

Building a Bridge to Welcome and Opportunity

Unitarian Universalist Church of Vancouver

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Reflection on the Theme – Deborah Willoughby

I was on a group tour in Arizona last month, and one evening I was having dinner with several fellow travelers. We were talking about places we would like to visit, and I mentioned Cuba, which I didn't intend as an incendiary comment. But a member of the group took it as a declaration of my political views. She said, "I don't usually talk to people like you. You don't listen; you don't even try to understand." She went on to share some viewpoints that pretty much shut down conversation at our table.

The next day, her travel companion quietly took me aside and apologized. She said she has talked with her friend about the fact that not everybody agrees with her politics. This person looked so sad—she is trying to maintain her long friendship with someone who lives in a political bubble. We agreed that we all have to find ways to get along with people we disagree with.

I have a lot of respect for bridge builders, especially during such difficult times. On a bad day I deal with immense anger, although I know carrying this bucket of rage isn't doing any good. But most days I also think about how I try to maintain relationships with family members who think my beliefs are naive and wacky.

Sometimes when I'm feeling overwhelmed by current events, I try to change my focus to a time in the future when resistance has been successful and our country is able to rebuild, to try to undo the massive damage that's being done. Will we have a formal reconstruction period? Will there be any accountability? Will we make reparations to people who are being hurt? I don't think we will be able to move forward unless there's reconciliation among people with different beliefs.

For now, I want to express my admiration for the bridge builders. I want to thank the people who are resisting the current chaos and oppression in thoughtful and creative ways—and who are simultaneously dedicated to reaching out, to listening and to identifying common values. We need your kind of leadership, and I hope I'm strong enough to join you.

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