



**NEIGHBORHOOD UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST CHURCH**

We Who Believe in Freedom

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SUNG:

Hush Hush
Somebody's calling my name

Hush Hush
Somebody's calling my name
Oh my lord
Oh my lord
What shall I do

Like many Americans, despite my intentions to be distracted, I could not help but be focused on the transfer of power from one president to the next. I needed to witness the ceremony. "The peaceful transfer of power..." This phrase was repeated countless times during the day.

As I listened to the coverage, one NPR reporter focused on one key word of this refrain: peaceful. Interviewing an attendee in support of the new president, the supporter spoke of how peaceful the capital felt before the inauguration, the hush falling over the freshly swept streets anticipating the ceremony.

SUNG:

Hush
Hush
Somebody's calling my name

I grew up in family with a father who was at times domineering. Insults, criticism and yelling were frequent. Comments, biting, on our weight and our appetites, our grades. I remember at dinners a silence that fell over the table as the three kids tried to appease. Trying to behave to avoid consequences. Trying to find an uncontroversial subject. "Can't we just have a peaceful dinner," was a common request. The three of us would eat quietly waiting to be excused so we could go back to being who we were beginning to become. Our music, our drama, our budding politics, our desire, our joy.

Today my partner points out that when conflict brews I have a tendency to be terse, hardened, patronizingly deferential, a throwback to those days of attempting to "keep the peace." He teases me at my obviously inauthentic silence. And we laugh together at how I am still recovering from my wounds. So much lies just beneath the surface. My frustration and anger.

Hush
Hush
Somebody's calling my name
Hush

Hush
Somebody's calling my name
Hush
Hush
Somebody's calling my name
Oh my lord
Oh my lord
What shall I do

HUSH

When I watched the "peaceful" transition of power Friday I did hear a hush just like the reporter said. But it was not the hush of peace. It was like the dinner table of my childhood. Everyone trying to be quiet, behave; trying not to go through the motions that all was normal. Revealing so much with the silence, forced, restrained and controlled.

In the past week we've seen dissenting viewpoints from Civil Rights movement veteran John Lewis shouted down, the White House website scrubbed clean of any mention of health care, LGBTQ, disability rights and climate change, news media attacked, called wrong and irresponsible, first amendment protections of speech, press and assembly threatened and denigrated.

SUNG:

Sounds like freedom somebody's calling my name
Sounds like freedom somebody's calling my name
Oh my lord
Oh my lord, what shall I do

As we are led by Kim in spirituals and freedom songs we must with seriousness and reverence recall the context of these songs as they are shared with us. These songs were created by slaves and the children of slaves who lived in an ongoing situation of unspeakable cruelty and violence. Profoundly hopeful, the songs call for God's presence in the midst of suffering and a fundamental affirmation of God's love. Subtly subversive, the songs signaled a vigilant call to guard and protect the pathways to freedom. "Hush" was a code song signaling to runaway slaves and the conductors on the Underground Railroad to caution that authorities were on the move and to look out for one another. Civil rights leaders updated the words to make it a song of the movement which we sing today.

SUNG:

Sounds like justice
Somebody's calling my name
Sounds like justice
Somebody's calling my name
Oh my lord, oh my lord what shall I do

Over 75 church members and friends gathered here on campus to carpool and board buses to the Women's March in downtown LA. Astoundingly, the attendance counts are now in at over 750,000 people—the largest march Los Angeles has seen in many years of demonstrations—some are calling it the largest march in the country. Being in a crowd that large is both exhilarating and overwhelming—while it was hard to move, everywhere you turned you were surrounded by friendly, positive marchers of all life experiences, cultures and identities. The feeling of being surrounded by kindred spirits holding bold, creative and sometimes controversial posters was absolutely liberating.

Among my favorite signs:

Tweet everyone with respect
Respect my existence or expect resistance
Men of quality support women's equality
A woman's place is in the revolution

As we moved slowly downtown, we could hear the roar of the crowd through the bus windows from blocks away.

I felt for the first time this weekend a new understanding of the peaceful transition of power. Back to the people rendered hopeless and paralyzed, a righteous anger unleashed, a re-acquaintance with the powerful selves we have always been, a visibility of our walking, dancing, taking up space, delighting in our freedom.

But also, in spite of the joyful shouts I felt the old tension of the childhood dinner table cropping up again, as chants of "my body my choice" spread across the crowds catching lift and volume, while chants of "no hate no fear, immigrants are welcome here" and "black lives matter" quickly died out with few takers.

My trans partner noticed white women suggesting a transgender white woman be silenced when trying to rally the crowd. Black women in my community were hesitant to join the march for fear their voices would not be centered and the names of their dead like Sandra Bland would not be said (they weren't). I only saw a few signs about health care or police violence, but there were many that were clever and funny but also that shamed and insulted Trump and his family, seeming to proclaim "When they go low, we go lower."

Respecting the inherent worth and dignity of every person is always our first principle, no exceptions. A warning to the left, especially to our liberal religious community. There is a circling of the wagons we need to be mindful of – around individual rights and freedoms amongst the left – a protective re-sorting of our priorities out of a real fear that our movement's advances for women and LGBTQ communities will be lost.

We need to remember to heed the warning of the freedom song. Listening to how justice is calling us to join our struggles—poor women, immigrant women, women of color and white

women, transgender women and refugee women, lesbians and straight women, women who are mothers and those who choose to be childless . . . and MEN—we need you men, gay men, transgender men, men who can teach your sons to respect and love women and to despise misogyny and violence.

We need to safeguard our vision of a justice which is inclusive, expansive, a democracy which is sacred. We need to return to our vision of a faith which calls us on and asks again and again

—

“What shall I do?”

Yesterday, we marched. Today, we fellowship. We pray. We sing. Tomorrow, we organize.

In her *Speech to the Young Speech to the Progress*, Pulitzer Prize winning poet Gwendolyn Brooks wrote:

Say to them,
say to the down-keepers,
the sun-slappers,
the self-soilers,
the harmony-hushers,
"Even if you are not ready for day
it cannot always be night."
You will be right.
For that is the hard home-run.
Live not for battles won.
Live not for the-end-of-the-song.
Live in the along.

FRIENDS-- IT CANNOT ALWAYS BE NIGHT. Remember the last verse of the spiritual we sing:

SUNG: the last verse of “Hush”

I’m so glad
Trouble don’t last always
I’m so glad
Trouble don’t last always
Oh my lord, oh my lord what shall I do.