



From J.R.R. Tolkien, Lord of the Rings:

FRODO: I can't do this, Sam.

SAM: I know. It's all wrong. By rights we shouldn't even be here. But we are.

It's like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo. The ones that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger they were. And sometimes you didn't want to know the end. Because how could the end be happy. How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened. But in the end, it's only a passing thing, this shadow. Even darkness must pass. A new day will come. And when the sun shines it will shine out the clearer. Those were the stories that stayed with you. That meant something. Even if you were too small to understand why. But I think, Mr. Frodo, I do understand. I know now. Folk in those stories had lots of chances of turning back only they didn't. Because they were holding on to something.

FRODO: What are we holding on to, Sam?

SAM: That there's some good in this world, Mr. Frodo. And it's worth fighting for.

What are you fighting for?

That's the question artist Allison Smith asked herself in the spring of 2005. President Bush had just been elected to his second term in the White House. It seemed like wars would continue to rage on in the name of defending freedom and the people would need to work even harder to make sure all people truly felt free. She was feeling depressed and hopeless. Her friends, activists and artists, needed a boost to their spirits, and so did she.

Allison started to look to the past for inspiration. She became interested in the Civil War era, when our nation was deeply divided around the question of freedom for all of its members. She learned about a gathering called a "muster" used during those times of war: a gathering of the troops for the purposes of free exchange, critique and display. What if she could gather a "muster" for her time, a public performance declaring the kinds of freedom she and her friends were working to defend and enjoy.

So Allison put out a public Call to Arms to any willing participant to "set up camp" on the historic Governor's Island lawn to share about their cause in a one day live performance.

She called it a "Call to Art."

"What are you fighting for?" She asked. "Are you ready to devote your time, energies, blood and treasure to the declaration of your Cause?"

Over 100 willing participants said yes, registering their causes from the serious to the sublime, the fanciful to the abstract. Here's how some of the participants responded.

"What are you fighting for?"

Inner Peace in a Warring Nation

The Right to Paint

questioning,

colors

solidarity and

forgiveness

and one cause appropriate for our time too:

The right to be scared.

I was there with my organization CHAMP, the Community HIV/ AIDS Mobilization Project, joining its founder JD Davids in our cause: Turning AIDS Frustration into Power. Like everyone, we were in costume. We literally "wore our cause on our sleeve," giving away tee shirts that spread our message that AIDS is a social justice issue. We were fighting for HIV prevention and for health care, housing and services for people living with AIDS.

Ten years later, Smith's project was rebooted, this time on the internet to a powerful effect for the PBS program "The Art Assignment." Today, she still believes this project helps people to create the world they want to live in by making their passions public and encouraging others to join their causes. "If we don't participate in the writing of history or histories then other people will do the work for us." In Smith's words, we need "A diverse regiment of our own design."

One of our great 20th century Unitarian social ethicists James Luther Adams worked in a time not unlike today, when dangerous governments were on the rise around the world. He was particularly concerned with the rise of Hitler in Germany. He felt it was important to understand what made democratic societies last and what could keep them protected from such hateful leadership.

His theory was that people needed to have ways to channel their passion for fighting for their causes and to organize into communities of likeminded people. American

democracy isn't just about independence, about fighting for our own causes, but interdependence, about fighting for causes that help everyone and make the world a better place. In his understanding, the group was the key to our democratic life: people of good will needed to be organized into a powerful force for positive social change.

In a wordplay on Jesus' famous saying, "By their fruits you shall know them," Adams said "By their groups you shall know them."

A group unites a diverse group of people into a community that values a common cause. It turns a handful of very different people into a neighborhood, an organization, a mosque or a church. From the ACLU to Planned Parenthood to the Sierra Club, all of these organizations safeguard the causes that keep our world safe for all people and keep our earth protected. Religious organizations like our churches are some of our nation's most powerful groups. Our moral voices are stronger and louder when we join together as a community, our courage emboldened and our leverage greater.

At the center of all of these groups, especially our church, is a deep well of love for humanity, love for the world and deep concern for the future. In these political times, I know a lot of us are wondering what we can do. It's time to muster: to gather together and to ask ourselves:

What you are fighting for, or willing to fight for.

What are you passionate about that needs attention in our current political environment, now more than ever.

Find a group to channel your passion with your time, talent and resources. Show your gratitude to groups that are fighting for causes you believe in. Even if you can't donate your time or your money, you can write a thank you note to the director of your favorite organization or to your California legislators. Let them know you're grateful they're fighting for what you believe in too.

You're never too old or too young to get involved.

I think about our own Mia Coomes, who was moved to help raise money for her 12 year old classmate's family as he suffered from a rare childhood cancer. She and her friends became so passionate about helping families living with childhood cancer that they formed an organization called Change Works! that continues to raise money and spread awareness.

Or LA Rabbi Susan Goldberg's son Griffin Joesph, who just launched a GoFundMe campaign with his passion for our water and our earth in solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux tribe.

Listen to Griffin.

I am twelve years old. For my Bar Mitzvah, I have decided to work a project to raise money and awareness for the water protectors at the Standing Rock reservation in North Dakota. There is an oil pipeline being built that could threaten drinking water and ruin sacred sites. We need to help!

Friends, it's time to muster:

muster your courage,
muster your bravery
muster your compassion
muster your resources

In the spirit of justice, let's gather our troops together to build a great army of love. There is so much good in the world, and it starts with what is inside each and every one of us.

Indeed it's worth fighting for.

*Go out into the world in peace
Hold on to what is good
Return for no person evil for evil
Support the weak
Help the suffering
Honor all beings*