

Looking Around  
UUF

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I don't like much of what I see in this world of ours today. Almost everywhere I look there is tumult, disharmony, antagonism, oppression, terror and dislocation. And it seems to be getting more problematic day by day.

There are police in schools and classrooms. Six and seven year old kids are being placed in handcuffs for misbehavior. High schoolers, teenagers, are being arrested in their classrooms for disobedience. One young lady was yanked from her chair and literally thrown across the room...and we all got to watch, thanks to phone cameras and the internet. I almost threw up the first time I saw it.

The loss of biodiversity, due to the impact humans are having on organisms and ecosystems, is massive. I've read the rate of extinctions is 100 times higher than what would normally be expected. We're over fishing the oceans. There is significant destruction of habitat as we cut down forests, fill wetlands and blow the tops off mountains for mining. And then there is climate change...despite what some of our politicians are telling us.

And there is more, which I will get to in a moment. But first I need to tell you that my words this morning are not intended to depress you. Nor are they intended to be a rant. My intent is to raise what I believe are moral issues; issues of inequality, oppression, and injustice. These are issues I believe moral people ought to look at, think about and determine what's our relationship to these issues.

As Martin Luther King Jr. said in his letter from Birmingham, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

So, as the flight attendant says, the pilot has turned on the fasten seatbelt signs. We may encounter some turbulence. Again, I quote Martin: “there are certain things in our nation and in the world which I am proud to be maladjusted and which I hope all [people] of goodwill will be maladjusted... I never intend to become adjusted to... discrimination...religious bigotry...to economic conditions that will take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few...to the madness of militarism”.

Our federal governmental system is dysfunctional, likewise some states and cities. I believe the road to dysfunction was crystallized in Reagan’s first inaugural speech when he told us, “the government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem”.

The government has been demonized every since. It seems everything but the military has had it’s budget cut. The Tea Party appears to see victory in shutting down the government. Because nature abhors a vacuum, something needs to fill the space created.

Money interests have filled the void at a rate like never before in the history of this country. US income inequality has been on the rise for decades and is now greater than anytime since 1928. We now have banks that the government says are too big to be allowed to fail.

We discovered this during the economic collapse of the first decade of the 2000’s. The Great Recession, the worst since WWII, captured the entire world market. We continue to live with the consequences. Why did it happen?

The U.S. Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission, found "the crisis was avoidable and was caused by: Widespread failures in financial regulation, including the Federal Reserve’s failure to stem the tide of toxic mortgages; Dramatic breakdowns in corporate governance including too many financial firms acting recklessly and taking on too much risk; An explosive mix of excessive borrowing and risk by households and Wall Street that put the financial system on a collision course with crisis; Key policy makers ill prepared for the crisis, lacking a full understanding of the financial system they oversaw; and systemic breaches in accountability and ethics at all levels.”

With breaches in ethics at all levels, no more than a handful of low level Wall Streeters went to jail. The system is rigged as the senator from MA says. I call it corrupt. Breaches of ethics at all levels indicates probable lawlessness to me. But it's the guy who steals a car that goes to jail. It's the guy who steals a box of cigars or sells single cigarettes that gets killed by the police for their behavior.

We have built a system where making money is infinitely more important than the lives of most of the world who pay the price for the greed of the powerful. The financially powerful bankroll the politicians who make the rules...and can decide whether or not to enforce them.

This is a dynamic that's not going to change of it's own volition. It's a corrupt system---we need to tell the truth, we need to be honest about that. We need not to turn a blind eye to that reality. And we as individuals should assess our relationship to this dynamic.

In his farewell address in 1961, President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned against developing a military-industrial complex; an infrastructure that could only exist in collaboration with congress. In 2014 we spent \$581B on defense, more than the next 15 countries combined.

Is there any wonder our cities, states, and school systems have become militarized? Is there any wonder some nations see America as a global bully. We are the only nation to use an atomic bomb, twice! We killed some 200,000 Japanese civilians and military personnel. That's efficient killing. While our government has justified it, many around the world refuse to do so.

In October of 2001, the US, along with allies, launched "Operation Enduring Freedom", invading Afghanistan. This followed the 9/11 attack by some 19 men associated with al-Qaeda who killed some 3000 people on American soil. The stated reason for the invasion was to dismantle al-Qaeda and to remove the Taliban from power. Officially the war ended in 2014, but we continue to have troops there. To date, there has been no enduring freedom.

In 2003, the US invaded Iraq. The mission was "to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, to end Saddam Hussein's support for terrorism, and to free the Iraqi people." The UN Secretary General called the war illegal. We became an occupying force.

Both wars were said to be a war on terror. Both countries are predominately Islamic. Many in the Muslim world and others saw it as a war on Islam. There were no WMDs. We took out a head of state. The region has been destabilized. Today there is mass migration or relocation of thousands as a result. Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair is quoted, as saying there were 'elements of truth' to the view that the invasion helped promote the rise of ISIS.

Muslims in America and around the world have become associated with terrorism. Many believe they are profiled, questioned and discriminated against because they are Muslims. It is important to understand the power of dominant systems.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor some 120, 000 Japanese, mostly American citizens, were relocated to internment camps. Losing their livelihood, homes, money and family structures. We had previously done the same to the people who occupied this land before the Europeans arrived, we call them Native Americans. We've enslaved Africans and free blacks for hundreds of years. We have ugliness in our history.

Margaret Wheatley in our reading this morning says, "everything comes from something". I'm convinced so-called radical Islamists are highly correlated with the behavior of the United States, including our economic and military support of the Israeli government.

Israel has been an occupying force since the six day war in 1967. Almost 50 years. United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 called for "the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East" ... to be achieved by " ... Withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in [that] conflict ... Termination of all claims or states of belligerency" and respect for the right of every state in the area to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries.

The United States, and most of the western world acts as if resolution 242 does not exist. It acts as if the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a defensive posture rather than a violation of international law. The Israeli government is able to continue to occupy and oppress a people in largest measure because of the monetary and military support of the United States.

I understand full well there are a zillion data points that are argued to “explain” why the Middle East is as it is; why no peace agreement has been made and held. I argue such data points operate to obscure a fundamental truth. A form of failure to see the forest for the trees, or a refusal to see the forest because of trees.

The so-called western world, a predominately Christian western world, has to be held accountable for allowing, even supporting the ugly reality of one people subjugating another. As it was complicit in allowing apartheid to stand for so long, it is complicit in the apartheid nature of the Israeli/Palestinian relationship.

I do not support or condone the horrible, vicious attaches of Islamic terrorists. I can not accept the brutality, the inhumanity of beheadings or suicide bombers. I, like Martin, am proud to be maladapted to such cruelty.

Yet, I understand everything comes from something. As a systems thinker, as a believer in the interconnectedness of existence, I understand there is a connection between those atrocities and me, between them and Unitarian Universalism.

At the same time, I understand it is not my job or responsibility to fix the world, nor yours. I know I am not, you are not, directly responsible or accountable for world affairs. I also know I believe in justice, equity and compassion.

I believe in the inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. I believe that whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. And I am committed to a free and responsible search for truth and meaning.

I believe we need to learn to be able to hold it all, at the same time...the good, the bad and the ugly. All are part of our every day lives. We need to be compassionate, help to heal and support each other with open hearts.

We must not give in to hate, bigotry, or denial. We can not allow ourselves to be alienated from our government, from our fellow travellers on this earth. We must be engaged with the world around us if we are to truly live.

My hope is that we will seek to see clearly, seek the truth, seek to play our part in the unfolding of the universe... Because we can and do make a difference, each and every one of us, each and every day.

May it be, Amen, and Ashee