I’ve always been a fan of Tina Turner. Her rendition of “Proud Mary” is among my favorite songs of all time. But, as we dive into the theme of Love and Justice, it’s her hit “What’s Love Got to Do With It” that is on my mind. Every February since we began following monthly themes, we have chosen a Love theme. It’s a nice connection with Valentine’s Day. Over the years, we’ve explored themes like compassion and loving-kindness. This year, though, we will look at the intersection of Love and Justice.

Looking at these two concepts together also fits with the Thirty Days of Love campaign that the Unitarian Universalist Association and Standing on the Side of Love promote for the 30 days between Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Valentine’s Day. This campaign is inspired by how clearly Dr. King expressed his commitment to justice and undoing structures of injustice as an expression of the call to love one another.

In her song, Turner sings “What’s love but a sweet old fashion notion.” In a theological or religious sense, the ideas of love and justice are often joined. We see this most clearly in the expressions of the Golden Rule throughout the world’s religious traditions. When Jesus says the highest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself, he follows that with the story of the Samaritan—showing that this love is not just an emotional sentiment, but it is followed by acts of mercy toward others. In other words, we are called to love one another and because of that we seek to be of service to one another, we seek to do no harm to others.

However, it is not just in our responsibilities to our neighbors and our fellow humanity that love and justice intersect. Justice is also an important value and framework in loving interpersonal relationships. Issues of power, gender, agency, respect—they all play out in our interpersonal relationships. When Turner asks, “What’s Love Got to Do With It,” she is highlighting the fact that love alone (exciting and emotional as it is) does not make a healthy relationship. Studying ethics in seminary, I was introduced to Yale ethicist Margaret Farley’s concept of Just Love.

Just Love is a way of expressing the importance of the values of equity, power sharing, mutuality, non-violence, and agency existing within our personal relationships right along side the feelings of love. Moving beyond the focus on the individual relationship, Farley says that relationships of Just Love also move a couple to a wider concern and attention to the needs of those around them.

Much attention will be given this month (especially by advertisers) to romantic love. In our services, we will be exploring how understanding love and justice together provides a deeper and more powerful understanding of both concepts— more powerful than either of them separately. During this exploration, I invite you to reflect on the intersection of love and justice in your life and relationships.

What do you see as key concepts of justice (what does justice look like, feel like to you?) and are they expressed within your loving relationships? This can include romantic, familial, even friend relationships. If not, how might you create an ethic of Just Love within your interpersonal relationships?

Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray

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Questions to Contemplate

1. When we add “Justice” to another concept, we give it a much richer conversation. For example, reproductive rights vs. reproductive justice. The rights-based conversation is more limited in scope and application, whereas the justice-based conversation includes more voices, perspectives and experiences. So, how does the conversation about love become deeper when combined with justice? Whose voices are included?

2. The UU Our Whole Lives lifespan sexuality education curriculum helps our children, youth and adults explore sexuality, relationships, and personal safety and health. It not only talks about sexual health, but it also includes information about consent, sexual orientation and gender identity, and looking multiple ways to be in relationships. How were you taught about love and relationships growing up? How are love and justice expressed in your relationships now?

3. What do you see as key concepts of justice (what does justice look like, feel like to you?) and are they expressed within your loving relationships? This can include romantic, familial, even friend relationships. If not, how might you create an ethic of Just Love within your interpersonal relationship?

4. How is love different when we see it as a noun versus a verb? Same question for justice - how is it either a thing or an action? What does it mean to you to combine both terms as nouns, verbs, or even adjectives?

5. How do you see the combined concepts of justice and love at play in:
   - Personal relationships & friendships
   - How you view the institution of marriage
   - Larger justice movements in society (environmental justice, racial justice, reproductive justice, etc.)
   - UU principles and values
   - Courts and prisons

6. Buddhist teacher Pema Chodron says “People need a lot of support for suffering to turn into compassion. What usually happens to people when they don't have teachers and guides and the support of people who care is that great suffering leads to more suffering.” Who are your teachers that help you understand the ways that injustice or suffering in your life can be transformed by love/compassion?

7. Can love exist without justice? Or justice without love?
What does it mean to live a life of Love & Justice?

Quotes and Thoughts on the Theme

My conclusion become my calling: that justice is what love looks like in public, just as deep democracy is what justice looks like in practice. When you love people, you hate the fact that they’re being treated unjustly. Justice is not simply an abstract concept to regulate institutions, but also a fire in the bones to promote the well-being of all.
—Cornel West, *Brother West: Living and Loving Out Loud*

We are different. Yet we are all God’s children. We are all united behind this country and the common cause of freedom, justice, fairness, and equality. That is what unites us.
—Sen. Barbara Boxer

Only when man succeeds in developing his reason and love further than he has done so far, only when he can build a world based on human solidarity and justice, only when he can feel rooted in the experience of universal brotherliness, will he have found a new, human form of rootedness, will he have transformed his world into a truly human home.
—Erich Fromm

All religions try to benefit people, with the same basic message of the need for love and compassion, for justice and honesty, for contentment
—Dalai Lama

I should like to be able to love my country and still love justice.
—Albert Camus

Justice without love is not justice. Love without justice is not love.
—Mother Teresa

Feminist thinking teaches us all, especially, how to love justice and freedom in ways that foster and affirm life.
—bell hooks

Without justice and love, peace will always be a great illusion.
—Helder Camara

In Scotland over many years we have cultivated through our justice system what I hope can be described as a ‘culture of compassion.’ On the other hand, there still exists in many parts of the U.S., if not nationally, an attitude towards the concept of justice which can only be described as a ‘culture of vengeance.’
—Keith O’Brien

Until the great mass of the people shall be filled with the sense of responsibility for each other’s welfare, social justice can never be attained.
—Helen Keller

I believe in the equality of (people); and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavoring to make our fellow-creatures happy.
—Thomas Paine

The love of justice is, in most men, nothing more than the fear of suffering injustice.
—Francois, Duc de la Rochefoucauld, *Sentences et Maximes Morales*

“Justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love.”
Martin Luther King, Jr.

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Given the unfairness that strikes so many people in life, I would rather believe in a God of limited power and unlimited love and justice, rather than the other way around.
—Harold Kushner

Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world’s grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.
—Rabbi Tarfon

Our opponents in the agricultural industry are very powerful and farm workers are still weak in money and influence. But we have another kind of power that comes from the justice of our cause. So long as we are willing to sacrifice for that cause, so long as we persist in non-violence and work to spread the message of our struggle, then millions of people around the world will respond from their heart, will support our efforts ... and in the end we will overcome.
—Cesar Chavez

Power is of two kinds. One is obtained by the fear of punishment and the other by acts of love. Power based on love is a thousand times more effective and permanent than the one derived from fear of punishment.
—Gandhi

Violence as a way of achieving racial justice is both impractical and immoral. It is impractical because it is a descending spiral ending in destruction for all. The old law of an eye for an eye leaves everybody blind. It is immoral because it seeks to humiliate the opponent rather than win his understanding; it seeks to annihilate rather than to convert. Violence is immoral because it thrives on hatred rather than love. It destroys community and makes brotherhood impossible. It leaves society in monologue rather than dialogue. Violence ends by defeating itself. It creates bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers.
—Martin Luther King, Jr.

One of the things you learn early in life is that there’s only one thing really worth having, and that’s love. Well, by the same token, there’s only one thing worth fighting for, and that is justice.
—Tom Clancy, The Bear and the Dragon

Love is the motive, but justice is the instrument.
—Reinhold Niebuhr

It is our duty to fight for our freedom.
It is our duty to win.
We must love each other and support each other.
We have nothing to lose but our chains.
—Assata Shakur, Assata: An Autobiography

When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace.
—Jimi Hendrix
What does it mean to live a life of Love & Justice?

Quotes and Thoughts on the Theme

Love & Justice in Black Liberation

1. We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.

In the early 1900s, Marcus Garvey introduced the theory of self-determination as a basic tenant for liberation for Africans worldwide. In the Americas and the Caribbean, his prescription was for a people not yet a generation away from slavery. But he was also talking to continental Africans, whose freedom from colonialism was some 50 years into the future. “Action, self-reliance, the vision of self and the future have been the only means by which the oppressed have seen and realized the light of their own freedom,” he wrote. The Black Panther Party, largely inspired by these teachings, made “freedom” the first principle of their 10-point plan.

But what does 21st-century self-determination mean? Independent nationhood is no longer the call. As a new generation of organizers and movement thinkers re-imagines Garvey’s freedom principle, his philosophy remains critical: “Let us in shaping our own Destiny set before us the qualities of human justice, love, charity, mercy and equity.” It’s important that he used “equity” and not “equality,” that he used “justice” and not “rights.” It’s important that between the bookends of justice and equity he placed the words “love,” “charity” and “mercy.” This deeply human call puts self-love and self-care at the center of a radical movement for true freedom—the guiding principle the Black Panther Party rested all others upon.

—dream hampton is a writer and activist, commenting on the first point of the Black Panther’s 10 point platform, released 51 years ago in 1966.

This is the 21st century and we need to redefine r/evolution. this planet needs a people’s r/evolution. a humanist r/evolution. r/evolution is not about bloodshed or about going to the mountains and fighting. we will fight if we are forced to but the fundamental goal of r/evolution must be peace.

we need a r/evolution of the mind. we need a r/evolution of the heart. we need a r/evolution of the spirit. the power of the people is stronger than any weapon. a people's r/evolution can't be stopped. we need to be weapons of mass construction. weapons of mass love. it's not enough just to change the system. we have got to make this world user friendly. user friendly.

are you ready to sacrifice to end world hunger. to sacrifice to end colonialism. to end neo-colonialism. to end racism. to end sexism.

r/evolution means the end of exploitation. r/evolution means respecting people from other cultures. r/evolution is creative.

r/evolution means treating your mate as a friend and an equal. r/evolution is sexy.

r/evolution means respecting and learning from your children. r/evolution is beautiful.

r/evolution means protecting the people. the plants. the animals. the air. the water. r/evolution means saving this planet.

r/evolution is love.

—Assata Shakur

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Post-election ‘love notes’ in chalk appearing around Twin Cities

This weekend, Sharon Rosenberg-Scholl took boxes of colored chalk off her back porch, left over from when her 12-year-old son was younger, and wrote “We love immigrants” in front of her house in St. Paul’s North End. She hasn’t heard from the African immigrants who live next door, but the gesture made her feel like she was doing something in the wake of a presidential election that has left her feeling anxious.

“With all the grief and anger, it seemed like a small and positive thing to do,” said Rosenberg-Scholl, who teaches at a Jewish school. “I’ve been wondering a lot about how all my neighbors are feeling and I wanted to make sure there is some love and positivity out there.”

Similar chalk messages have popped up around the Twin Cities, and photos of hundreds of them have been posted with the hashtag #NeighborhoodLoveNotes on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. The movement even has its own Facebook page.

The idea came from the Rev. Ashley Horan, a Unitarian Universalist clergywoman from Minneapolis and executive director of the Minnesota Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Alliance.

“The day after the election I was feeling very upset,” Horan said Monday. “I knew how afraid and hurting everybody was in my community, which is full of queer folks and black and brown folks and immigrants. I needed to do something.”

She believes Donald Trump’s win has “emboldened and empowered” people to speak negatively about Muslims and immigrants, make racist slurs, and put down women and members of the LGBTQ community. So on her sidewalk she wrote things like “Black lives will always matter” and “Ninguna persona es ilegal” (“No one is illegal”).

Her idea was picked up by a number of Unitarian Universalist churches locally and in other parts of the country, some of which handed out colored chalk at worship services. A Facebook page about the effort has been shared nearly 20,000 times.

The messages have gotten less specific and more broad as they’ve spread across the country. Someone from Elgin, Ill., posted the chalk message “If love hasn’t won, then it’s not the end.” A Grand Rapids, Mich., poster posed seven preschoolers sitting next to “You are ALL loved” written on a driveway.

Fritz and Barbie Steimann of Roseville posted a photo of their chalk message, “Imagine” next to a heart, on the driveway of their Roseville home.

And someone spread messages of love all over Lowertown in downtown St. Paul: “You are welcome here #Lowertown cares” and “love lives here” and “Lower-town has your back” and “this community needs you” and “we should hang out more often.”

By Maja Beckstrom at twincities.com