

Good morning friends! I am so happy to be here with you all this Sunday. As an aspirant for UU ministry and in my role as Coordinator for Congregational Activism at UUSC, I have preached in a lot of different UU congregations and let me tell you, each congregation does things a little bit differently - which makes sense. I mean we UUs are kind of known for loving to argue and disagree about practically anything. There are even UU jokes about it. Some of my favorites are:

A Unitarian Universalist died, and to his surprise discovered that there was indeed an afterlife. The angel in charge of these things told him, "Because you were an unbeliever and a doubter and a skeptic, you will be sent to Hell for all eternity—which, in your case, consists of a place where no one will disagree with you ever again!"

Visitors on a tour of Heaven noticed a group of Unitarian Universalists, who were arguing about whether or not they were really there.

A visitor to a Unitarian Universalist church sat through the sermon with growing incredulity at the heretical ideas being spouted. After the sermon a UU asked the visitor, "So how did you like it?"

"I can't believe half the things that minister said!" sputtered the visitor in outrage.

"Oh, good—then you'll fit right in!"

Honestly, I love pretty much all UU jokes, but especially the ones about how much we love to argue and disagree about things. We have 8 principles and an infinite number of ways to interpret them, we agree on a lot, but love to get into the nitty gritty about what we aren't so sure of, and I think we can all agree that as a faith we actually love being unsure, we lean into it and that is a beautiful thing. We understand that we are a learning and not a learned faith and that healthy disagreement produces growth and keeps us from being dogmatic about things we, and in fact no one, can know for sure.

However, there is one thing that solidly connects all UU's. In every single congregation, there is a chalice and that chalice is lit to begin worship.

Now, you might be thinking...I thought this worship was going to be about how our faith calls us to support our trans beloveds in these times of fascist threats against their humanity? The chalice and UU jokes don't have anything to do with that - well, first, to come full circle, I disagree. And second, I promise I will explain more and maybe something that never happens in a UU service will happen today - you all will end up agreeing with me.

It is the chalice itself, the very thing that binds all UUs together, that most strongly calls us to the work of resisting the criminalization of our trans and gender expansive beloveds.

You see, our chalice, as sacred as it is to us, wasn't always the symbol of the Unitarian and Universalist faiths. In 1940, Reverend Dr. Charles Rhind-Joy was sent by the newly created Unitarian Service Committee, the predecessor to the current UUSC, to Lisbon, Portugal which was the only open port in Europe at that time and was the preferred port for the many refugees that were fleeing the Nazi regime.

Many of the refugees had to flee without any of the identification papers that were required to cross borders, so Joy decided to start making identification papers issued by the USC itself. This was uncharted waters, but instead of focusing on the risks that he and the organization might be taking by doing this, Joy focused on saving the lives of those fleeing fascism.

He also decided that these papers needed a seal to look as official as other travel papers, and so he asked Hans Deutch, an Austrian refugee and artist working in Lisbon to create one and the result was the basis of the flaming chalice as we know it now. While this was happening, Waitstill and Martha Sharp were also sent to Europe by the USC - they not only falsified documents to get people out, but also laundered money if necessary!

So you see, the thing that binds us all as Unitarian Universalists together - the chalice - was founded on our commitment to human rights and to fighting fascism. Since the founding of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee,

we have been committed to supporting the work of liberation, even when and maybe especially when, it involves making holy trouble for the powers that would deny anyone's full humanity.

Okay, let's take a quick breath

Now, this is where we get into the especially heavy stuff, so I want to invite you all to do whatever you need to do to care for yourselves and stay grounded as we proceed. If you need to stand up and stretch, walk to the back of the sanctuary, look at your phones (yes even that), please listen to your bodies' needs and follow them. I promise I won't be insulted. Talking about the present nature of fascism in our country can be incredibly triggering for anyone. To my trans and queer family in the room, this invitation especially goes out to you. I love you.

To understand what fascism is, I want to reference the work of Jason Stanley, who is the author of *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them*. Stanley is a professor and scholar of philosophy and propaganda at Yale. He describes fascism as an ideology but also, and perhaps more importantly, as a political method. Not all who use fascist tactics are ideologically fascist. We recognize fascists less by their beliefs than by their methods.

I'm going to share Stanley's overview of the 10 tactics of political fascism.

What I'm sharing with you now is taken directly from Stanley's work, at

times word for word from a video lecture he gave titled "The Ten Tactics of Fascism" which is available on Youtube. I recommend watching this video, even more than once.

Stanley opens by explaining that these ten tactics are bundled—that they can't be isolated from each other.

1. The first tactic is A Mythic Past.

Fascists always present the idea that there was once a glorious past. In politics, this is presented in the idea that we were once a great nation. Notice the past tense. And when we were great, the dominant racial group ruled over others. But now that's been taken away—not lost by our own actions, but taken away by some group designated as "other." Jason Stanley says: "Fascists are always telling a story about a glorious past that's been lost, and they tap into this nostalgia. So when you fight back against fascism, you've got one hand tied behind your back, because the truth is messy and complex and the mythical story is always clear and compelling and entertaining. It's hard to undercut that with facts."

2. The second tactic is Propaganda:

All social movements and all politics use propaganda to persuade. Fascist propaganda, however, makes a distinction between friends and enemies; it casts “the other” as a threat and presents the idea that these “others” are fundamentally opposed to the nation.

3. Tactic number three is Anti-intellectualism.

Authoritarianism presents a cult of the leader. In a fascist system, the leader and only the leader sets the rules about what is true or false. So we see the takeover of the country’s media, schools, and cultural institutions to enforce what the leader says is true. Institutions that teach multiple perspectives on history always threaten the leader. Expertise is also always a threat to the leader. Science is a threat to the leader. If intellectuals are telling the truth, they are a threat. So, anti-racism, critical race theory? Definitely a threat.

4. This brings us directly to tactic number four, the creation of a form of Unreality.

The scholar Timothy Snyder talks about this a lot—the destruction of notions of reality. Authoritarians undermine what we know to be true and convince the population that a) everyone is lying and b) the lies don’t matter. In political terms, the center of democracy is truth. You cannot function as a

democratic citizen if you are being lied to. Jason Stanley says: "If you are going to rip the heart out of democracy, you get people used to lies."

5. The fifth tactic of fascism is Hierarchy.

Hierarchy is absolutely central to fascism. It is the big lie at the center of things. White supremacy, male supremacy, abled supremacy- these lies assign people superiority and the privileges and benefits that go with that superiority.

6. Hierarchy goes right into Victimhood

Once you have convinced people that they are justifiably higher in the hierarchy, then you can convince them that they are victims of equality. Fascists tell people that equality is victimizing them by making them lose their rightful place or power. Stanley says: "The goal is to make [people] feel like victims, to make them feel like they've lost something and that the thing they've lost has been taken from them by a specific enemy, usually some minority out-group or some opposing nation." According to Ejeris Dixon, writing in Truthout, "Fascists believe that democracy has failed them and allowed the majority [...] to be tyrannized by communities that have no right to

power. Therefore, fascists seek to eliminate both democratic processes and marginalized communities to return to an often fictitious and glorified past where their power reigned unchecked.”

7. The seventh tactic of fascism is Law and Order.

Under fascism, the definition of law-abiding means loyalty to the dominant group. Members of the dominant group, by their very nature, are considered law-abiding. Marginalized groups are seen by their very nature as not being law-abiding, and Law and Order has nothing to do with justice or equality. Law and Order structures who is legitimate and who is not. And Law and Order will ultimately be enforced by violence. The fascism scholar Ruth Ben-Ghiat reminds us that “the essence of fascism is violence.”

8. Tactic number eight is Sexual Anxiety.

In every case, across different cultural and historical settings, the fascist leader will always say, “Your women and children are under threat. You need a strong man to protect your families.” Fascists make conservatives overwhelmingly terrified of transgender rights and gay, lesbian, and bisexual people and their families. According to fascists, these targeted groups are not simply trying to peacefully live

their own lives, they are trying to destroy the majority's life, and they are coming for the majority's children.

9. Stanley calls the 9th tactic of fascism "Sodom and Gomorrah."

Fascist movements typically rest on an urban/rural divide, and fascists use a toxic trope of the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah. In this trope, pure, hardworking, real members of the nation live in rural areas, where they work hard with their hands. But when politicians talk about inner city voters or 'urban' voters, we all know what they mean—Black and queer folks, immigrants, Jews, and other people that fascists seek to control or eliminate.

10. The tenth tactic is what Stanley, a child of Holocaust survivors, calls 'Arbeit Macht Frei,' Work shall make you free.

These words were hung over the gate at Auschwitz. Fascists create an idea that minorities, immigrants and others are lazy; that these groups need to be taught a work ethic. The mechanism they use is forced labor—whether it's prison labor or work requirements for benefits, the targeted groups must provide free labor as a supposed moral education. According to fascists, labor unions are supposedly run by communists who are trying to make things easier for these

lazy people. College students who protest conservative speakers are described as lazy spoiled kids who need to get real jobs.

The thing is, the end game in this calculation is evil. Valuing people by how hard they work means that the elderly, disabled, and even children can become disposable. The Nazis murdered these groups first, because they believed that those who could not work had no value. Is it any wonder that we are now seeing the repeal of child labor laws, in this time of rising fascism?

Those are Stanley's 10 Tactics of Fascism. Very long quote is over.

Friends, let's take another breath.

No doubt, you recognized many, if not all, of these tactics at work today in the United States and around the world. Currently in the US, anti-lgbtq rhetoric and legislation seems to be one of the few issues that brings disparate factions of conservatives together and right-wing politicians are leaning in hard.

Thirty-eight states currently have anti-transgender legislation on their books with the number of new bills growing by the day. The ACLU is currently

tracking 484 anti-LGBTQI bills that are in process for the 2024 legislative season in various state legislatures, most of them anti-trans laws. There are also 38 national bills being proposed.

These bills threaten our trans and gender expansive beloveds in many ways, some of which include:

- trans genocide through legal definitions which seek to erase trans folks from public life and to remove any protections they may have
- Expansion of anti-LGBTQI propaganda laws which apply to libraries, schools and the internet
- Child custody and removal laws that would allow the state or other family members to take children from trans parents or from parents who are honoring their child's gender identity.

The lies and misinformation surrounding these bills are abhorrent. These bills are trying to legislate trans and queer people out of existence. Please know this is not hyperbole either. We know that this is the ultimate goal as well because of project 2025 which is the right's published plan to reshape the executive branch if they win the next presidential election. One of their

first acts would be to institute a nationwide Don't Say Gay policy through executive order.

Because of these laws, trans people in the United States now meet the definition of *Internally Displaced People, or IDPs, by the United Nations*. Hundreds of thousands of trans people and their families have already fled their homes to safer states with more than a million considering doing so, according to a recent *Data for Progress* survey.

Let's take another breath.

There are so many questions we can ask ourselves in light of the current situation - what do we do? Who do we want to be? How do we resist and find joy even in times like these?

I think many of us have looked back at times like the Holocaust and have thought, if I was there I would have done something. Well folks, we're there.

What is the something we are going to do? What is the something that you are going to do?

Earlier this year, an organization led by trans activists approached UUSC and asked if we could help trans folx relocate to safer states. They saw the work UUSC is doing with congregations in supporting asylum-seekers and wondered if the Unitarian Universalists had the networks, infrastructure, and desire to support a different kind of asylum-seeker, ones driven from their US-based homes and communities.

In this work with trans activists, we are in an interfaith coalition with quakers, jews, mennonites, the United Church of Christ and more. We are exploring partnerships with mutual aid networks and anyone else who is saying, "no, I won't let this happen, not on my watch". We are working together to create networks of safety and direct support for trans beloveds and their families who need to relocate, access healthcare across state lines, or stay as safe as possible where they are.

Because of safety concerns for these trans organizers and the people they are serving, we are prioritizing their security above all, which is allowing us to move together in deep trust during these crucial, frightening times. This is why we are not sharing any names of organizers or passengers, or the

trans led organization that is leading us in this work. Instead, we have come up with the name Pink Haven Coalition to talk about this work.

Acting in coalition together for trans liberation is a direct antidote to the rising fascism we see not only in the United States, but throughout the world. Whenever we resist fascism and injustice, we weaken them everywhere. Know that as you support our trans and gender expansive beloveds to not just survive but thrive, you are also supporting all others that are targeted by fascism and you are helping to heal the world from the sin of dehumanization and oppression.

Here are three important ways you can get involved in this critical work and support trans liberation:

- 1. Get Involved as a volunteer. We are looking for people to be part of villages of support. We need hosts to offer space in their homes, and we need volunteers to provide support in navigating government programs, accessing healthcare, finding employment, and establishing social connections. By joining forces, we can provide a safer exodus and a welcoming community for those settling in our area.**

2. Make a gift: These efforts to support our trans beloveds require financial resources. Your contributions will help us address the practical needs of those seeking sanctuary, respond to their immediate needs, and set them up for success in their new lives.

The First Parish in Malden, MA has generously offered to act as fiscal sponsor for this work. Please know that all donations, in their entirety, are moving directly into the hands of trans-led organizers and being used to support trans and non-binary people in accessing the resources and support they need to survive and thrive. If you can, I encourage you to give as abundantly and courageously as you are able by visiting www.PinkHaven.org and clicking donate.

3. Skill up. We are all in different places on our justice journeys. Some of us here are trans or gender-expansive and this is your lived reality. Others of us may be new to the wonderful world that awaits beyond the gender binary.

For those of us who may not fully understand all the terms and complexities of gender and maybe worry about not knowing what to say or saying the wrong thing, I urge you to lean into your discomfort and support these

individuals anyway. Explore resources that increase your competency in this arena. Reach out to me if you need some ideas. Pretty much nothing would make me happier.

Join me during coffee hour to chat about this work, UUSC's other work or anything else and keep your eyes open for opportunities for being in solidarity with our trans and gender expansive beloveds.

Friends, the forces of facism in our nation and in others around the world are only going to grow more brazen in their quest for power. It is up to us to pay attention, disrupt the violence, and remain true to who we are as justice-loving people of faith. As the late John Lewis advised, "Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Do not become bitter or hostile. Be hopeful. Be optimistic. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble. We will find a way to make a way out of no way."

So I am calling all holy troublemakers to join us. To rise up and say, we will not fall in line, we will not let this happen. We will make so much holy, troublesome noise that we drown out the sounds of hate and fear and

fascism. Together, we can and will find a way out of no way. Now is the time, we are the ones we have been waiting for.

Amen, ashe and let it be so.

