

Isten áldjon! God bless you!

I am Előd Szabó, Unitarian minister in Ürmös, a town located in the southeastern corner of Transylvania, in the center of Romania, near the city of Brassó. I came to the United States together with my family: my wife, Kata is a preschool teacher, my older son, Magor is seven years old, the younger, Regő is four. Our congregation has around 580 members, around 80 of them, mostly young families live in the city or somewhere further, some of them in Western European countries. Our partner church in the UU community is the first Unitarian Universalist Church of New Orleans. I came to the United States through a scholarship called after an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Transylvanian Unitarian minister and poet, Francis Balázs, who also travelled in the US to study and to American Unitarian siblings. The scholarship brings a Hungarian Unitarian minister to Berkeley every year to study at the Starr King School for the Ministry. Besides studying, the aim of this scholarship is to strengthen relationships between you, American Unitarian Universalists, and us, Unitarians in Transylvania and Hungary.

Let me tell you a story from our national tradition that may help me answer the other possible question you may ask: why am I here?

Friar Julian was a Dominican monk living in the Kingdom of Hungary in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. He read and heard a lot about the history of Hungarians. He knew that his people arrived in the Carpathian basin 400 years before from the old homeland in the steppes of Central Asia. Reading and hearing the stories of the big journey the idea of another big journey strengthened in his soul. He decided to travel to the unknown place where these legendary ancestors once lived, discover the old homeland and maybe find some of the descendants of the Hungarians who hadn't joined the majority when the grand journey began.

Brother Julian sacrificed many years to prepare for this dangerous and long journey. He walked enormous distances, he survived diseases, attacks, loneliness, fatigue, doubts and fear. And at the end of this long journey of suffering he found the place and the people he looked for. This is how he described these people, the unknown relatives, brothers and sisters forgotten for many centuries:

*“They are pagans. They know nothing about God. They don't worship any idols either, but they live like wild men. They don't farm on the fields, they eat horse and wolf meat, they drink horse milk and blood. They have lots of weapons and horses, and they are very brave when it comes to fighting.”*

Although centuries have passed, although they seemed so different, they seemed barbarians, he could understand their language and he was able to communicate with them. The dream came true, and the

journey full of suffering and sacrifices got a meaning.

I believe we can leave some of the politeness of the strangers behind. I believe you will understand me when I say that you and us, American Unitarian Universalists and Transylvanian Unitarians are not meant to invite each other in the most comfortable armchairs of our homes and of our communities. I believe we will be blessed if we invite each other to the housetops of our houses. I know that may sound rude, but I also know it is surely authentic.

Jesus was no stranger to his disciples. He invited them to the housetops: “What I tell you in the dark, utter in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim upon the housetops.”

I find powerful and great meaning in these words. These words call disciples and call us to discover courage, conviction, sensibility in our lives and realize our calling and understand the joy to make sacrifices for a better world in which justice prevails.

Times are dark. I’ve heard that several times and we all experience that in our lives and our world. Times were always dark, but this doesn’t make the darkness of our times more acceptable.

You, American Unitarians and Universalist say times are dark. And you have long decades, even centuries of tradition of climbing on the housetops and proclaiming uncomfortable truths. You may know that your proclaiming courage seems sometimes strange and weird for Transylvanian Unitarians. Sometimes we look upon you as Friar Julian described his ethnic relatives. We criticize you because you don’t mention God as often as we do, but we admit you don’t worship any idols either. Your food and drink may not be the meat of horses and wolves, horse milk and blood, but they look, smell and taste different as ours. But we also admire your horses and weapons, your resources and your bravery and commitment when it comes to fighting for your truths, principles and justice. We all need to be aware of the differences in our history, past and present, language and culture, and we need to see each other, accept each other, relate to each other by respecting those differences.

We, Transylvanian Unitarians also experience dark times. Let me tell you just one story, a tragic and frightening story that speaks about times in our country. A few weeks ago two teenaged girls were kidnapped, raped and killed by a man in a small town in South Romania. The news were shocking and frightening in itself. At first, it seemed like just a crime of a mentally ill criminal, but the whole truth was even worse. Investigation, mostly done by the press proved that one of the girls called police several times hours before she was killed. Police knew the house where the girls were kept, but didn’t intervene. The criminal was member of an organization which kidnapped lots of girls, and sold them to be prostitutes in European countries. Highly-ranked officers of the police seem to be part of the

organization.

Times are dark when criminals are wearing uniforms of law and justice.

Times are dark when children are sold as slaves.

Times are dark when a survey shows that more than a half of the population of our country thinks that victims of rapes are in some way responsible for the crimes committed.

Times are dark when many think and loudly say that verbal and physical violence is useful in families, schools and many fields of life.

Real religion, authentic church is needed as it was always needed when times were dark. We need to wake hope in our people's souls. Convince them that even though times are dark, the world around us can and should be changed. We need to forget the whispering and realize that our place is on the housetops of prophetic proclamation. We need to believe that our world is not looking for perfect people; the world instead needs us: individuals and small communities which may be considered insignificant in numbers, but their courage, faith and hope which are rooted in their innocence and good intentions can really make a difference.

Sometimes we, American and Transylvanian Unitarians seem strangers to each other. There are times when temptation is strong to say we have very few or nothing in common, so maybe we should forget each other. Different languages, principles, goals, methods, environment.

If we want to find a way of continuing our common journey, we need the efforts Julian made. Friar Julian, Brother Julian. It involves travelling thousands of miles - physically and spiritually. It involves seeking. Believing. Sacrificing. Persevering. Paying attention. It involves the humility of accepting the possibility that meeting each other in a deep spiritual way could change both communities, both sides. It involves acknowledging the fact that as we grow to know each other more and more, we will never be able to judge each other, forget each other, turn our eyes away from each other anymore.

We can discover the common roots in the past and common goals in the future. We can discover that we can become blessings for each other. We can proclaim our truths together and we can sing our hymns together and our voice can be louder and our song can be wealthier and truth and justice will have better chances of glory. May this be the great blessing of our meeting, our partnership, our brotherhood and sisterhood. Amen.