

## **1/16/11 Remarks**

“MLK: In His Shoes”

Rev. Paul D. Daniel, Minister

The shootings in Arizona have been a sad reminder of how fractured our community and this nation still are. Civil discourse has been subjugated by contentious and hateful rhetoric in our everyday conversations and in the media – especially on talk shows of the left and right.

In such a time we are reminded of the universal call to make peace through non-violent means. All the world’s major faiths speak of peacemaking and love. Listen and heed these messages.

Buddhists and Hindus focus on non-harm, or ahimsa. The Buddha said, “Abandon the taking of life, dwell without stick or sword.” Christian scriptures tell us, “Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take the sword will perish by the sword.” (Matthew 26:52). The Old Testaments admonish us to turn swords into plowshares.

Love and peace are not garments to be put on and off at will. Its seat is in the heart, and it must be an inseparable part of our very being, we are told by Gandhi.

“We know there is evil in the world,” the President said, and that terrible things happen for reasons that defy human understanding. In the words of Job, “When I look for light, then came darkness.”

We all struggle to find that same light. Our sixth Unitarian Universalist Principle seeks it in “the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all,” and that is central to our faith.

This week’s events have shattered that goal of a world community built on peace and justice. Yet one lone gunman cannot destroy our shared faith in each other and in the goodness of humankind – especially in the face of tragedy. We are so grateful for Daniel Hernandez and the other heroes of Tucson who put themselves in harm’s way and, unfortunately, some tragically were killed or grievously wounded. They saved people lives and demonstrated that individual acts of moral and physical courage can make a difference. They showed how we can all be better friends, neighbors, parents, people and citizens and together still build the holy golden city on the hill even in the face of such violence.

We will survive and grow beyond this tragedy if there is a will to love thy neighbor as thy self. Yes, our hearts are broken – and yet, our hearts also have reason for fullness, especially if this tragedy prompts reflection and debate, as it should; let's make sure it's worthy of those we have lost, let's make sure it's not on the usual plane of politics and point-scoring and pettiness that drifts away in the next news cycle.

We must stop the blame game – dial down the vitriol. It's important for us to pause for a moment and make sure that we are talking with each other in a way that heals, not a way that wounds. What we can't do is use this tragedy as one more occasion to turn on one another. As we discuss these issues, let each of us do so with a good dose of humility. Rather than pointing fingers or assigning blame, let us use this occasion to expand our moral imaginations, to listen to each other more carefully, to sharpen our instincts for empathy, and remind ourselves of all the ways our hopes and dreams are bound together.

We are reminded that, in the fleeting time we have on this Earth, what matters is not wealth, or status, or power, or fame, but rather how well we have loved and what small part we have played in making the lives of other people better.

We wonder: How do we do that? What beyond prayers and expressions of concern, is required of us going forward? How can we honor the fallen? How can we be true to their memory?

We cannot be passive in the face of such violence. We should be willing to challenge old assumptions in order to lessen the prospects of such violence in the future. But what we cannot do is use this tragedy as one more occasion to turn on each other. That we cannot do. That we cannot do.

We must, if we are to live authentically, make sure we align our values with our actions. That is what a tragedy like this requires. We may not be able to stop all evil in the world, but how we treat one another, that's entirely up to us.

As the President says, "For all our imperfections, we are full of decency and goodness, and the forces that divide us are not as strong as those that unite us."

And that process – that process of reflection, of making sure we align our values with our actions – that, I believe, is what a tragedy like this requires.

We may not be able to stop all evil in the world, but I know that how we treat one another, that is entirely up to us.

And I believe that for all our imperfections, we are full of decency and goodness, and that the forces that divide us are not as strong as those that unite us.

Blessed be.