of belonging to this UU community. If you have given or received support or care because you belong or have connections here, how did that experience affect you?
2. How or where do you find comfort or strength when you're feeling most vulnerable?
3. When gloom and doom seem too close, how or where do you find hope?