

It is written that in the beginning, God made light, the whole of the earth and sky, all of the world's vegetation and animals... And God saw that all that was created was good. It is written in Genesis chapter 1:

"Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'

So God created humankind in [divinity's] image,
in the image of God [they were created]...

[And] God blessed them, and... God saw everything that [was] made, and indeed, it was *very* good."

God saw humanity, created in the image of the Holy and given dominion, given responsibility, over all the world, and God saw that it was very good. *Very* good.

We can see where Anne Frank may have drawn her beliefs. Seeing the chaos and suffering of our world, Anne Frank wrote that her great ideals seemed "impractical" and "absurd." And yet, she wrote, "I cling to them, because I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart."

God saw that we were very good. The Unitarian Universalist faith sees this too: people are truly good at heart. Our faith calls us to see the inherent worth and dignity, the goodness, of every person.

But, we Unitarian Universalists also believe that revelation is not sealed. Scripture is not the beginning and end of our religion. And, what has been revealed this week in Boston may make us question our faith in the goodness of humanity. How could someone with worth and dignity plan and perpetuate such acts of violence? Is humanity really very good?

This has been a difficult week. All of us are shocked by the violence, some of us feeling triggered from past traumas, a few of us directly mourn someone killed or harmed during Monday's bombings or Friday's chase.

Neither Universalist nor Unitarian theologians are known for focusing on evil. Both modern strands of our faith were reacting to the deep pessimism found in the theology of sixteenth-century minister John Calvin. Calvinist doctrine teaches that

every person is totally depraved and sinful and that some people are born condemned to hell in this life and the next.

And so, in reacting to Calvinist doctrines of depravity and condemnation, most of our faith's great theologians sound more optimistic. Arlington Street itself is comprised of the merged congregations of two of Unitarian Universalism's most famed eighteenth-century ministers: William Ellery Channing of Federal Street Unitarian and Hosea Ballou of Second Universalist. Channing and the Unitarians believed that humankind had the potential for both good and evil within them—we're certainly not *totally* depraved—and that we can choose good. Ballou and the Universalists believed that regardless of our earthly actions, the God of Love would eventually give every person a heavenly existence. This is our theological inheritance, a faith in the positive potential of humankind and the infinite compassion of the loving God.

So then, what of evil? Unitarian/Universalists have had many ways of describing evil. Some have said that evil is the absence of good, others that any evil will eventually be proven good in the greater scheme of things, still others that evil comes from our animalistic tendencies of competition and resistance to change.¹ I believe that human evil is rooted in fear and ignorance, the seeds of which spawn all prejudice and violence, and which can only be mitigated by love.

Regardless of the metaphor we each may use, we can agree that evil does indeed break into our very good world. On Monday, two bombs went off along Boylston Street during the Boston Marathon, killing three and wounding over 170. Thirty people at a wedding in rural Afghanistan were killed when the United States military bombed a village by accident. Did you know that since the beginning of 2013, seven people have been shot and killed in our city?

We are not isolated from any of these events. Like the childhood game of six degrees to Kevin Bacon, there are only so many degrees between each of us and any of these incidents. How many steps does it take for us to trace ourselves to the Boston Marathon bombings? ... To an Afghani family's celebration? ... To a person in Boston's city limits who has been murdered?

For myself at this time, I can't help but think about how I spent a year living only blocks away from where Lingzi Lu was going to school and three years living only blocks away from where the Tsarnaev brothers grew up. I can't help but think about how a young man I met my first year of college in Pittsburgh now goes to

business school where Krystle Campbell's mother works. How children connected with our congregation know Martin Richard's little sister. How members of our community were running, volunteering, on Marathon Monday, the finish line only three blocks from this house of worship, our sacred home.

Along with a faith in every individual person's worth and dignity, our Unitarian Universalist faith teaches us that we are all inextricably connected to the interdependent web of all existence. As erstwhile Arlington Street congregant Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King wrote, "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." We are all so interconnected, to one another and to every living being on this earth.

We are all so interconnected, and we can choose to pass on the evil that we experience.

Evil does not exist in a vacuum. Evil exists *between*. Evil requires perpetrators and survivors. Evil happens in relationships, and is passed from person to person, neighborhood to neighborhood, country to country.

In the beginning, God gave to humanity responsibility over the entire world. More than any other creature on our blue boat home, we have the power to steer the course of the planet.

Did God pick the wrong species? Is humanity good, truly good at heart?

We could respond to our experience of evil with fear, or anger, or hatred. We could pass on those evils. But, because of this vast interconnected web, because of humanity's ability to choose good or evil, because of the support of the loving God, I say we can have faith. We can have faith. As evil passes on, so does good. As evil exists between, so does good.

Just on Monday, seconds after the explosions at the Boston Marathon, we witnessed that inner, human impulse toward good in those first responders, the "helpers" of officers, soldiers, medics, volunteers, and spectators who ran into the chaos and saved dozens of lives.

We are all so interconnected, and we can choose to pass on love.

In a pastoral message after the bombings, our denomination's president Rev. Peter Morales wrote, "This is a time for being together, for giving and taking comfort

from one another. This is a time for reaching out—both to be comforted and to offer kindness... Everything we do to spread compassion, understanding, acceptance, and peace, matters. It is literally a matter of life and death.”

We have to ask ourselves, are we choosing love or fear? When confronted with evil, do we choose to pass on forgiveness? Do we choose compassion? We must question our active or passive participation in evil because whatever we do is passed through the web. This is the grace of God in our world, that we can choose love.

This is what we strive to do here at Arlington Street Church. We support each other in choosing love. Every Sunday, we come together to worship the great gift of living, reconnect with one another, and shore up our highest ideals. We offer comfort to one another, to our city, and to the world through our various caring ministries. We change the whole interconnected web of the world one act of sacred activism at a time, whether it be through a march or a vigil or tending to the Earth right outside our doors. We recognize that beyond being interconnected, we are interdependent, reliant on one another, friend and stranger alike, and thus our central ethic must be one of constant care for the whole of our Earth.

Though every person has the seeds of evil and the seeds of good within, we believe that in beloved community, we can grow closer to that divine image in which we were made. Religious community gives us the opportunity to dig down into the well of our deepest selves to find the divine, the source of the very goodness of humankind.

We are so interconnected, and we choose love.

Will you pray with me?

Dear God of Many Names, whom we know as the Great Spirit of Life and Love, draw near to us. Comfort us and all those who mourn, who are in shock, who are traumatized by the tragic events of this past week. Help us to be the helpers who care for our neighbors and work for systemic change in our violent and prejudiced culture. Teach us to have compassion for all beings, even those who manifest the evil that lives in our world, so that we may cure evil with love.

May we live into our potential to be very good. May we support one another in community to choose love, choose love. “Love is bigger than anger, bigger than fear. Love wins.”² May it be so. Blessed be, and amen.
