

Speaking of Faith, 6/29/18 (for publication the week of July 2)

Staying With The Struggle

The news cycle has worn us down, and not for the first time.

Again, a photograph of a small child hijacks hearts the world over, her panic unmistakable as she looks up at the officer and her mom (Robert Moore, Getty Images). We fear what might have happened next. The same week, a recording of distraught children's voices begging for their parents goes viral. We may avoid clicking on the link at first, knowing it will upset us, and when we do, it hits hard. Who can forget their wails? The insistent little girl who keeps repeating her aunt's phone number, knowing that *she* will help?

The media does its thing, relentless. It fuels the narrative with fact and opinion, and passions spike across the country, both for and against the U.S. actions. People everywhere find themselves caught up in the maelstrom. And then – who could predict it? A shift.

A heaviness creeps in. Tired and emotionally wrought, people begin to feel sick. Sick of the pain and conflict and outrage. Sick of ourselves. Sick of it all. You can almost see the collective urge to shut down. The outcry subsides, and, for some of us, the pain burrows inward, gnawing at our hearts. Weary, people begin turning off the news. THAT now becomes the news, and the media tells us what we already know: people have reached their pain limit. They can't take any more. Summer's pleasures beckon: weekend guests, the hammock, barbeques, ice cream cones....

But the crying does not stop. Not the kids' tears, not the parents' tears, not our own. Suffering never stops entirely, whether at the border or in our own homes and hearts. We struggle with longing and disappointment, with grudges and difficult conversations. This is the reality of being human.

In her book *The Wisdom of No Escape: And the Path of Loving Kindness*, the beloved Buddhist teacher Pema Chodron writes, "The sadder it is, and the vaster it is, the more our heart opens." This, my friends, is the good news: from our struggles, we grow. Our hearts break and break again – hasn't yours? In every breaking, we live a bit more fully. More aware. More grateful. More joyful in our aliveness. Every time our heart breaks, we also emerge fortified. Ready to return to the struggle and do what we can to make a difference in the world. For this we give thanks.

Take good care of yourself this summer. Do what you love to do. Feed your soul (you know how). Heed suffering, too – yours and the world's. Risk opening your heart to it. Dang, but it's hard work! There's nothing easy about staying with the struggle, nor is anything more sacred.

Be well and treasure the gift of each day.

Rev. Betsy Mead Tabor serves the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Eastern Slopes (UUFES) in Tamworth, a congregation known for its warm welcome, diverse beliefs and quest for justice. Come visit any Sunday at 10 a.m.