

## **When the Storm Comes, We Move Together**

### **Service Description:**

When the Storm Comes, We Move Together

There is so much change happening right now that it may feel as if the whole world is in a storm. How do we find the way to move with and through the storm? Not running for cover, but finding who we must become to ride it out and emerge triumphant. When the storm settles, as it must, how do we help to keep the house from blowing away? Presented by Rev. Summer Albayati, UUA Congregational Life Staff, Pacific Western Region.

### **Time for All Ages:**

The Umbrella Sanctuary from WorshipWeb (<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/story/umbrella-sanctuary>)

### **Suggested Reading**

A Community Well by Julia Hamilton from WorshipWeb (<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/affirmation/community-well>)

### **Suggested Music**

#210 Wade In the Water

#1020 Woyaya

“Keep on Moving Forward” by Emma’s Revolution

## **When the Storm Comes, We Move Together, Rev. Summer Albayati**

Aunt Seneva was the only adult around, and as the sky blackened and the wind grew stronger, she herded us all inside. Her house was not the biggest place around and it seemed even smaller with so many children squeezed inside small and surprisingly quiet. All of the shouting and laughter that had been going on earlier outside had stopped. The wind was howling now, and the house was starting to shake. We were scared. Even Aunt Seneva was scared and then it got worse. Now the house was beginning to sway. The wood plank flooring beneath us began to bend, and then a corner of the room started lifting up. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. None of us could. The storm was actually pulling the house toward the sky with us inside it. That was when Aunt Seneva told us to clasp hands, line up, and hold hands, she said.

And we did as we were told. Then she had us walk as a group toward the corner of the room that was rising. From the kitchen to the front of the house we walked. The wind screaming outside, sheets of rain beating on the tin roof. Then we walked back in the other direction as another end of the house began to lift. And so it went back and forth. 15 children walking with the wind, holding that trembling house down with the weight of our small bodies.

When the late civil rights activists and US House of Representatives, John Lewis was much older, he reflected on that time. More than half a century has passed since that day, and it has struck me more than once over those many years that our society is not unlike the children in that house.

Rocked again and again by the winds of one storm or another. The walls around us seeming at times as if they might fly apart.

It seemed that way in the 1960s at the height of the civil rights movement, when America itself felt as if it might burst at the seams. So much tension, so many storms. But the people of conscience never left the house. They never ran away. They stayed. They came together and they did the best they could. Clasp hands and moving toward the corner of the house that was the weakest. And then another corner would lift and we would go there. And eventually, inevitably the storm would settle and the house would still stand. But we knew another storm would come and we would have to do it all over again. And we did, and we still do. All of us, you and I, children holding hands, walking with the wind.

That story lifted up in our own Unitarian Universalist Association WorshipWeb is a perfect metaphor for what these past few weeks have felt like. They have felt like a storm in which we feel as if the house we have built is going to blow away. Some of us feel like we don't even have hands to grasp in order to move to one area of the home to help it remain in place. Others of us may cling to rituals that sustain us because that is what we can control in a world that feels out of control. Still, some of us may hold onto family, crying and praying in fear of what is to come. It's a chaotic time for so many of us. We may find so many scrambling in different directions, maybe even running for cover. But how do we stop it all and become like those children holding hands and walking with the wind together?

Within Islam, a storm is actually considered a blessing. Rain coming down from the heavens is said to be attributed to the divine mercy upon us. There's a story regarding the prophet Muhammad who would go out into the rain to pray, and thank God for the blessing that would allow food to grow and provide water to drink. One can imagine that in places where it rains so little, all rain, even a storm, would be welcome. But merciful rain provided something else. It provided hope.

I'm aware that for many of us storms are scary. They bring uncertainty and they fill us with fear and we duck and cover instead of being grateful for the blessed mercy raining down upon us. And why would we be grateful when we are stuck in a life-threatening storm? How can we remain steady and move with all the changes and chaos, finding a new rhythm rather than running for cover and waiting it out?

I remember one time visiting a museum in Tennessee and being stuck because of a rainstorm. I wanted so badly to just make a run for it. But everyone told us just to wait it out. Stay away from the trees, they said, for lightning could strike you. We did wait it out. But I wondered what new rhythm we could have found if we did jump into the chaos of the storm. Not fearing it, but embracing it. What new courage could have developed from that experience? And now I wonder how we can overcome our fears and become even more courageous as we witness this current metaphorical storm within our nation.

Oh, beloveds. We are in crisis once again. Our Unitarian Universalist values of justice and equity are being challenged within the walls of our

capital. We witness laws being enacted against the most marginalized within our midst, and we are scared. I believe that with this particular storm, we will need to make a choice. Do we hold hands and move with it? Move within it. Finding ways to strengthen our communities, providing sanctuary for the most marginalized, all while challenging those who dismantle years of our work building towards true equity and justice. Or do we run for cover and wait it out?

Yes. This is the million dollar question today. And surviving the storm will become one of the most important decisions of our lifetime. Because if the storm uplifts the houses we have built, the structures we have painstakingly work towards building to bend that arc towards justice a little more, to protect those who are most marginalized, then I fear humanity may not survive.

Beloveds, the choices we make today are a matter of life and death. Literally. We are witnessing on the national stage the criminalization of our trans and immigrant beloveds, ICE is storming homes in search of undocumented immigrants, passports are being returned with the wrong gender. Thousands upon thousands are losing their jobs and funding because of dismantling models of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

I wonder if it is like the story of the three little pigs. You remember the one, I will huff and puff and blow your house down. That is a threat of the big bad wolf or sly fox, depending on your version. Well, those little pigs had three types of homes. Straw, sticks and bricks. The straw and sticks were easily built. Those piggies wanted to have fun, so they built homes fast.

Unfortunately, those homes could not withstand that storm. The pig with a brick home took a long time to build it. They worked so hard and for so long, making sure their structures were strong and could withstand any storm. Their decision was the right one. The storm did not blow it down.

Some of us have been in many of these storms. Perhaps we marched in the 1960s and remember the times before the Civil Rights Era. Some of us may have witnessed world wars and even participated in them. Some of us have been blessed with an education that taught us about such historical storms, and we have learned how to do the work together, to move together to build together. Why? Because we always knew there would be storms. They keep coming one after another, huffing and puffing. But we have known what to do to withstand them and emerge triumphant.

So here we are in another storm. For some, this one seems different, somehow. It feels as if what we built all these years was made of just straw and sticks. Some of us worry that we don't know what to do. But Lewis reminds us that we just hold onto one another and move together.

Naomi Klein, author of the Shock Doctrine, while being interviewed by journalist Meti Hassan the other day, tells us that the intention is to shock and awe so that we run scared and curl up in a ball and give up until it's all over. Instead, we have to remember that we have been here before. Indeed, we have, many times. The last time we experienced this shock and awe strategy as Meti Hassan said, was during George W. Bush's administration in which he pummeled the Iraqi people in 2003 with so many missiles that they would have to feel overwhelmed and overpowered

and lie down in submission. As Klein reminds us, that isn't what happened. As an Iraqi American, I remember that time very well. It was devastating for those of us who could only watch the dehumanization of our Iraqi family members and friends who were stuck in a horror show. But as was proven over and over, the resilience of the Iraqi people means the temporary overwhelm eventually dissipated as it must do with the rest of us.

That is history is proven that we will find the way if we hold onto one another and move together within the storm. Yes, that is what we must hold onto now. The overwhelm will eventually dissipate. You might be thinking, but so many of us are hurting. I agree, and we must take the time to grieve. We must do what we must to get ourselves ready to move within the storm. And once we are ready, let us be grateful for what we must do. We have a large task at hand to build the biggest brick house instead of straw and stick, so that we will build, and what we build will withstand any new storm. Because there will always be another storm. Let it instead be a storm of mercy.

Beloveds are Unitarian Universalist values are lifesaving, and we must use them to guide our way because without these values living and breathing and moving within our world, I fear many of us will perish like the umbrellas given as temporary sanctuary to others in our time for all ages story, we must cover and protect those who need it with our lifesaving values. So now the million dollar question is simplified to this.

What will you do to help beloved Unitarian Universalists who are affected by this storm? Will you run and hide or will you find a steady rhythm in this

new storm working on bringing our sacred values into it, to dismantle it from within? Will you provide a sanctuary to the marginalized? The choice is yours, beloveds. The hope is ours.