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First Unitarian Society
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No to Despair, Yes to Action

I've been thinking of the wisdom that I learned from a dear friend and colleague. Through his actions I learned that working for social justice and caring for a community are not separate opposing objectives, as some would have us believe. It's a false dichotomy to think that we must choose to be a *social activist* -- going to protests, writing letters to the editor, and raising our voices against inequality, poverty, environmental devastation, and war -- *or a caring individual* -- bringing meals after a loved one dies, making hospital visits, tutoring kids who need help, and cleaning up a dilapidated building.

Working for social justice and caring for the needs of a community are intimately connected. They reinforce each other. Both are rooted in compassion. We reach out to others to comfort them in times of distress, support organizations that can get help them with basic needs, sustain projects that contribute to the larger community, and fight against inequality in all its forms.

We come together to lift up our compassion.

We come together to reject the forces around us that say that only some people are deserving of compassion, that we can turn away from victims of injustice, that we can blame them for their own misfortune.

We come together because we need each other. We need to foster compassion among ourselves. We need to remind each other that all people are created in the image of God, all people are sacred, all people deserve basic respect, dignity, and love.

Our actions today will not change the world in any significant way. The poverty, suffering, and inequality will still devastate communities; loneliness and despair will still consume so many people. But our actions are not an end in and of themselves. We do these acts of kindness, these acts of justice, because they are a beginning. They make only a tiny dent in the world around us. But they are a voice of hope. And they change us, making us more loving and patient, making us more committed to justice.

Jewish tradition teaches *mitzvah goreret mitzvah*. One mitzvah – one act rooted in compassion for others – leads to another mitzvah. We come together to say no to despair. And yes to compassion.