

"I Will Not Dishonor My Soul"

Reading and sermon preached by Reverend Carolyn Patierno
January 22, 2017

By, Diane Ackerman

In the name of the daybreak
and the eyelids of morning
and the wayfaring moon
and the night when it departs,

I swear I will not dishonor
my soul with hatred,
but offer myself humbly
as a guardian of nature,
as a healer of misery,
as a messenger of wonder,
as an architect of peace.

In the name of the sun and its mirrors
and the day that embraces it
and the cloud veils drawn over it
and the uttermost night

...

and the plants bursting with seed
and the crowning seasons
of the firefly and the apple,

I will honor a life –
wherever and in whatever form
It may dwell – on Earth my home,
and in the mansions of the stars.

.....

By train, plain, bus and car we moved our bodies and joined our spirits
with others who also traveled miles, interrupting the flow of their days.

Because there is something to be said. There is something to be said and
we say it and we chant it and it goes like this:

Tell me what democracy look like!
This is what democracy looks like!

And from sea to shining sea we sang, "Oh beautiful for spacious skies ..."
 Millions of voices. Millions.

And we are reminded: we none of us walk alone.

One speaker: "Remember: there are more of us than there are of them."

And honestly, I try so hard not to use such divisive language but in that moment I was thrilled that someone else had.

Let me take you to the start of the day:

7:15 a.m. Hilary & Lizzie Jantzi greet me in the parking lot. We are the Bus Captains!

But there's only one bus. We booked two buses.

"Where's the second bus we booked?"

And the heart-stopping moment – yes, my heart stopped – "We don't have record of a second bus."

Martina – bless her heart – and I jump into action. And the bus, in time, *too much time*, arrives.

We depart to Boston ... in solidarity paying attention to the Facebook posts from other Souls, family, friends, Beloved Community, all.

I wonder how many times, "I LOVE YOU" was texted, placed in a comment, tweeted, spoken tearfully.

Millions. Millions of times, "I LOVE YOU". And probably in caps.

We fly into Boston as though it is o'dark thirty and we're catching a flight out of Logan.

And this is what we see ...



A sea of people -

And we are among them



And from afar I see a sign: "First UU Church of Chelmsford" and my heart leaps. I make my way through the thick-as-mud crowd – glorious mud,

and I am loving this muddy scene as a child loves the mud itself. “Excuse me” and big smiles all the way as I make my way to my dear friend, Reverend Ellen Spero, who has so beautifully served that faithful congregation for as long as I have served you. I reach her people. “Hi! I’m Carolyn Patierno, the minister of our congregation in New London, CT! Can you tell me where Rev. Ellen is?” And she jumps in front of me.



She pulls me close. And she whispers in my ear, “We got this. We got this.”

And I believe her. Look at that face. Don’t you believe her, too?

I make my way back and with quite a few Souls, we take in the magnificent and inspiring array of speakers – one more amazing than the last.



But we can't wait for ELIZABETH WARREN to take the stage. And a grateful – I was going to say “congregation” because that's what it felt like: it felt like church – a grateful *nation* roars our welcome. We have emblazoned in our mind's eye her steely gaze cast toward the cabinet nominee:

“So, you have no personal experience with college financial aid or management of higher education?”

True to form, she's great. We feel for the senior senator who must follow. Senator Marky. And guest what? HE'S GREAT, TOO!!

And while we're listening, we are taking in the signs. Funny. Biting. Smart. Artistic. And remember we learned a few new concepts last week? Intersectional? Fusion politics?

Here's what Intersectional fusion politics looks like evidenced by the signs that were created by the citizens who gathered:

Women's health & healthcare for all:





Women's rights as human rights – Say the Nasty Buddhist Women:



Transgender rights – new language on signs that beg the encouragement: if you don't know what this means, learn what it means:



Peace on Earth. From the credible heart of a woman whose forefathers have served the country generation after generation since the Civil War.



And there were the signs that served only as poetic encouragement in the midst of the storm in which we find ourselves:



And straightforward encouragement to fight on:



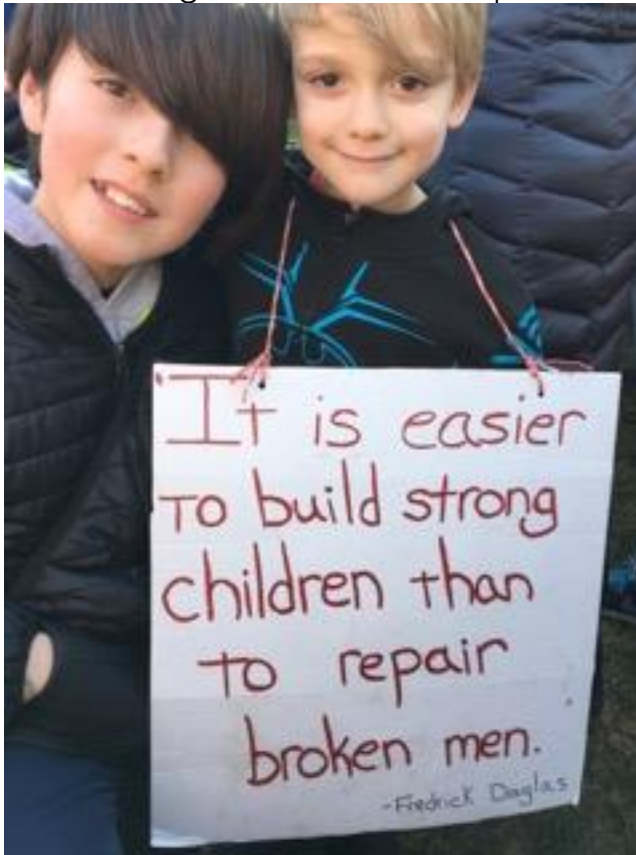
And then there were the children. The children learning what it means to live in a democracy – there were quite a few children on our bus, the youngest of whom was Brownen still held in Liz & Danny's arms. And Helen, making her way with such aplomb, Nancy gently and steadily moving her forward. And youth: Gabriella, Mark and Ella.

And returning home from the third shift, young Mark Robel is brought into the fold.

And these children, bows in their hair reminding us that we are greater than fear.



And these two little boys - buddies – holding up hope that it is easier to “build strong children than to repair broken men.”



And the sign that I text to Lynn Tavormina & Jan Larson back home with these words, “Thinking of both of you.” (If I had Pat Abrahams’ phone number, I would have sent it to her as well. Clare Evento was on the march herself.) The four of them are our 25 Jay Street Renovation Steering Committee. I do not say his name from this pulpit but in that moment, I was glad that someone else had done so.



You will see today what they have accomplished along with a long list of Souls who have volunteered their skills / gifts / commitment: I'm talking about you, Vic Marolda, Sid Gardner, Nick Evento, Janet Marolda, Peter Cooper, George Fargo ... all at the center of this effort.

And I save my favorite sign for last, held by a young Muslim woman thereby busting every uninformed stereotype we hold of a young Muslim woman:



And the crowd grows more thick and dense and we are not moving as the organizers had thought 25,000 people would be there but there were more than that. Tens of thousands more than that. And there are photos to prove it, if prove it we must.



And the good Souls of All Souls – your kin – hold on and are of good cheer.



And they even meet a new friend or two as encouraged by the unshakable MC: (Love that we were photobombed!)



And some of us decide to step out of the crowd. But how to get back to the bus for there is a wrought iron fence surrounding the Common. But if there's a will, there is a way.

Two men on the other side of the fence, reaching their arms up to hold anyone who wants to jump over, their knees serving as a step up. Their generosity and ingenuity serving as a way to exit safely.





The knees of their jeans are worn with layers of mud, a sign of their effort. They stand there helping over marcher after marcher, chanting with whatever chant passes them by – with adjustments: “Their bodies! Their choice!”

A half hour goes by. I know this because a few of us have staked ourselves out on a bench that at first seems like a mirage in a desert.

Our multi-generational congregation shows it's face in Strea's eyes and Helen's determined gaze. (We welcomed neighbors from other faith communities. On the bench is a matriarch of Congregation Beth El, for one.)



It was a sea of homemade, briskly knitted pink hats and everyone got in the act.



Back to the bus we went. Amazed. Encouraged.

And finally: Must find the coffee shop. We have spotted beverages in the hands of fellow marchers. We must find the coffee shop.

On a mission, Kate and I head off.
And lo! Here's who we come upon:

(And here was placed a video of a school bus. High school-aged young women were hanging out windows and others were dancing in the street chanting: "Love! Not Hate! Makes America great!")

We love those young women. We love them so much. They dance and they sing and we are heartened and allow ourselves to believe that "every little thing is gonna be alright" because they've got the whole world in their hands.



But Beloveds, this is the photo that is the most inspiring. This is my mother:



Maria Carolyn Gioia Patierno, for whom one of her life mottos could well be, "I've spent my whole life trying not to make a scene". The character Mary Richards once spat out that line on the Mary Tyler Moore show and in that line, I recognized my mother.

My mother made a scene yesterday.

With my sister, she made her way to the Pompton Plains, NJ demonstration joined by over 1000 other Jersey Girls.

That text from my sister – one of the few that come through for lack of reception – was a highlight of my day. Because I love my mother & sister, sure, but more: if Maria is out there in the streets along with thousands of other introverted, not-typically-demonstrating folks it means that the resistance is stronger and larger than any one of us would have ever hoped.

Rock on, Mommy. By your witness you have shown that:

You swear ... you will not dishonor
 your soul with hatred,
 but offer yourself humbly
 as a guardian of nature,
 as a healer of misery,
 as a messenger of wonder,
 as an architect of peace."

Rock on, millions of citizens in the street, many for the first time yesterday.
 "You never forget your first march" said Gloria Steinem. "It's like your first love."

We settle in on the bus. The sun is settling in and we are, too.

And then, we are startled out of our sleepy rest:

(Here was a video taken from the bus looking out at the wrought-iron fence that surrounds the Boston Common / Public Gardens. To the fence was attached hundreds of signs.)

Signs. Signs. Signs fixed to the fence that surrounds the Boston Common and Public Garden. Signs that seem to say, "We were here. And here we will stay."

We got back to All Souls at 7:30 p.m.

There is a saying attributed to St. Francis of Assisi that goes, "Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use words."

You preached your Gospel this week. You traveled to DC, NYC, Old Saybrook, Hartford, and Boston. Some of you were there in body and others in spirit. You preached with both: body and spirit.

Some of you stayed behind and served our neighbors at the Meal Center. You preached without words.

Some of you spent the last week putting the finishing touches on the House of Hospitality. You preached without words.

Quite a few of you showed up for our mid-day inauguration service. You preached without words.

Some of you spoke out in ways in which you have never felt emboldened before. You preached WITH words. And it was good.

Now is the time, Beloveds.

*In the name of the sun and its mirrors
and the day that embraces it
and the cloud veils drawn over it
and the uttermost night*

...

*and the plants bursting with seed
and the crowning seasons
of the firefly and the apple,*

Now is the time to honor Life –

Last week, the Sunday before the Inauguration, I spoke with a few Souls about the sermon I preached. I was concerned, "I've preached the same sermon every Sunday I've been in the pulpit since November 6th. I was assured that it is the only sermon that begs to be preached.

I'll be here but not in the pulpit next week. Next week we welcome a dear friend of mine, Rev. Tom Schade. You will find him compelling, I'm pretty sure.

And who knows. Perhaps he'll preach a different sermon than the one you have heard five times from this pulpit since November 6th.

And maybe he simply can't.

And so we begin.

Hold close our gospel that begins with the inherent worth and dignity of all people.

And preach, Beloveds. And use words, if necessary.

Blessed be. Amen.