Many times throughout my ministry I have encountered people who find their sense of meaning, their spiritual truth, their spirituality in works of compassion and justice. Our theme for the month is justice so for this last sermon of the month, I want to invite you to think with me about the importance of doing justice as a spiritual practice.

Even before I studied with Matthew Fox, lo these many years ago now, I had found compassion and justice to be inextricably linked. Today we seem to talk more readily about love, so let me remind you that compassion, feeling with another, is the kind of agape love that Jesus and his early followers talked about and exemplified, as in contrast to eros or philos, erotic or philosophical love. Compassionate love is often the force that moves us to do works of justice. Some may be motivated by the call to justice in its most abstract form, but most of us feel the need for justice when we hear or see the cry of those who have been unjustly treated. It is in hearing and telling the stories of injustice in the battles for civil rights for blacks, women, gays, and transgender persons that we are moved to action.

That work of compassion and justice, or love and justice, is truly a spiritual practice for many Unitarian Universalists. Probably it is the most important spiritual practice that we might have in this era. Not that other spiritual practices are less important to the individual, but it is the commitment to work for justice with love that will bring peace and change the hardened and often insensitive business practices of this time that have harmed so many people through the release of environmental toxins into impoverished communities and allowed predatory loans, and taken advantage of unskilled workers, among so many other matters. Until the business practices of corporate persons are regulated by more tests than the bottom line or the benefit to investors, the need for works of compassion and justice will only increase.

Matthew Fox, describing creation-centered spirituality in the introduction to his seminal work, Original Blessing, says this:
Creation Spirituality is a justice spirituality—Meister Eckhart, its greatest spokesperson, says, “The person who understands what I have to say about justice understands everything I have to say.” It is also a “street spirituality” that the oppressed can recognize as their own. While the fall/redemption tradition has served the needs of what Johannes Metz call “the history of the successful and the established” during the marriage of empire and religion since the fourth century in the West, the creation tradition has a different historical tale to tell. Metz writes:

> It is of decisive importance that a kind of anti-history should develop out of the memory of suffering—an understanding of history in which the vanquished and destroyed alternatives would also be taken into account: an understanding of history *ex memoria passionis* as a history of the vanquished. (*Creation—Centered Spirituality*) represents such an alternative history. Ironically, however, too few liberation theologians have realized that the memory of suffering is only complete when it embraces memories of beauty, of pleasure, or original blessing. Why? Because suffering is proportionate to what is lost—the Via Negativa follows on the Via Positiva—you can only truly lose what you love. The pathos of the crushing of individual’s dignity happens because individuals have dignity; the pathos of crushing creativity happens because individuals are creative; that of divinity, because people are divine with the image of God alive in them. (*Original Blessing* intro pp 17-18)

So Creation—Centered Spirituality is a spirituality of justice for those whose dignity, creativity, divinity, has been crushed, those who have been disenfranchised, disempowered. The recent immigration battles that have so often distracted from the more important issue of the widening chasm between the rich and everyone else, is about people who have come to the US to work for less than minimum wages to try to feed themselves and their families and try to make a better life. Even as corporations continue to outsource work to China and India, undocumented workers are rushing in by the truck load to pick Tomatoes in Florida and Strawberries in California! Should we let the produce rot in the fields because we are afraid to pay for emergency medical care for other human beings? Millions, probably billions of dollars is being spent by corporate persons to change public opinion, to convince people to vote against their own self-interest and against justice and human compassion in every election cycle. When will we ever learn?
The teachings attributed to Jesus are filled with injunctions to practice compassion and justice, to love and to treat others fairly and to work to insure that women, children, lepers, disabled persons, even Samaritans are treated fairly. Today we talk about spiritual practices, but Jesus was teaching people about living a healthy and upright life. Jesus warned against praying in public and making a big show of your religion, he was more into a holistic and healthy lifestyle and relationships. He wasn’t impressed by the actions and promises of Kings and rulers, and he probably would not be interested in the recent debates full of sound-bites and empty promises and disingenuous disparagements of other candidates by self-avowed Christians.

What would Jesus do? I’m not sure, but I don’t think it would be to support laws allowing assault rifles in every home, or outlawing immigration, or guaranteeing exorbitant profits for bankers and investors at the expense of ordinary people. I don’t think Jesus would have led the charge to war or said don’t worry about pollution or the mess we have made of the earth. Jesus probably would be out camping with the occupiers, not sitting in committee meetings in the churches that have kicked out the occupiers.

Love and Justice requires a different kind of stretching than yoga or meditative walking or prayer. As a spiritual practice, compassion and justice may require more than a half hour a day, but it won’t require special mats or clothing. The spirituality of compassion and justice is about taking our beliefs on the road, engaging in the societal struggles for human and civil rights, about showing support for those whose skin is the wrong color or who are attracted to the wrong people or who just won’t conform to the societal norms. The spirituality of compassion and justice is about speaking out when we would rather be silent, of getting up earlier than we want to, of taking our own precious time to stand up for another who is not being treated fairly. And you’d better believe I am preaching to myself as much as to anyone else—I really could have gotten up to go to the MLK parade and demonstration. It isn’t about guilt for what we haven’t done in the past, it is about continuing to try to do more and better in the future.

The world will not change if we remain silent. The gaping chasm between rich and poor will continue to grow if we do nothing. I don’t know if I agree with
the Occupy movement, but at least they are doing something. I’ve noticed that the media corporations are giving them less and less attention, but I know there are still many out there practicing a spirituality of compassion and justice.

As I have told you many times, my greatest spiritual sense comes from a starry sky, a view of the ocean at sunset, a quiet time in the mountains, but our world is more in need of an engaged spirituality at this time. Putting our beliefs into action can help to reshape the world in light of our UU Principles. Even though we may be few in numbers, we can join hands to work with many others who seek to practice a spirituality of compassion and justice around the world. We do not need to acquiesce to patterns of power and control set in place by corporate persons and those they pay. Even without overturning all the rules of society, we can help to change the way decisions are made. We can balance the stories of corporations in matters like climate change with the stories of the 99% of climate scientists who are in agreement about the dangers of current levels of greenhouse gases. We can also balance the uncontrolled financial practices of banks with the stories of those who have lost homes and businesses due to unfair practices and outright lies. We who have a little more access to power and wealth can help to tell the stories of the disenfranchised. We can help to make a difference, but we will have to focus on the good of the broader community more than our own spiritual comfort.

One way we can make a difference is to support the work of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, UUSC. This year’s collection for UUSC with the Guest at Your Table Boxes did not seem to bring in very many boxes. I hope that many of you have supported the work of UUSC at other times because that is our own program of outreach, support, and advocacy working in many places around the globe. It is also a program that we can trust to promote our UU values!

We need an understanding that is much larger than ourselves, larger than this community, cosmic even. In Theme 4 of Original Blessing Matthew Fox says:

*There is in the sense of cosmos a sense of balance, of harmony, and therefore of justice. For the word “cosmos” is in fact the Greek word for “order.” A cosmic spirituality is a justice spirituality, for it cares with a heartfelt caring for harmony, balance, and justice. Indeed injustice is precisely a rupture in the*
order of the cosmos, a rupture in creation itself. The Hebrew people believed that the entire cosmos stood on two pillars: a pillar of justice and a pillar of righteousness, which was justice internalized...If a crack or rupture appears in either of these two pillars, then the entire cosmos becomes off center, off balance. Injustice then is a cosmic issue. (Original Blessing Theme 4 page 70)

In this modern world, we can find anything we want as long as we know how to google it, but if we don’t know what to look for we get only as much as the media want to share with us. Whether we get our news from network television, radio, yahoo, aol, or google, or even the newspaper, the news has been sifted to provide only the selected stories, the most important news in the estimation of the corporation giving it to us. If some of the stories about injustices are buried or get little attention, how will we know what important things they might symbolize? Even NPR and the BBC select their stories for there are too many things going on in the world to tell it all.

To practice a cosmically aware creation—centered spirituality of compassion and justice is an all-encompassing thing. It is not just something that we can do on a special mat for a half hour a day, it is a way of life, a way of being in the world that takes our journeys so seriously that we cannot just stop in now and then. It is like joining a religious order, it is a way of re-organizing who we are and what we are doing. It is becoming a Unitarian Universalist and actually seeking to live our principles every day, every hour, every moment. It is a heightened awareness, a focused sense of purpose and meaning, a transformation into the kind of being that truly models compassion and justice and orients one’s life around the quest for not just a healthy self, but a just and loving cosmos. It is only thusly that we move from being dilettantes of religions into truly spiritual practitioners of compassion and justice, but are any of us ready to so re-orient our lives?

Most of us are not yet ready to reach the summit of spiritual truth. We each have journeyed far and wide, but few of us are ready to let go of those many things we hold dear, the niceties of modern life, the comforts of home and family, the illusions of independence and uniqueness, the hopes and dreams of our own successes and accomplishments. So many things we each hold onto, so many distractions to mask the angst, the fear and trembling of our lives.
There is always another level in our moral and spiritual development to which we can aspire. Even the archetypal heroes, the exemplars of the great religions were flawed humans who had to learn and grow and seek spiritual truth. Each of them gave us a model for how we might proceed on our spiritual journey, but none lived to enter the promised land, none reached the pinnacle of the mountain of truth and wisdom. The great ones stayed true to the journey most of the time, and therein lies the key to spiritual seeking. We were not born to conquer and enslave, rather we were born to find ways to cooperate in bringing love and justice to a cosmos that has too often known only war and famine and disease. Our challenge this day and all the days to come is to find and practice a cosmic spirituality of compassion and justice.

May our journeys bring us light and love and justice! So May it Be!