

Sermon by Rev. Peaches Gillette: “Resistance and Resilience”

January 11th 2026

First Unitarian Society

I live on West Hill on Richard Street, and I have been there for about a year. I have an apartment on the side of the main house with its own entrance, and my entire time living there has been a wonderful experience, highlighting one of the things I love about Ithaca—the sweetness and generosity of heart of most people I know.

I moved in when the house was owned by Joanna Green and Arthur Grodin, who have since sold it and relocated to South Carolina—remarkably good people.

The new owner doesn't live in the house, but purchased it for her daughter and her daughter's boyfriend. Her daughter now attends Cornell Law School.

I don't see them too often, as their busy schedules keep them quite occupied, but every now and then we run into each other in the laundry room, which they are kind enough to let me use freely.

They are young, vibrant, and joyfully cordial in nature.

I sometimes sit and think about them, their tremendous youthful energy, their carefree perseverance, and the trusting ease with which they approach life. It is precious, almost childlike, which explains why I have spent over 50 years working with children.

Often, when I am walking around or sitting, I have a smile on my face as my heart holds onto the joy people find in this world. I love the sound of laughter, watching fun sports games, being at parties, and chatting frivolously with friends

But I know the world is what it is, and life can be tricky, harsh, deflating—life in our personal universes and in the one that surrounds us, encompassing things far beyond our control or comprehension.

I often write "Morning Thoughts" on Facebook. The other morning, I wrote this:

Morning Thought.

We are exceptionally fortunate to have three universes to explore at our fingertips—the one we view above, the one we create together on this small planet, and the one that lives within us.

Enjoy your time in this life.”

I want to focus on the one that lives within us, the one that can be the brightest of places or the darkest. The one that houses the barely speakable of our painful secrets, our saddest memories, the worries that .make us tremble, our feelings of failure, our rejections, our regrets, and our observations of the world around us, both good and bad, of our other universes.

I say this for two reasons: to point out that I am aware that often the vibrance and energy, as well as the sweet connections I see in my landlords, within their extraordinary youthfulness, do not mean that their interactions with their three universes remove all the heartache that anyone can feel in this world.

Youthful or not, we are here in this world together. We see the tragedies and experience the emotional and physical dis-ease within us and around us. It is only through our resistance and resilience that we can carry on.

In reality, each day brings more grievous news, the kind that shakes me to the core, unraveling my steady understanding of who many of us are; it begs the question of our purpose.

What are we to do with all the suffering? Why are we such a brutal, merciless animal? Where do monsters come from?

Why are some not resisting becoming those monsters, while others stay with love and helping “thy neighbor”?

Are all of us capable of becoming monsters given the right circumstances and conditions? Which of us is slowly changing right now?

Has the concept of “every man or woman for themselves” silently crept into I believe the you would know first; it will arrive on the horizon of your personal universe, the one inside you, and the idea and truth of who you become will eventually be corroborated by your immediate external universe, your fears that make you think of yourself only. Sometimes resistance and resilience is difficult. We see that.

I worked as a prison chaplain, and my many conversations with the imprisoned, with prison guards, and during my training brought forth the reality of how the pressure to survive in those situations can change anyone. The question is, change them into what?

A few times, guards asked me to pray for them. Not just for their safety, but for their souls.

More than ever, we are confronted with the horrors of human behavior. It affects us deeply. Some begin to feel the world is about the survival of the fittest, strike before being stuck can feel like the only option. Always remember, it is not. Never lose your good selves in the mire of the proverbial abyss.

I struggle with hope and faith, as we all do at times, I often ask, “What do we do with our hearts when we hear news reports like the following:

BBC reporter, Elaine Okyere

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Updated 10 January 2026...

announces that a video filmed by the US immigration agent who fatally shot a woman in Minneapolis on Wednesday has emerged, showing the moments before gunfire rang out.

The 47-second clip, obtained by Minnesota-based conservative news outlet Alpha News, shows Renee Nicole Good sitting behind the wheel of her car and speaking to the officer.

U.S. Vice President JD Vance shared the footage on social media, commenting that the agent had acted in self-defence. Local officials have insisted the woman posed no danger.

With the overwhelming onslaught of hate, violence, and lawlessness from those who are supposed to uphold the law, where do we find resilience? How do we resist keeping ourselves from literally falling apart?

Why do we do?

What is the point?

Why not resist and push back in like-ways as these lawless barbarians?

Afterall, we all want to survive, to live.

Most of us don't become monsters, thank goodness, thank God

We don't because we know that life is meant to be lived fully and lovingly and happily, and we cannot accomplish this without truly respecting life, passionately sustaining it.

We resist some of the urges to give in, give up, or behave vindictively or maliciously, or act like barbarians.

We are resilient; we carry on in honor of the true nature of what life is meant to be.

Marcus Aurelius said:

The best revenge is not to be like your enemy.”

Resistance and resilience are both innate and adaptive, and our lives are powered and renewed each moment of each day because of them.

There is a nice article that I will read. The title: “The Beauty of Resilience and Resistance: How Challenges Shape Stronger Souls”

Written in the AROGI Trauma Care foundation, no author name

It begins with a quote by Helen Keller

“Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it.”

– Helen Keller

It goes on to say this:

“There is a quiet kind of beauty that is not found in perfection but in persistence and resistance, and in the beauty of resilience. It’s the light that shines through the cracks, the calm that follows the storm,

and the strength that grows from struggle. Resilience is not about never falling; it's about rising, again and again, resisting with a heart that refuses to give up.

Life doesn't always unfold as we imagine. There are moments when everything seems uncertain, when plans fail, doors close, and pain feels endless.

Yet, it is within those very moments where [resistance rears its head] and resilience begins its work. It whispers, "You can endure this."

It teaches us that growth often disguises itself as hardship. The truth is, life's most difficult seasons often become the soil where strength and wisdom bloom.

Resistance and resilience is the art of bending without breaking. It doesn't mean you don't feel pain or fear; it means you keep standing even when the weight feels unbearable. It means learning to breathe through discomfort, finding peace in imperfection, and believing that every setback is preparing you for something greater.

When challenges come, they test more than your endurance; they test your perspective. Do you see obstacles as roadblocks or as lessons? Every struggle carries a message. Some teach patience, others reveal courage, and many build compassion. Resistance and resilience help you see that pain is not meant to define you; it's meant to refine you.

The beauty of resilience is that it turns scars into stories and wounds into wisdom. Every person who faced adversity and came out stronger knows this truth: that the things meant to break us often become the very things that build us. It's in the moments when we think we cannot go on that we discover just how strong we truly are.

Resistant and resilient souls are born, but they must be cared for and shaped. They are shaped by failure, which teaches humility; by loss, which deepens empathy; and by uncertainty, which strengthens faith. Each challenge is like sculptor's chisel, shaping us into the people we were meant to become. Resistance and resilience are not built in comfort; it is forged in fire.

To nurture these two human traits, start by accepting that setbacks are part of life's rhythm. You cannot control every storm, but you can

control how you survive through it. Focus on progress, not perfection. Celebrate small victories. Allow yourself to rest, but not to quit. Remember, strength is not about moving fast; it's about refusing to stop.

Surround yourself with positive energy, people who lift your spirit and remind you of your worth. Practice gratitude even in hard times; it shifts your focus from what's missing to what remains. Each day, be hopeful over being in despair, you strengthen the foundation of your very core.

Resistance and resilience thrive in self-belief. When life tests you, remind yourself that you choose to overcome. The person you are becoming is wiser, tougher, and more compassionate than the person you were. Hardship is not the end of your story; it is the beginning of transformation.

So, when life feels heavy, hold on. You are not breaking, but you are becoming. Every challenge you face is shaping a more grounded, courageous version of you”

The compelling part of resistance is that it inspires each of us to watch our own steps, and to watch the steps of others. We avoid falling, physically, socially, emotionally, or politically. We become moral, ethical, gatekeepers of what is just.

The beauty of resilience is that if we do fall, we call forth the inner strength to set things back in balance, to recover our hearts and our good selves, not in believing we can avoid being hurt, but in finding the light that helps us heal our pains.

Everyday, i learn the following:

“The truth is, resilience is not a destination but a lifelong practice. It’s choosing to keep faith when fear is loud, to stand tall after you’ve fallen, and to keep believing in the possibility of better days. And as you rise, your story becomes a beacon for others, proof that even in brokenness, beauty can be found.” Unknown.

If you think about it, resistance and resilience are perfectly woven into each of us—it is the amazing way the essence of who we are is designed.

Many professional groups study resistance and resilience, including **psychologists and psychiatrists, Sociologists, public health experts, military and defense analysts, Organizational Behavior Specialists, and Ecologists.**

These studies span the fields like mental health (NIH, Mayo Clinic),; all the social sciences.

They conclude: Innate resistance and resilience in humans involve a combination of genetic predispositions and the capacity to develop skills, allowing individual to adapt, cope, and recover from stress, trauma, and adversity, rather than being immune to it; this involves biological factors (like specific genes and immune responses) and psychological traits (optimism, self-regulation, problem-solving) that enable effective bouncing back and growth, making resilience a trainable, dynamic process, not just a fixed trait.

Innate or not, we will all fall. We will all have times when our resistance is weakened under the weight of life's tragedies and hardships.

Make not mistake, neither resistance or resilience can exist without the help of others. They are tied to others through supportive relationships, shared struggles, and collective action, as social bonds buffer stress and foster adaptation, while resisting oppression often leads to community building and shared strength, turning individual endurance into collective power for change. Strong connections provide essential emotional support, help us see challenges as less daunting,

We will carry on, cheering and tenderly supporting one another into a new day. We will redesign our souls, reconstruct our universes together, and eventually change this world into one of peace.

Thank you