

## We are Love's Only Hands Cindy Beal

“It is hard to be a person,” my friend said.

Maybe you know what that means. Maybe you know how hard it is to hold too many commitments, too many deadlines, too many people's bruised feelings, too much pressure, too few hours in the day. “It is hard to be a person,” my friend said, and my friend's next thought was, “Thank god for our congregation.”

Does that surprise you? Is it news to you that like Wemberly reaching out her hand, my friend felt relief, safety, reprieve, strength, even hope, at the thought of you, at being here, together?

I think it doesn't.

Our hands are the only hands that Love has.

*This is what Love's hands look like:*

The hands of this congregation have sat by hospital beds,  
have sat with love and worry,  
have gathered after tragedy.

You in this congregation,  
have joined one another in the deepest most frightening

times, and in times of celebration.

As Jennifer reflected to you last week, this is about “Love standing on the side of love, answering the call of love. Opening our doors, opening our hearts, hanging a black live matter banner, working with ACTS, showing up at immigration protests, writing our representatives, sponsoring a refugee family, attending our Preemptive Radical Inclusivity workshop next week, hosting a gender identity conference, talking to people who are different than us, asking our youth to lead us, seeking their wisdom.”

These are some ways hands of this congregation have held and loved and built and fed. And are called to more.

Our hands are the only hands that Love has.

Love’s hands can be just that straightforward concrete, or more complex. They can also look like our struggle to make sense of our location within with a political and economic system that is not just, that privileges some more than others. Loves hands can be that which looks forward to the next two years and begins to change and

make plans to oppose the coming days' power structures, and to replace or shore up those structures of our society that promote well-being. And yet that is such a monumental task. It is all over whelming. And I want to tell you that that task may not be your primarily one.

We balance our need for self-care with our commitment to social justice, to community, to congregation, to the future. We recognize together that we each have capacity and need for different ones of those at different times.

We recognize that there are weeks or years when someone needs to just be here. Just that.

Hands in this congregation have held space for one another to share, explore, wonder;

Yesterday a full 1/6<sup>th</sup>, 20% of this congregation, spent 6 hours on the last warm Saturday of 2016 downstairs exploring what it means to live radical inclusion in a preemptive way. What is means to plan ahead for inclusion. People looked at themselves and thought about what is it that we need to do to prepare our hearts to welcome the stranger, not just through the doorway, but into the full life of this congregation. Yesterday's workshop was not a technical workshop. They were no how to-to lists, it was not a workshop about the 7 steps

to seamless welcoming. It was a workshop about listening to one's heart and reflecting on the ways we individually perceive the world and how that helps or hinders our ability to recognize and welcome the stranger. It was an adaptive workshop, because being inclusive is an adaptive process. Because to be Love's hands in the world we have to make a plan – which means gathering information, and reflecting on it. We cannot just jump into doing more of what we do already the way we do it, or what we think we should do based on what we already think because if that would bring that the strangers through our doors it would have already worked. Increasing the capacity of this congregation to welcome and integrate new people into it is a task that requires self-reflection, community listening and sharing and more listening, more reflection, and then little experiments.

Our hands are Love's Only Hands.

Today is a day that is marked across the country as the national transgender day of remembrance. It is an important day when we mark and honor those who have died by violence at the hands of others who kill them

simply because of who they are. Today is a day when across this country and in congregation after congregation we bear witness, to the murders of transfolk, mostly Transwomen of color, nationally and here at home. We have been marking this since 1999. And honestly, with the advent of the Internet and social media it has become more and more evident just how many people are killed because of their identity. This is a jarring thing to mention in the middle of a sermon about our wonderful congregations.

But it is a true thing, and I believe, a thing that our congregations are uniquely positioned to respond to. Since 2008 – in the last 9 years, 146 Trans and gender diverse people have been killed in North America. 23 in the United States this year.

2115 are the total number reported for the last nine years in the world. And this is only the tip of the iceberg for reasons I will not go into here but you can read about elsewhere. The violence and daily discrimination directed at transpeople, predominantly transwomen of color is unparalleled in the country.

So why on earth am I talking about this on this lovely snowy morning in a beautiful building surrounded by wonderful amazing people. Because I believe we are called to consider how we can respond to this moment in time. Not simply in the national, state and local politics, in the threat to the very democracy of our nation, but also in our congregations, this very congregation. In February you are hosting a Gender Identity Conference. This is an opportunity for you to do that work of listening and reflecting, and listening more, and holding space for trans and gender nonconforming people... to make it evident in your larger community that this congregation is a safe and welcoming place for trans and gender nonconforming people to be, to be witnessed, heard, supported, protected and served. To be given an opportunity to serve.

And we reach out our hands to the stranger, and we might call it ministry, or support, or Our Way to Change the World.

For we all come here to this space, whether for 50 years or one day,

open and scared, awkward and graceful in turn;  
to join to listen to share to love to cry  
to invite to explore to sigh.

If we aren't in the room, then we miss the opportunity to love and let ourselves be loved.

Others who are not in the room miss the opportunity to love and be loved.

We here gathered are made up of community, the covenants and promises that bind us together, the learning and action and love of our hands. The thinking part of this does not require an agreement about the nature of the sacred.

It does not require us to individually agree whether or not there is something we might call G-d,  
and if there is whether or not It is self-aware,  
and if those are true, whether or not It then has any interest in  
or even willingness to intervene in the affairs of humans.

Our gathering here in community and commitment and covenant does not require us to agree on the use or the meaning of all of those big words.

Our hands are the only hands that Love has.

After a life filled did with pain and anger and fear, it was in a congregation like this one that I learned that I can love 200 people at once, and my brain wouldn't explode. In many ways, it was there that I learned to fully live, to be the kind of person whose hands surprise people with gifts of cookies or bacon or beer left on the back porch, usually anonymously. My hands hold babies and children when crying. And hug elders whom I adore. And don't hug babies and children and elders whom I adore but who aren't huggy. Because boundaries. And consent.

We do not actually need to know what one another's belief systems are to be in our religious community. What we do know is Love through one another's hands. Because we join together in this community – here, specifically. I have a friend who says her church is the Sunday New York Times Crossword in the corner of a coffee shop with a mocha cappuccino. I think that's a lovely way to spend time, or I would if I

were Sunday Times Crossword kind of smart, but I don't think it's religious community. The people in the coffee shop aren't going to be Love's Hands for one another in any sort of ongoing way.

Love's Hands are shared in this congregation in service, in stewardship, in support, and yes, doing intellectual and emotional explorations of theologies and ideas together. But that's not what we actually lead with.

It's a myth that if you're UU it doesn't matter what you believe. And I think once we've been here a while, we understand that as a myth. There's a big difference between it not mattering what we each believe and being able to choose our own beliefs. What we believe matters deeply. It matters to us and to the world because that belief informs our choices and our actions, shapes how our hands Love.

It is mostly true that Unitarians really enjoy The Thinking. Some of us are even good at it. We listen to NPR, we read the Huffington Post and the New Republic and the Economist or Forbes. We may discuss

the relative merit of changing the tax code, or solar versus water power.

But it is not really the big intellectual deep thoughts that bring us together here. All of those things could happen in Starbucks. What we find here, specially, is an experience of love, compassion, and commitment. We bring our children here not because we will somehow magically teach them everything about ours and the world's religions in a few short years. We bring them here because it is here that they will learn to commit to a community, to know a community that will have their back no matter what, to be in relationship with people who choose to be in relationship with them. Even when it's complicated or hard, when we are our most difficult selves; because, after all, two things may be true at once. We gather because we believe that being together is good, that we can do more and be more together than we can apart, that we can be in the space on a Sunday morning and be recharged, we can love and let others love us; We learn that the only way to be present for the moments of connection that happen here is to show up here, week after week, to reach out over and over.

No congregation is made of magic. Even as we reflect on what this congregation is doing in the world, there are no laurels to rest upon. I'm an educator, and it's always about the growth, the next level.

Love does not magically make things happen. This congregation is not run by magic people, or magic money, or heated and cooled by magic power sources. People do not walk through the doors and become suddenly perfect, (because, god knows, it is so hard to be a person). We – we ourselves – are Love's hands. Gnarly and worn, arthritic, strong, soft, rough, gentle and inestimably beautiful. Hands that can reach out to the stranger and say, "Welcome. Tell me about "your one wild and precious life.""

"Sometimes two things are true at the same time," my friend says.

"It is hard to be a person," my friend says, "thank god for our congregation."

Wemberly had someone with her on her journey, "Don't worry," Wemberley said.

"In each moment, love stands at our side ready to be

chosen” said Samuel.

We are Love’s only hands. And I say, “they are beautiful.”