

“Made for These Times”

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Reading: by Clarissa Pinkola Estés¹

Do not lose heart. We were made for these times. ...

Ours is a time of almost daily jaw-dropping astonishment and often righteous rage over the latest degradations of what matters most to civilized, visionary people. ... Yet, I urge you, ask you, gentle you, to please not spend your spirit dry by bewailing these difficult times. Especially do not lose hope. ... [W]e were made for these times.

We are needed, that is all we can know. And though we meet resistance, we more so will meet great souls who will hail us, love us and guide us, and we will know them when they appear. ...

One of the most calming and powerful actions you can do to intervene in a stormy world is to stand up and show your soul. Soul ... shines like gold in dark times. Struggling souls catch light from other souls who are fully lit and willing to show it. ... To display the lantern of the soul in shadowy times like these – to be fierce and to show mercy toward others, both are acts of immense bravery and greatest necessity. ...

There will always be times when you feel discouraged. I too have felt despair many times in my life, but I do not keep a chair for it. I will not entertain it. It is not allowed to eat from my plate.

The reason is this: In my uttermost bones I know something, as do you. It is that there can be no despair when you remember why you came to Earth. ... I hope you will write this on your wall: When a great ship is in harbor and moored, it is safe, there can be no doubt. But that is not what great ships are built for.

Reflection: Made for These Times

Jaw-dropping astonishment and righteous rage - I can do that. And I love the idea of being a great ship boldly sailing into a stormy world, my soul a lantern for all to see. That's got a good feel to it, even if boldness isn't always where I'm at these days. But, made for these times? I'm not so sure about that one. I see myself in a softer, gentler time, a less demanding and more predictable time. A time when I wouldn't have to muster courage just to check the news. A time when I could hug my children. For real.

¹ Clarissa Pinkola Estés is an American Mestiza Latina poet and psychoanalyst, specializing in post-trauma recovery. This is an excerpt from her 2001 “Letter to a Young Activist during Troubled Times.”

<https://www.mavenproductions.com/letter-to-a-young-activist>

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And yes, they are grown men, and they are my children. This is not a time I would have chosen for them. This is not the time they deserve. I resist the idea that they were made for these times. And all of you. And all the children we love. Made for these times?

But what if we were?

I don't mean that some intellect individually crafted each of us for a particular earthly task. Some theologies go there comfortably – mine doesn't. And I don't mean that what's happening now is in any way acceptable. It isn't.

But, what if being made for these times isn't about assigned tasks or acceptance? What if being made for these times is about knowing that - whatever is going on, however dark it seems - our soul has something the world needs - even if we're not sure what it is, even if we really don't have the time or the energy, even if despair keeps trying to pull up a chair?

What would it take to know that we are made for these times? What might it mean?

Let's return for a moment to the story of John Murray.

Through the lens of history, Murray seems made for that time - in the right place, with the right people, at the right moment. But Murray himself was lost. Everything he thought he knew about his life was gone. Despair had moved in and taken over. In desperation, he made a plan, and he was sticking to it.

It took being blown way off course and stranded on a sandbar; it took the extraordinary persistence of Thomas Potter, the support of a community, and a faith rooted in love for Murray to let go of the old ideas and expectations he brought with him to this strange new world, and remember that he had something this world needs. And that 'something' changed the course of liberal religious history.

it wasn't easy - Murray went on to be charged with vagrancy and sedition, and those in power tried to stop him from preaching.² In one now-legendary moment, someone threw a large rock through a window as he preached; it narrowly missed killing him. Murray reportedly picked up the rock and held it high saying "This argument is solid and weighty, but it is neither rational nor convincing."³ Being made for these times might call for both humor and bravery.

2020 has been a year with so much loss and change, and anxiety about things getting even worse before they get better. We seem to be blown further and further off course, as our desperate planning turns out to be no match for the real world. Things are not OK, and we can't make them be OK for ourselves or those we love. I don't want to embrace this moment. I want to be in a world that offers the opportunities and experiences I thought my children would have. I want to hold onto my expectations about my education, and my life. I want to hold onto my old ideas about this country.

² Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography, <https://uudb.org/articles/johnmurray.html>

³ Dan McKanan, A Documentary History of Unitarian Universalism, Vol. 1, 159.

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Some of our old visions are needed in these times. But some just don't fit, no matter how much we'd like them to - no matter how much we value, expect or depend on them. Pouring energy into creating lives that resemble those visions is stressing us out.

I noticed some of this in myself recently. This is my last year of seminary. I had some ideas about what this year would, and should, be like - what I would learn and experience, relationships I would deepen, how I would grow. And I started filling my calendar with seminars, gatherings, workshops, actions and suggested readings - trying, as best I could, to live into my expectations. They made sense before, but not in this world. There are real losses in my revised calendar. But it is, now, a calendar for these times.

I wonder if there are visions, plans, expectations from the world that was that you are holding on to, that really don't fit now, where you might perhaps loosen your grip a little, lighten your load?

Letting go not just for our sanity, but so we can allow ourselves (like John Murray) to be challenged by others, and so we, too, have space to remember that we have something this world needs.

For John Murray that 'something' was the courage and commitment to spread the good news of a loving god and salvation for all. 250 years later, the faith has evolved, but it still offers a message that I think the world needs:

- A message that we are loved. Whatever you are experiencing or struggling with, however tenaciously despair is hanging on to a chair at your table, you are worthy of love and you are loved.
- A message that we are absolutely interconnected, to one another and the planet. Our suffering affects each other. And love, given anywhere, lifts us all.
- And a message, that we are needed. Our task is to show up, with love, and receiving love, in this world.

In the words of the poet, "We are needed ... And though we meet resistance, we more so will meet great souls who will hail us, love us and guide us, and we will know them when they appear."

Ruth Bader Ginsburg was a great soul. She showed up with love. She overcame obstacle after obstacle in her life, all the while working to make this country better. She did not give up, and neither must we. Though fear and despair may be at our table, this is not a time to allow them to eat from our plate. Ginsburg's legacy and memory can still guide us; her resolve shall be our resolve; her love received by us and carried into the world with hope and courage.

Showing up with love isn't always public. It can be a private action - saying yes to being there for someone else, instead of, say, finishing the homework. Recommitting to relationships. Letting other stuff go. Or setting a boundary, saying no. Letting go of the need to keep doing, and perfecting. Remembering that no one can always be a lantern for others.

Showing up with love can look like caring for the visions of a community that we must bring forward. I think of the faith formation teachers embodying this congregation's continuing love

for its young people. And the building project - in spite of all the reasons you might despair, through this project you're carrying your mission into a world that needs it.

For John Murray, and Ruth Bader Ginsburg, showing up with love looked like speaking truth, even when it wasn't welcome to those with power. We show up with love when we defend democracy, immigrants, the environment, Black lives. As Cornel West said, "justice is what love looks like in public."

It's not easy. It's not going to be easy. But we have a faith and great souls to guide us.

May we find the courage and the clarity to let go of what we must.

May we allow ourselves to be challenged, changed, loved and held by this community and the great souls in our world.

May we show up in this complicated world with love, our soul a lantern for all to see.

And as we do, though we might not choose it or welcome it, may we perhaps come to know that we are made for these times.

In this darkness, may love show the way.

Amen