

The background of the slide is a blurred image of the American flag, with the stars and stripes visible. A dark blue rectangular box is centered over the image, containing the title and date information.

# 5 RULES FOR RESISTANCE

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Yeah. There's a lot going on in the world right now. I think it's on a lot of our hearts. One of the things I was thinking about this week was a lecture by my religious history professor, Bruce Gordon. He wrote a book this thick on John Calvin. To give you an idea, he and I might not have seen eye to eye on our theology, but John Calvin was the person who began the Reformed Christian tradition during the Reformation in Switzerland during the 16th century. And in that book, Bruce Gordon details the relationship of Michael Servetus, a Spanish physician, an ardent Unitarian to John Calvin, the theocratic ruler of Geneva.

Servetus dogged Calvin, couldn't help himself. He dogged him with his work called *On the Errors of the Trinity*. Not a bestseller in Geneva. And Calvin finally had enough and convinced the town elders that if Servetus should step foot in Geneva, he should be executed for blasphemy. Then, he made good on the promise, because Servetus couldn't help himself, and that bulldog of a doctor was captured and burned alive in the town square of Geneva, Switzerland with a copy of *On the Errors of the Trinity* strapped to his thigh.

And because humans may die, but irony lives forever, those early settlers, the Massachusetts Bay Colony, a little more than a century later, our forebears in faith and in freedom were all resolutely Calvinist, and, and our faith, much as we know it today, grew from inspirations like those of Servetus among those Massachusetts Bay colonists to become Unitarian Universalism today. Even in their deaths, Calvin's and Servetus' legacies remain intertwined in our very lives in this space here throughout the world with everyone watching in their rooms, such as the mystery of faith.

In one of the final lectures Professor Gordon gave, he showed us an image of a monument. It was a photograph from his own hometown in Scotland where he grew up. On it was etched the names of men from his village. In fact, he explained, were etched all the names of all the men from his village who lived there at a particular time, and they had their names on that stone because all of the men in that village died in World War I. Whole villages.

It was a dreadful reminder at the end of this class about religious history of what awaits those whose fervor for a political ideal or for power wrought upon the destruction of others treads, treads into the fanatical, and no war was more destructive in this country's borders than the Civil War born of fanaticism for power over economic systems based on stolen labor.

This weekend, we remember those who are gone sooner than we wanted, than we would've ever dreamed. I never forget personally the toll that serving this nation in combat has taken on the lives of my veteran friends and loved ones who have lost the ones they love in combat. And so to all those who were carrying that burden and this grief, and living in these silent challenges that soldiers bear forever, I say I love you, and I always pray that my life might honor all that you defend and all that was offered on the Altars of Liberty all over the world, not just here, not just there.

Our siblings around the world, and I'm thinking of Gaza, I'm thinking of the Sudan, I'm thinking of Ukraine now, are losing their lives in the face of fanaticism. The evil that corrodes a society is on a pale horse guiding factions. It fits of righteousness, kinked with malice, calls those of free will and good conscience to take up the cause against that evil, to resist the evil of fanaticism.

No matter how much malice may spill from pens, and from lips, and from the ends of weapons, no matter what awful gesture shadows our lives, truth, justice, and love are the eternal things in life, and they will not perish from this earth no matter what come. Truth doesn't stop being truth because someone louder contradicts it. Justice doesn't stop being justice because we haven't seen it in its full bloom yet. Love does not stop being love because hate rings out around us.

When tyrants trample on the people of the earth as they have always done, behind every cause that beats them back, we're not the armaments alone, we're not solely strategy and keen planning. Behind each of them was the deep love we feel for those we give our lives to defend. This love is what tyrants fear most. Though it goes often by another nickname, which is resistance.

Resistance can look like a lot of things, but at its core, it requires stepping from our protection, our comfort, and risking something. Some loss in the service of something greater. If you are wondering how to resist, take courage, you've come to the right place. Though it's not an exhaustive list, we have five things to think about today, five rules for resistance.

First is creation. At the core of the oldest phase, the indigenous phase of this land, of many lands begins a history, a story of creation. The holiness in each life linked to the divine, the original blessing that is in each one of you. Each of us flows from an act of creation, of creative love that before there was something, there was nothing. It is the miracle at the heart of all miracles. Make something, friends. People who want to control you will hate it. Make something, beloveds. Create something and

dip in the waters that pushed forth all life. Artists, crafts people, authors, playwrights, singers, teachers, those who devote so much to bringing what is new into the world are always integral to any movement. They counter falsity, inhumanity, and tyranny. Creation is resistance, creation is courage, and you don't even have to be a pro at it.

The incomparably gifted visionary, historian, and musician, Rhiannon Giddens says this about creativity and art. Her words, "It doesn't matter what discipline you're in. If you are true to yourself, then that's a piece of art. When you're in a discipline that is strengthened by how you can look outside the box, you see other ways of doing things, and those connections are strengthened. Creation is strength. Creation is resistance. Creation takes courage."

Number two, health, friends. Tyrants leading a minority, and let's not make any mistake about it. An elite minority is what is exploiting weaknesses today because of their twisted ideas of what is strength. Tyrants will focus on a sensitivity of small groups of individuals, one small group at a time, because it's easier than taking on the majority, and we cannot say this enough, people. That small elite minority is acting in their self-interest to take power that is not theirs. We must never lose sight of this, that there is a majority against this.

The minority's exploitation includes always from the dawn of this country and before, includes the exploitation of the physical body and mental wellbeing. Every bit of energy devoted to your health now, walking a little farther, ideally, maybe in nature, maybe with other people, eating nutritious food, good nutritious food, and making rest and sleep non-negotiable is worth the energy. It is worth the work.

In his book on tyranny, scholar Timothy Snyder says this, "Power wants your body softening in your chair and your emotions dissipating on the screen. Get outside. Put your body in unfamiliar places with unfamiliar people. Make new friends and march with them."

Mm-hmm. Part of resistance work is knowing your limits, yes, and trusting what you know of them and deliberately, safely expanding those limits in ways that are effective for you. Your health is an act of resistance in the face of what we see.

Third, you got to take turns. Resistance only build strength when it is repeated in intervals with rest in between. That's just science, right? Anyone who's lifted weights knows this. On the playground, if there's a cool toy or a ride and only two kids can use it at a time, but 10 kids want to, what do the adults remind the kids?

That's right, and then the adults get on it and mess it all up, but anyway. It requires solidarity and sometimes to trade off. Taking turns means solidarity. You can't take turns if you're not in relationship with people. We cannot be on every line, guard every wall, or chase down every lie in the world. A bucket brigade always requires taking a rest, stepping out of line so someone else can come in. CPR requires handing over the compressions. When you are too tired to be effective anymore. You got to take breaks, friends, and come back rested.

Taking turns works best in relationship with others, when we're in solidarity with others, working alongside others who understand that liberation is not what we do for others, but what we do for ourselves. The saying among aboriginal activists in what is called by some Australia is always, "If you have come here to help me, then you are wasting your time. But if you have come here because you believe your liberation is wrapped up with my liberation, let us work together." Working together means taking breaks to have more energy to make liberation for all. Resistance is taking turns.

Number four, focus. We hear it a lot up in this, and we should. Mary Oliver asks us, "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one, wild, and precious life?" It's a personal question, I know, and it might be the one we need the most courage to answer. Resistance requires focus, focus.

The structures we navigate right now be economic, the family, the media, peer pressure, and more have told us things all our lives about who we are supposed to be, how we are supposed to act, and a lot of those messages sound like they're trying to keep us safe, but a lot of those messages only keep safe the status quo, only let the power elite sleep well at night, feeling like every cause must be yours to take up to fit in with a group, to seem like a good person, to be liked. Oh, let us not try to be liked. That is a trap. There is no shame in choosing your focus, friends, in knowing what is your work to do. We can have a heart for a world of things, yet time and energy only for one or two. You got to choose it sometimes.

What will you do with your one, wild, and precious life? What kind of trouble do you want to make? What kind of trouble do you want to make, friends?

Congregation:

Good trouble.

Right across the quad from Bruce Gordon's office is the institute Reverend William Barber III runs.

Same quad. Reverend Barber is the leader of Dr. King's Poor People Campaign, a founder of Moral Mondays, and the proclaimer of the call for a third reconstruction in this country. May it come soon. Reverend Barber was arrested for praying in the rotunda of the US Capitol. His prayer is to keep Medicare and Medicaid funded. His prayer is to keep food assistance funded to keep people alive and healthy, rained down with holy focus on those who serve this powerful majority... minority, excuse me.

And then the same Capitol police who were ravaged by the white supremacist mob that stormed the Capitol and then insulted by the white supremacist leader in the White House were forced to apprehend this elderly minister praying to God for mercy on their souls. And Barber made his focus clear. His words, "We came to the Capitol Rotunda to pray for representatives who currently support this immoral budget to see the danger of policy that kills and choose life. We came believing that God can take a heart of stone and give anyone a heart of flesh, and we came knowing that whatever their choice, we must non-violently embody our prayer."

As Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel said, "We must pray with our feet. We must trust that when we align ourselves with the truth at the heart of the universe, our action can unleash power beyond us,

setting others free to act and respond in their own way to the moral urgency of this moment." Focus sets us free. It is the engine of resistance.

And number five, what is the heart of resistance? It's hope. I know many are feeling that creeping hopelessness, or maybe it's more crushing at times than creeping, but hope is at the heart of resistance, guys. This week, a friend shared a letter. A veteran actually shared a letter that Nick Cave, the musician, poet, and visual artist, wrote to a dad who is scared, scared that his own hopelessness was going to somehow infect his child.

This is how Nick replied to this parent. "Much of my early life was spent holding the world and the people in it in contempt. It was a position both seductive and indulgent. The truth is I was young and had no idea what was coming down the line. It took me a devastation to teach me the preciousness of life and the essential goodness of people. It took a devastation to reveal the precariousness of the world, of its very soul, to understand that the world was crying out for help. It took a devastation to understand the idea of moral value, and it took a devastation to find hope."

Unlike cynicism, hopefulness is hard-earned, makes demands upon us, and can often feel like the most indefensible and lonely position on earth. Hopefulness is not a neutral position. It is adversarial. It is the warrior emotion that can lay waste to cynicism. Each redemptive or loving act as small as you like, such as reading to your little child, or showing them a thing you love, or singing them a song, or putting on their shoes, keeps the devil down in its hole. It says the world and its inhabitants have value and are worth defending. It says the world is worth believing in. In time, we come to find that this is so.

Five centuries ago in a town square under the thumb of a dictator, a resistor said, "This far, no further," and lost his life. We in this faith are children of that devastation, but all humans are children of some devastation in their own town squares. And like so many monuments that sit in town centers, they call to us those names of the cost of resistance, of the bargain we're all making, whether we want to admit it or not, between the duration of our lives and the quality that we want those lives to show the world.

This is our wild, our wild and precious life, friends. The soldiers in towns and hamlets here and in places around the world are speaking still, are speaking now to us all. May we commit together to make resistance the rule and courage the call, to honor the memory and the future of this faith today. May this faith that brought us this far confirm we have not come this far in vain. These rules are not exhaustive. They are humanizing against dehumanization. They are loving against hate. They are the alloy of strength and flexibility against the toxic brittleness of unyielding small-mindedness.

Creation, health, focus, solidarity, and hope are only some of the foundations laid in our own ground of being. May the monument we each make with our life in the days ahead speak forever to the generations to come so we may realize the beloved community on earth as if it were heaven. Happy Memorial Day to all of you. May God bless and keep us all. May it ever be so, and amen.

