

# Making Our Mark

## By Matthew Meyer

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Where do you find yourself in this story? Are you the young girl, wanting to add some art, some beauty to the world and don't know where to begin? Are you the gentle and wise teacher who sees the potential of the blank page? Are you the developing artist, leaping from dot to dot, getting better and better as you find your way?

Sometimes I can picture a more just world. Sometimes, the way there seems straight ahead and clear. Sometimes though, I am a little less sure of myself and like Peter, lying in bed, anxious for sleep, I urge myself to just try and make some kind of mark to know that I was alive today.

Thank goodness though, for the teachers who have reminded me that it is indeed possible to make a difference. Thank goodness for the artists and the activists, so much farther along than I, who have held my hand and shown me the way.

The amazing thing about making a dot, is that it leads to more dots. Make a mark. Sign it. Own it. Make another and another. Soon you can help others to make their marks. Soon the whole world starts to look a little more colorful.

There is something about this spirit of creativity. This urge inside everyone of us, that calls us to create. It is that something inside us that hears noise and strives for music. It is that something that learns of war and aches for peace. It is a part of that something inside us that sees oppression and *says*, "I don't know where to start, but I want to end it."

There is something to learn from art. There is a lesson of interdependence, inherent in the act of creation. Whether we are creating a rhythm or a painting or a garden or a nurturing relationship. There is this idea that the creation of beauty is worth the time and effort of it all. Our relationships are worth the time, what we have to tell one another is worth the time and listening is also worth our time.

It is no accident that the drive to create beauty in music, has so often mirrored the creation of beauty through social change.

Wherever there is injustice in our world, and lord, we know that there is injustice now, it is the responsibility of all those who value the creative spirit of humanity to stand up and to speak out. So many before us have paved the way. They have spoken to the issues of their time. They accepted the blessings and responsibility of creativity and with the courage that gratitude begs of us, they have sung the songs that authority did not want them to sing. Dr. King was one of those creative spirits. He was a teacher to us all. He saw the potential of the blank page.

Today, in this weekend set aside to honor not just one man. But a movement of people who sought to make our country more whole... Today, one might look back to the early 60's and say, "my god, do you remember when people of color were treated so unfairly? There was a time when blacks were being jailed for the color of their skin and were consistently targeted for minor crimes. There was a time when people of color were not given the due process of law.

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There was a time when banks and the housing market worked to keep people of color segregated and living in poverty. There was a time when people of color and women, for that matter, did not receive equal pay for equal work.”

My friends, can you imagine such a time? Such conditions would surely call upon people of faith to rise up. To answer King’s call of engagement and give everything they had to work for a solution. And in that time, so they did.

But it does us well to take a moment and look around us on day of remembrance.

Last month a Unitarian Universalist young Adult was arrested in New Orleans while protesting the planned demolition of public housing. Because two years after the natural disaster of Katrina, the unnatural disaster of systemic racism continues to devastate the region and keep poor people of color homeless.

Last week another Unitarian Universalist young adult was arrested in Chicago as part of action against torture. Several groups came together to draw attention to the sixth anniversary of Guantanamo and relate it to the systemic and documented torture of African Americans by the Chicago Police.

UU’s in Boston are continuing to protest Burger King, who’s tomato pickers in Florida are asking for a one cent raise, for every pound of tomato’s they pick. This increase would nearly double their wages, but not only has Burger king refused to negotiate with workers, who are largely people of color, *but is actually trying to get McDonalds and Taco Bell to back out on the contracts that they have previously made with the tomato pickers.*

This year’s mortgage crisis has not pained everyone in our country equally. We know that those most affected by the foreclosures are women and people of color. In Boston, the foreclosures are the culmination of years of predatory lending to poor people and communities of color.

Also in the Boston area, UU’s are working to reform a prison system where in Massachusetts, Blacks and Latinos are about 12% of the population, but make up half of incarcerated adults. Nationally, African Americans are 15% of the drug users but are 36% of those arrested for drug abuse violations. Massachusetts, like the rest of the country spends more money on prisons than higher education.

Can you imagine such a time? Where people of color are systemically incarcerated because of their race. Where they might be in prison for six years now, without trials or even charges brought against them? Can you imagine a time when multimillion-dollar corporations say they can’t afford to pay tomato pickers a living wage?

My fellow people of faith, despite significant advances in civil rights over these last 30 years that should be honored, we continue to live in a society where white people are every day, given privileges we did not earn and people of color systematically held down by lenders and privatized prisons and even fast food giants.

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Can you imagine such a time? My friends, that time is now. The injustices of today call us to rise up as a force of change. Dr. King left us with the words that “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” We know that there is injustice in the banking industry, the judicial system, in New Orleans and in the tomato fields of Florida.

On this day of remembrance, we might ask ourselves, “How much of our lives, of our time and our money and relationships should we dedicate to the work of change?” For myself, every time I have enough to eat, every time I am not pulled over by the police because of my skin color, every time that I sit down to practice my instrument, instead of going to work in a sweatshop, I reminded that those are good times to more fully devote myself and my art to the work of justice. I invite you to think about where the spirit of creativity manifests itself in your own life. Where does the spirit of interdependence walk with you as a guide?

The African American vocal sextet, Sweet Honey in the Rock, sings that “We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes.”

Let us not rest until it comes. Let us speak more loudly, with all of our voices and our talents and our hands. Let music and art and the spirit of creativity be our guide and teach us the many lessons of our reliance on one another.

Let’s donate more money, and protest more fiercely. Let’s call our congresspeople more and write the editor more and volunteer more and show up more and kiss and dance and cook more. Let’s give so much away and speak out so often, that we get a little uncomfortable. Because that is where our growth will come.

Each of us struggles with the roles in this story of The Dot. Sometimes the student, sometimes the teacher, sometimes the mature artist. We so often struggle to see the potential in the blank page. Together though, in a faith community, we are given a vision of a more colorful world. We are given “a dream.” Together we can find the words and take the action to build a world that honors the creative spirit in every individual.

What would that look like? For me, *it would mean a world where no one is jailed because of the color of their skin*, where women are regarded as people despite the messages of the media and no-one owns two homes, while others have none. It would mean some very major changes in our lifestyle and I believe, in our congregations.

But, if we believe in every persons right to grow themselves and make a mark on this world, then the work of radical justice-making is our work. If we believe in the spirit of creativity, which is a spirit of interdependence, then this is our work. If we recognize that the music and the voices of some are being raised up, while others are being silenced, then this is our work. This is our work, because as people of faith, our spirituality does not exist in a vacuum, but takes shape in the context of this community. This is the work of people of faith who have declared themselves participants rather than spectators of life.

This is our work because our own growth as individuals and indeed as a denomination will come only when we push ourselves to a place we have not been and strive for change we have not yet seen. This is *our* work.