

**“Possibility Without Burnout:
Justice as a Sustainable Spiritual Practice”
Dianne M. Daniels; UUCN, April 5, 2026**

There is a kind of exhaustion that sleep does not fix.

You can go to bed tired and wake up tired.

You can take a day off and still feel depleted.

You can care deeply, act faithfully, speak courageously, and still feel as though something inside you is wearing thin.

Many of us know that kind of exhaustion.

It comes from carrying too much for too long.

It comes from living in a world where the needs are real, the harms are many, and the injustices do not politely line up and wait their turn.

It comes from loving this world enough to want it to be better, while also knowing how much work remains.

And for people of faith, that exhaustion can become its own spiritual crisis.

Because we begin to ask:

If justice matters, how do I keep going?

If love calls me to act, how do I avoid collapse?

If the world is hurting, how do I rest without feeling guilty?

So today I want to offer a claim that is both compassionate and demanding:

Justice must be sustainable, or it will not be faithful for long.

Or said another way: Justice is not only a cause.
Justice is a spiritual practice.

And if it is a spiritual practice, then it must be rooted not only in
courage, but in discernment.
Not only in urgency, but in endurance.
Not only in sacrifice, but in balance.

That is the angle I want us to hold this morning: possibility without
burnout.

Because there is possibility.
There is still possibility.
But we will not reach it by running ourselves into the ground.

WHAT

Let us begin with the “what.”

What do we mean by justice as a sustainable spiritual practice?

In our Unitarian Universalist tradition, justice is never separate
from love.

Justice is not punishment.

Justice is not superiority.

Justice is not self-righteousness dressed up in good intentions.

Justice is love made public.

Justice is what love looks like when it refuses to be private.

It is what love looks like when it moves beyond sentiment and into
structure, beyond sympathy and into solidarity, beyond good feel-
ings and into real commitments.

That is why justice belongs at the center of our faith.

Not at the margins. Not as an optional committee. Not as an occasional sermon topic. At the center.

But justice cannot be sustained by adrenaline alone.

Adrenaline is useful in a crisis, but it is not a way to live.
Panic can get your attention, but it cannot build a movement.
Outrage can wake you up, but it cannot nourish your soul.

That is why the core ideas for this sermon are courage, discernment, and endurance.

Courage gets us moving. Discernment keeps us wise.
Endurance helps us stay.
And we need all three.

We begin with **courage** because justice always requires it.

One of the reflections I used in preparing this service says, “I am brave in the face of injustice... I am courageous in my thoughts and actions.”

That is not small.

It means we are willing to see what is wrong and refuse to deny its existence or its presence.

It means we are willing to speak when silence would be easier.

It means we are willing to act when comfort would prefer that we remain still.

Courage is essential. But courage by itself is not enough.

Because if courage is not paired with discernment, we can become reactive.

We can confuse movement with wisdom. We can start to believe that every need is ours to meet, every crisis is ours to solve, and every injustice is ours to carry personally.

And that is too much weight for one human soul.

So discernment asks a holier question: What is mine to carry?

That question is not selfish. It is spiritual.

It is how we learn the difference between faithful responsibility and ego-driven overreach.

It is how we learn that saying yes to one faithful task sometimes means saying no to ten others.

Discernment also helps us distinguish between urgency and anxiety.

Urgency says: this matters, and we need to respond.

Anxiety says, "If I do not fix this immediately, everything will fall apart."

Urgency can be faithful. Anxiety can be frantic.

Urgency sees the moment clearly. Anxiety floods the system.

And if we are not careful, anxiety will disguise itself as moral seriousness.

It will tell us that exhaustion is proof of commitment, that rest is betrayal, and that boundaries are selfish.

But anxiety is not the same as faithfulness.

Exhaustion is not the same as devotion.

And collapse does not serve the cause of justice.

That brings us to endurance.

Endurance is not flashy. It is not dramatic.
It does not always look heroic. But it is holy.

Endurance is the ability to remain rooted in love over time.
It is the discipline of staying in the work without letting the work
consume your spirit.
It is knowing how to continue, not just how to begin.

One of the transformation reflections I used in preparing this sermon says, “Positive transformation is my daily practice... I am committed to making transformations that nourish my soul, mind, and heart.”

That is a beautiful description of endurance.

Not a frantic transformation. Not a desperate transformation.
Daily focused, intentional practice.

Soul, mind, and heart.

Justice, if it is going to last, must be practiced that way.
Not as a burst. As a rhythm.

That is where the worship theme of possibility can help us.

Possibility is not naïve optimism.
It is not pretending that everything will work out.
It is neither denial nor fantasy.

Possibility emerges when we refuse resignation.

Possibility says: This world can be different.
People can change. Systems can change.

Communities can heal. New futures can be built.

We are strong enough to say, “Transformation is a blessing... I am open to the process of transformation and the incredible lessons that it offers me.”

Possibility requires that kind of openness.

It requires us to believe that transformation is real, even when it is unfinished.

It requires us to hold onto the truth that change is possible without demanding that it happen instantly.

And that matters because burnout often comes from a distorted relationship to time.

Burnout whispers: Everything must happen **now**.

Every result must be **immediate**.

Every problem must be solved **at once**.

But justice work is long, layered, interdependent work.

That means we need pacing, humility, and we need community.

We need generosity—not only generosity toward others, but generosity toward ourselves.

The UU value of generosity is not just about giving more.

It is also about giving **wisely**.

Giving wisely means understanding that even sacred work requires limits.

Giving wisely means knowing that pouring from an empty cup is not noble; it is dangerous.

Giving wisely means asking not only “How much can I give?” but “How can I give in ways that remain rooted, loving, and sustainable?”

SO WHAT

So what does all of this mean?

It means that burnout is not just a scheduling problem. It is a spiritual warning light.

Burnout tells us something has gotten out of alignment.

Maybe our compassion is intact, but our pacing is gone. Maybe our values are clear, but our practices are unsustainable. Maybe our love for justice is strong, but our sense of limitation has eroded.

And when that happens, several things begin to go wrong.

First, burnout distorts our vision.

When we are depleted, everything starts to feel equally urgent. We lose the ability to prioritize. We lose perspective. We begin to react to the loudest need rather than the deepest call.

Second, burnout can harden the heart.

This is the part people do not like to admit. When we are exhausted, we can become resentful. We can become brittle. We can start out loving people and end up irritated by them. We can start out fighting for justice and end up angry at everyone who is not doing it the way we think they should.

That is not because we are bad people.
It is because depletion changes us.

Third, burnout can turn justice into performance.

If we do not stay spiritually grounded, it becomes easy to measure ourselves and others by **visible** output.
Who showed up, who posted, who spoke...
Who did enough.

And suddenly, the work is no longer flowing from love.
It is flowing from pressure, comparison, and guilt.

That is not liberation. That is another form of bondage.

Without sustainable practice, justice can become a slogan.
Outrage can replace strategy.
And burnout can replace devotion. That is the danger.

But with sustainable practice, something else becomes possible.

With courage, discernment, and endurance, working together, we act from groundedness rather than frenzy.
We become more useful, not less.
We build stamina instead of spectacle.
We participate in change that can last because it is not powered solely by emergency energy.

One of the resources I used to create this sermon says, “Changing seasons inspire me to revisit success strategies... I know that being consistently successful requires adaptability.”

That is wisdom for justice work, too.

Seasons change. Contexts change. Communities change.

Our own capacity changes.

What was faithful in one season may not be faithful in the next.
What you could carry at one stage of life may not be what you can carry now.

And that is not failure. That is reality.

Justice as spiritual practice means revisiting the strategy.
Not abandoning the commitment but adjusting the rhythm.

And that takes humility.

It takes the humility to say: I cannot do everything.

I am not the whole movement.

I am one person in an interdependent web of responsibility and care.

That UU value of interdependence matters deeply here.

Our liberation is bound together, yes.

But so is our labor. So is our rest. So is our resilience.

You do not have to do everything because everything was never yours alone to do.

That truth can be hard for helpers, leaders, caregivers, ministers, activists, and deeply conscientious people.

Many of us have spent years being the reliable one, the responsive one, the one who steps in, the one who fills the gap.

But if you become the gap-filler for every gap, eventually you disappear into the work.

And justice that consumes the self is not the same thing as justice that transforms the world.

“We’re more powerful when we act together... surround yourself with friends and allies.”

Exactly.

Faithful justice is communal justice.
It is shared work. Shared witness. Shared burden.
Shared courage. Shared rest.

And let me say a pastoral word here: Normalizing limits does not weaken commitment. It strengthens it.

Limits are not proof that you care less.
Limits are proof that you are human.
And if our theology cannot make room for human limits, then it is not a theology of liberation. It is another impossible yoke.

Love does not ask us to be machines.
Love asks us to be present.
Justice does not ask us to be limitless.
Justice asks us to be faithful.

And faithful is different from frantic.

NOW WHAT

So now what?

How do we live possibility without burnout?
How do we practice justice in a way that is spiritually strong, emotionally honest, and sustainable over time?

Let me offer four invitations.

First: make a spiritual inventory.

Ask yourself:
What is mine to carry in this season?

Not in **every** season. Not forever. In this season.

What issue, what ministry, what act of care, what public witness, what private discipline is truly yours to carry right now?

And what is not?

This question is not an escape hatch.
It is a doorway into faithfulness.

Because once you know what yours is, you can show up for it more wholeheartedly.
And once you know what yours is not, you can stop confusing guilt with responsibility.

Second: practice Sabbath as resistance.

Sabbath is not laziness.
Sabbath is not avoidance.
Sabbath is not checking out.

Sabbath is resistance to the lie that your worth is measured by output.

Sabbath says: I am more than what I produce.
The world is held by more than my effort.
Rest is not the opposite of faithfulness.
Rest is part of faithfulness.

In a culture of endless demand, Sabbath becomes deeply counter-cultural.

It reminds us that rest repairs perception.

Rest softens the heart.

Rest returns us to ourselves.

Rest makes endurance possible.

Third: revise your strategies when the season changes.

If you are doing justice work the same way in every season, you may be ignoring the wisdom of change.

One of the transformation pieces I found says, “Transformation sets me free. It allows me to emerge as the best possible version of myself.”

Let that be true not only for your inner life, but for your methods.

Maybe in one season, you are the organizer.

In another season, you are the donor.

In another season, you are the letter writer.

In another season, you are the one who cooks for the tired activist, or drives someone to an appointment, or mentors a younger leader, or simply refuses despair.

Adaptation is not quitting.

Adaptation is wisdom.

Fourth: choose daily practices that nourish the work.

Justice does not stay healthy on anger alone.

What nourishes your spirit?

Prayer? Meditation? Silence? Walking?

Reading? Music?

Conversation with trusted companions?

Time in nature? Laughter? Beauty?

Whatever returns you to your deepest values is not a distraction from justice.
It is part of what keeps your justice rooted in love.

One of the reflections says, “I am committed to making transformations that nourish my soul, mind, and heart.”

Take that seriously.
Soul, mind, and heart.

Not only cause.
Not only crisis.
Not only demand.

If your practices do not nourish you, they will not sustain you.

CLOSING

So let me bring this home.

There is still possibility.

There is still possibility for justice, for courage, for transformation,
Still a possibility for a more loving world.

But possibility does not ask us to destroy ourselves on its behalf.

Possibility asks us to remain available.
Available to love.
Available to truth.
Available to courage.
Available for the long work of repair.

That means pacing matters.

Discernment matters.
Sabbath matters.
Community matters.
Limits matter.

Justice as a sustainable spiritual practice means we stop glorifying depletion and start honoring endurance.
It means we stop assuming that burnout is the price of caring.
It means we learn to give wisely, love steadily, and act in ways that can be lived—not just admired.

And maybe that is one of the most faithful things we can do in this time: to refuse both resignation and collapse.

To say: I will not give up, and I will not give out.
I will stay rooted and connected.
I will carry what is mine, **and** I will rest when needed.
I will return to the work.
And I will trust that others are carrying their part too.

Because justice without sustainability becomes another wound.
But justice grounded in spirit becomes a witness.

A witness that love can endure, that courage can be paced.
A witness that transformation does not only happen in dramatic moments, but in daily practice.
A witness that another way of living is possible.

And that is the good news for today: Possibility does not belong only to the tireless. It belongs to the faithful.

Amen. Ase. Blessed Be.