The Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street are two sides of the same coin. They have tapped into something visceral. While they are at opposite ends of the political spectrum their anger and fear are similar, and their goals seem to overlap at some points. They both are frustrated by a political system that has failed us all, and both feel unheard, unrepresented and alienated. They feel that their country has betrayed them in some deep and fundamental way.

They are acting in their own self-interest to “take back America”. They have galvanized and are organizing themselves to influence the political order and gain control over the levers of power. While the Occupy movement is marching and camping in the streets, the Tea Party has more effectively seized the moment and brought government to a standstill... hijacking the democratic process, creating a new tyranny of a self-serving minority.

Both groups rightly claim that Congress is out of touch with America and has no viable plan of action to solve the mess they created with the collusion and profligate habits of the American people. If Congress had to live on the wages of the unemployed, they might come up with a jobs plan. If they had to eat on what food stamps provide, they would not be so quick to end programs that feed the hungry. If they had to pay the same increasing health care premiums for less coverage, they might be willing to offer the general public the same good coverage they have.

Congress fiddles while America suffers. They have done nothing to put people back to work, or to fix a very broken financial system where the rich get richer and the rest of us struggle to make ends meet. Is it any wonder that whatever side of the political spectrum we are on, we are all screaming, “I am mad as hell and we’re not going to take it any longer”.

From this religious progressive's view, the Occupy moment has a ways to catch up to the Tea party in organizing to gain attention, to be taken seriously as a viable alternative to change America. UUs understand the source of this anger. In the words of UUA president Peter Morales, “the Occupy Wall Street movement is a public outcry of frustration and anger. The protestors have taken to the streets to draw attention to the fact that our economic system has not only failed to protect the most vulnerable among us, it has preyed on the majority for the benefit of very few. The
Occupy protests are a wake-up call that the American people are in great peril, and we have been for some time.

“It is not surprising that Americans have had to take to the streets to get the attention of our leaders. For too long, we have seen attention paid to banks that are 'too big to fail' while the plight of the poor and the working class goes unaddressed. For too long, we have been pitted against each other by those in power, by a corrupt economic system that pushed us to consume more and to 'get ours' at any cost. Now we know: The cost is too great, and is ultimately without satisfaction.”

As a liberal religious person, I make no pretense at being neutral. Our UU principles offer all the guidance any of us here need when dealing with such division, angry, polarizing discourse and malaise. UUs believe in our Fifth Principle: *The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large.* This democracy of ours contains an implicit understanding that we will debate mightily; speak our minds with clarity; and with the passion of our hearts, work to be heard; but in the end, will act for the good of all, to compromise as the way forward to a better, healthy political and moral system of laws and values.

As UUs, we value the experience, worth and dignity of all individuals, especially important when someone is in opposition. Without that, our system of government and faith breaks down as it now has. Everyone is talking and arguing but no one is listening. As Morales notes, “we UUs have a long tradition of working for economic justice and workers’ rights. Today is another opportunity for us to live our faith, and the Occupy protests are a first step on the road to repairing our country. Let us reach out to Unitarian Universalists everywhere to consider how you might be of service to any among us who are struggling to provide for their families, those who have been cheated and abused by financial institutions, and all those whose backs ache under a burden of debt, unemployment, and fading hope. Let the world see the power of our faith in action.”

This crisis is not someplace out there. People's lives in UUMAN are disrupted: jobs lost, homes foreclosed; some go to bed hungry, while others deal with growing depression. Many of us feel as if an earthquake has struck and our lives have been shaken to the core. Some of us have had our retirement security put in jeopardy by the irresponsible greedy Wall Streeters, who gamble with our money without any consciousness that they are playing with people's very lives. Our members and others across this land are worried about whether they're going to be able to pay for their heat and electricity this winter, much less make their pledge payments to the church.
Few of us are adequately prepared to meet this continuing financial crisis. As one of my colleagues wrote, “We boomers and Gen-Xer’s were raised to believe that each succeeding generation would be more successful, more educated, more secure, and even wealthier than the one that preceded it. Oh, and happier, too. Let’s not forget our constitutional right to happiness. As long as we worked hard and played by the rules, someday we’d be comfortably residing on that shady, tree-lined boulevard called ‘Easy Street.’ But suddenly, when we look at our savings and retirement plans, or we look around at the empty offices recently vacated by our friends who’ve been laid off, we realize that we’re totally unprepared. And we feel powerless in the face of it.”

We struggle to know what to do. I have talked to some of you who suffer financially, spiritually and emotionally. The European debt crisis only makes our insecurity greater; we worry ourselves sick; some self-medicate with alcohol or drugs; others withdraw from all connection, or resort to blaming others, hoping those out there will solve all our problems. It took all of us to get into this mess and it will take all the American ingenuity we can muster and a renewed sense of common purpose to solve these very real, vexing problems.

I share your sense of vulnerability. This crisis is more than financial. It is spiritual. I see it in your faces. It is a growing fear and pain at feeling overwhelmed by an inability to find adequate solutions to our problems. We become myopic ...seeing the glass as more than half empty, our fears darken our perceptions of reality. As people of faith we are called to respond to this crisis as a spiritual one. When we face financial setbacks we can do practical things like network and look for a new job; we can down-size our expenses and create a new family budget to meet our current reality; but let us not forget these challenges don’t negate the resources that we have in family and friends, UUMAN and elsewhere. As my anonymous colleague wrote, “this congregation has a deep wellspring of kindness, love and compassion that are available to each and every one of you. Do not withdraw from us at the time you need us most.” Love here is freely given, compassion offered and advice too, whether you want it or not.

The people sustain us in our times of trial. We can still appreciate that the sky is still a beautiful blue, the sun feels good on our skin, and an embrace is perhaps warmer and more welcome than normal. What is most important in our lives is to not give up hope. When we open ourselves spiritually, we remember family, friends, relationships that sustain.
“The test of any community is how it responds to its members who are most in need. I am asking you to believe in us, to trust in us, in the power of community, the power of this community, to help you through whatever struggles you may be facing.” As Forrest Church writes, “Whenever a trapdoor swings or the roof caves in, don’t ask ‘Why?’ Why will get you nowhere. The only question worth asking is ‘Where do we go from here?’ And part of the answer,” he writes, “must be ‘together.’ Together we kneel. Together we walk, holding each another’s hands, holding each another up. Together we do love’s work and thereby we are saved.” [Forrest Church, *Love and Death*, 82.]

These things offer renewed hope. Together we can work to achieve and maintain a spiritual balance that will help sustain us through any crisis. We may even come to remember that the ground that is shifting under our feet is really holy ground and the smoke in the distance is not our society and our own lives crumbling into ruin, but is rather a burning bush that on approach, we hear a deep inner voice whispering “have faith in yourself and this community... all will be well again”. Nothing is forever, good times or bad.