

Nations Free, Tyrants Disappearing (Hannukah)
Sunday, December 18, 2022
Tri-County Unitarian Universalists
Summerfield, FL
Rev. Cynthia A. Snavelly

In the last verse of our opening hymn we sang,
“Children of the prophet’s word whether free or fettered,
wake the echoes of the songs where you may be scattered.
Yours the message cheering that the time is nearing
which shall see nations free, tyrants disappearing.” (Rock of Ages, Let Our Song).

Is that time now? On December 1 Miriam Berger wrote for a Washington Post newsletter, “The uprising in Iran, well into its third month, continues to defy expectations, persisting even amid an increasingly violent crackdown and opponents of clerical rule uniting across class and ethnic lines.

“The movement, born out of long-seething anger over decades of repression, cascaded after police arrested 22-year-old Mahsa Amini — also known by her Kurdish name, Jina — in a Tehran metro station for violating Iran’s conservative dress code for women, then allegedly beat her to death and tried to cover it up. What began in Amini’s hometown in a Kurdish-dominated province has grown into a sustained, nationwide challenge to the regime — and one not easily defeated,” [Iran’s regime at an impasse as protest movement defies crackdown \(msn.com\)](#).

On November 28 CNN’s Beijing Bureau and Nectar Gan reported that, “Chinese leader Xi Jinping on Monday faced unprecedented dissent after thousands of demonstrators protested in cities across China over the weekend against his zero-Covid strategy – with some daring to openly call for his removal in the streets.

“‘Step down, Xi Jinping! Step down, Communist Party!’ some protesters yelled among hundreds who gathered in the financial hub Shanghai – one of multiple major cities where protests broke out following a deadly fire Thursday at an apartment block in the far western region of Xinjiang.

“The fire appeared to act as a catalyst for searing public anger over China’s strict zero-Covid measures after videos emerged that seemed to suggest lockdown measures delayed firefighters from reaching the victims.

“From Shanghai to the capital Beijing, residents gathered to grieve the 10 people killed in the blaze in Xinjiang’s capital Urumqi, speak out against zero-Covid and call for freedom and democracy. On dozens of university campuses, students demonstrated or put up protest posters. In many parts of the country, residents in locked-down neighborhoods tore down barriers and took to the streets...,” [China Covid: Protests erupt in unprecedented challenge to Xi Jinping's zero-Covid policy | CNN](#).

On December 2 Sarah Rainsford in Bucha and Andre Rhoden-Paul in London reported for BBC News, The Archbishop of Canterbury has said Ukraine must not be forced to accept a peace deal with Russia, while on a visit to the war-torn nation.

The Most Reverend Justin Welby told the BBC “Justice demands that there is defeat of ‘an evil invasion’.

“He visited Bucha where evidence of atrocities and civilian killings were found after Russian troops withdrew.

“It comes as millions of people remain without power or heating due to Russian attacks on Ukraine's power grid.

“The most senior cleric in the Church of England was highlighting the need for support for the country ahead of a tough winter.

“I am clear that President (Vladimir) Putin chose to start the war and release the evil’ that comes from that, he said.

“It is proper to support a ‘victim nation’ that is ‘being overrun by aggression’, the archbishop continued, adding the international community had a ‘duty of care’ to protect weaker nations,” [Archbishop of Canterbury: Russian invasion must not succeed - BBC News](#).

One more. On December 6 Mat Nashed reported for Al Jazeera on Sudan saying, “Sudanese protesters have denounced a framework agreement between the military, powerful armed groups and political parties....

Sudan’s resistance committees, which are neighbourhood groups leading the street pro-democracy movement, say the deal effectively restores a partnership between political and security elites and thereby betrays the aspirations of the 120 people killed in anti-coup protests.

“‘We believe that if there is no justice then the killing and raping will continue,’ said Ahmed Ismat, a spokesperson for the Khartoum south resistance committees. ‘We are just repeating the same cycle,’” [‘Repeating cycle’: Protesters decry Sudan agreement \(msn.com\)](#).

Around the world people are standing up against oppression and tyranny. Yes, some people will be beaten down and will put up with their own mistreatment and the denigration of others but not everyone. Always there will be those who seek justice for themselves and for all people. They will protest. They will speak out. And, if they feel it is necessary, they will fight.

Nineteenth century American social reformer, abolitionist, statesman and ex-slave Frederick Douglass said, “If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet deprecate agitation, are (those) who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.”

“Nations free, tyrants disappearing.” Does that require bloodshed? Will Maccabees always be needed to take up arms and fight? I don’t want the answer to that question to be “yes,” but if it is not then we must be standing up and speaking out before tyrants can become tyrants. Wannabe tyrants will tell you they will protect you. They will make you richer. They will solve your problems. They will tell you your problems can be solved if you just work with them to put down others- the enemy is the Jews, the gays, the immigrants. Don’t believe them. Eventually you too will be an enemy to be put down.

Doris Plenn wrote a new verse to an old hymn somewhere in the 1950s and taught it to Pete Seeger. The reference in the added verse intended by Seeger and by Plenn is to the work of the House Un-

American Activities Committee. [How Can I Keep from Singing? - Wikipedia](#), an example of a little of our home-grown tyranny. Plenn's verse is included in our hymnal,

"When tyrants tremble as they hear the bells of freedom ringing,
when friends rejoice both far and near, how can I keep from singing!
To prison cell and dungeon vile our thoughts to them are winging;
when friends by shame are undefiled, how can I keep from singing!"

Speaking out, singing out, speaking out for ourselves, standing up for others. This is what is required if we are to prevent the formation of tyrants, big and small.

On Wednesday, December 7 Maegan Vazquez and Betsy Klein reported for CNN

"Second gentleman Doug Emhoff – the first Jewish person in his position – convened a roundtable on antisemitism at the White House on Wednesday, where he warned of an 'epidemic of hate facing our country.'

"'We're seeing a rapid rise in antisemitic rhetoric and acts,' Emhoff said at the start of the roundtable. 'Let me be clear: words matter. People are no longer saying the quiet parts out loud – they are literally screaming them.'...

"'Antisemitism is dangerous. We cannot normalize this,' Emhoff said at the White House event, adding that there is no 'both sides' to the argument. 'There is only one side. Everyone, all of us, must be against this,' he remarked....

"During his remarks... Emhoff detailed his own personal and family history with Judaism as he said that he is 'in pain' but 'proud to live openly as a Jew.' And discussed the deadly White nationalist protests in Charlottesville, Virginia, where demonstrators were heard chanting antisemitic phrases -- including 'Jews will not replace us.'" [CNN - Breaking News, Latest News and Videos](#).

Emhoff is Jewish himself and his station as second gentleman gives him a platform to speak out, but we do not need to be Jewish or have some high station to speak out against antisemitism. We do not need to be black to speak out against racism. Men can speak out against sexism. Straight people can speak against homophobia. Cisgender folk can stand up against transphobia. And if enough of us use our words and use them strongly, often, and well, just maybe we can prevent at least some bloodshed.

"If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet deprecate agitation, are (those) who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will."

Speak truth to power and speak it again and speak it again. He was not Jewish, but I think a quote from Representative John Lewis from his book [Across That Bridge: A Vision for Change and the Future of America](#) is a fitting way to end this Hannukah sermon, "You are a light. You are the light. Never let anyone—any person or any force—dampen, dim or diminish your light. Study the path of others to make your way easier and more abundant. Lean toward the whispers of your own heart, discover the universal truth, and follow its dictates. [...] Release the need to hate, to harbor division, and the enticement of revenge. Release all bitterness. Hold only love, only peace in your heart, knowing that the

battle of good to overcome evil is already won. Choose confrontation wisely, but when it is your time don't be afraid to stand up, speak up, and speak out against injustice. And if you follow your truth down the road to peace and the affirmation of love, if you shine like a beacon for all to see, then the poetry of all the great dreamers and philosophers is yours to manifest in a nation, a world community, and a Beloved Community that is finally at peace with itself.”