

Nov. 9, 2025, A Sermon by Rev. Janet Shortall titled **The Blessing That Carries Us**

In a time of turmoil and fatigue, what sustains our spirits and renews our strength for action? This service explores gratitude and blessing as deep sources of resilience and courage, drawing on stories of surprising compassion and the power of blessing to carry us forward when hope feels fragile.

Opening Words:

Come into this place of quiet hope,
where blessing waits—not in grand gestures,
but in the simple gifts of presence, courage, and care.
Here, may our hearts be opened,
our spirits steadied,
and our lives carried once more by love.

Meditation:

The Blessing That Carries Us
When the world feels uncertain,
and the noise grows too loud,
there is still a thread of grace
woven through the fabric of our days—
a quiet kindness,
a steady breath,
a light that keeps returning.
It shimmers in the hand that helps,
in the meal shared without fanfare,
in the smile of a stranger that says,
you are not alone.
Blessing doesn't fix everything.
It doesn't take away the ache.
But it softens the edges,
and steadies the heart for another day.

Blessing is the warmth that lingers,
the laughter that surprises us,
the love that keeps choosing life,
again and again.
So lean gently into the blessing, friends.
Let it carry you—
through the small hours and the bright ones,
through what is broken and what is still whole.
Let it carry us—
toward kindness without end,
toward peace that keeps beginning,

toward love that will not let go.

Reading: The Patience of Ordinary Things” by Pat Schneider

It is a kind of love, is it not?
How the cup holds the tea,
how the chair stands sturdy and foursquare,
how the floor receives the bottoms of shoes
or toes.
How soles of feet know
where they’re supposed to be.
I’ve been thinking about the patience
of ordinary things,
how clothes wait respectfully in closets
and soap dries quietly in the dish,
and towels drink the wet
from the skin of the back.
And the lovely repetition of stairs.
And what is more generous than a window?

The Blessing That Carries Us

There’s something so playfully steadying about that poem—the way it invites us to notice the quiet faithfulness of the world around us. In a time when so much feels uncertain, these small gestures of patience and generosity remind us that blessing is often woven through the most ordinary things. This morning, I want to speak about blessing—not as something sentimental, but as a quiet current of grace moving through our days. It’s there in the steadfastness of small things, in the way life keeps tending to us even when we are distracted or weary. Blessing steadies the hands that reach for the cup, Can soften the air between us when words fall short. Blessing doesn’t erase the world’s ache, but reminds us that goodness still abides—patient, generous, waiting to be noticed.

I think of a story from this past September. After a tragic shooting at a Latter-day Saints congregation, someone loosely connected to the community began a small fundraiser—not for the victims’ families, but for the family of the man who had done the killing. It wasn’t an act of denial, but of recognition—that even in the wreckage of violence, people were left grieving and in need of care. That gesture felt like a kind of blessing—not one that erases pain, but one that insists mercy still has a place among us.

We have all witnessed grace rise from devastation. I think also of Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, where after the massacre of nine worshipers, members stood before the killer and said, “I forgive you.” Their forgiveness was not denial, but a refusal to let hatred have the final word. That was the blessing that carried them—a blessing

fierce enough to keep love alive in the face of cruelty.

As gun violence has become heartbreakingly routine in our nation, I think, too, of the Amish community in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania. When a gunman entered a one-room schoolhouse and killed five young girls, Amish neighbors reached out the very day to comfort the killer's family. They brought food, sat with them in grief, attended his funeral. The world was astonished. But for the Amish we were told, forgiveness is not extraordinary—it is how they understand life with God. Their mercy revealed the blessing that carried their community through what would have felt impossible to most.

These stories I believe are not meant to leave us marveling at extraordinary goodness, but to awaken us to the quiet work of mercy still possible in our own lives. When we witness such grace, something in us remembers what it means to be human—to be held by a love larger than our fear or anger. Bearing witness keeps that love alive in us; it teaches us that compassion isn't a rare miracle, but a way of being the world still makes room for.

What allows such mercy to rise in a world that so often meets pain with more pain? What opens a heart to choose compassion instead of despair, forgiveness instead of fury? Perhaps these moments aren't sudden miracles at all, but the flowering of something long tended—habits of patience, reverence, and love that take root quietly in ordinary days.

To live this way isn't simple. It takes practice—the daily choosing of tenderness over fear, the courage to keep our hearts open when cynicism tempts us to remain closed. It means noticing beauty even amid cruelty, and letting that beauty remind us what's still possible. We must live this way as if our lives—and the life of the world—depend on it, because they do. To live this way is to remember our deep belonging—that our lives and the world's life are woven together. Mercy is how we resist forgetting our humanity. Each act of compassion becomes a small turning toward wholeness.

Mercy is slow work. It grows from stillness and community, from stories and songs that keep the heart soft. It asks for rest, for the courage to lament, and for a renewal of trust—that the small mercies we tend might, in time, help tilt the world toward tenderness.

And sometimes that trust takes shape before our eyes. We see it in steadfast acts of care—in medical workers who stayed beside their patients through the darkest days of the pandemic, in protesters linking arms to protect strangers, and in the mutual aid within our own community providing meals and groceries as SNAP benefits were halted this week. These, too, are blessings in motion—quiet signs that even in devastation, compassion still moves among us.

Blessing often moves quietly, yet with great power—steady, ordinary, life-giving. It carries us when we cannot carry ourselves.

And perhaps even now, you might call to mind a blessing in your own life—something small or grand, something steadfast that has steadied you.

(Pause.) Breathe in this moment.

Paul's words to the Corinthians echo here: "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends." Though often read at weddings, these words were never meant to describe romantic love. They speak instead of a larger, harder love—the love that sustains communities in turmoil, that resists division, that endures even when conflict threatens to tear us apart. This is not sentimental love. It is fierce and steadfast, a love that does not turn away. It is blessing made visible—compassion in motion, love as a way of life.

In our Unitarian Universalist tradition, blessing flows from many sources—from wisdom, courage, compassion, the beauty of the earth, and the communities that sustain us. Ours is a faith of ongoing creation and unfolding truth, where revelation rises wherever love and justice take root.

Blessing is renewed in the quiet rhythms of our days—in moments of stillness and breath, in shared rituals of song, prayer, candlelight, and silence, and in acts of service and solidarity that mend what has been broken. It meets us wherever we open our hearts to life's sacred unfolding. Blessing calls us to keep faith with life itself—to trust that even through heartbreak, grace still rises and love still finds a way.

Friends, in these turbulent days, we need blessing. We need to notice it, to receive it, and to extend it. For blessing does not carry us away from the pain of the world, but through it.

And as we go, may we be held and empowered by that blessing—carried in compassion, sustained in gratitude, renewed in love for the days ahead.

Amen.

Closing Words

Friends, blessing does not spare us from the world's ache,
but it gives us courage to meet it with love.

Go now held by compassion,
rooted in gratitude,
and renewed for the work of tending