

“Unshakeable: Inner Strength and the Gifts We Carry”  
Dianne M. Daniels; UUFS – February 8, 2026

**Prelude      Hymn #9 – No Longer Forward Nor Behind**

**Welcome      (as scripted)**

**Opening Words:**

We gather this morning carrying many things.

Some of them are visible—our coats, our calendars, the plans we made for later today.

Others are less visible, but no less real. We arrive with questions, with concerns, with quiet hopes we may not yet have words for. We come as people who are doing our best to live faithfully in a world that feels, at times, uncertain and unsteady.

Each of us has weathered storms of one kind or another. Some were loud and obvious. Others were private—known only to us. And still, here we are. Breathing. Listening. Showing up. That tells us something important about who we are.

In a culture that often celebrates only the loudest forms of strength, it can be easy to overlook the quieter ones—the strength it takes to begin again, to stay open, to keep caring when it would be easier to harden or withdraw.

It can be easy to forget that resilience is not about never being shaken, but about finding our footing again when we are.

This morning, we create space to reflect on what sustains us beneath the surface of our lives.

Not the strength we perform for others, but the strength that lives within us.

Not the gifts that bring recognition, but the gifts that connect us—to one another, to love, and to the larger web of life we are part of.

As we settle in, I invite you to arrive just as you are.

You do not need to be certain.  
You do not need to be untroubled.  
You do not need to have answers.

All that is asked of us in this moment is presence—an openness to listening, to remembering, and perhaps to recognizing something within ourselves that has been quietly holding us all along.

Let us enter this time together with curiosity, compassion, and trust in what may yet be revealed.

### **Chalice Lighting: The Strength that Lives Within by Rev. Dianne M. Daniels**

We light this chalice as a symbol of the strength that lives within us—not loud or showy, but steady and enduring.

We light it for the gifts we carry, some well-known, others still unfolding, each one shaped by experience, care, and love.

We light it in recognition that even when life feels uncertain, There is something within us that remains rooted—a capacity for courage, for compassion, for choosing how we meet what comes.

May this flame remind us that resilience does not require us to be untroubled, only present.

Not unshaken, only willing to return to ourselves again and again.

In this shared light, may we find grounding, connection, and the quiet confidence that we are not alone—and that what we bring, just as we are, is enough.

**\*Opening Hymn: #30 – Over My Head**

**Sharing of Joys and Concerns (see script)**

**Offering & Offertory #123 Spirit of Life**

## **Prayer & Meditation: Prayer for Hopelessness by Rev. Audette Fulbright Fulson**

On the days that come and carry away your spirit, your spark —  
Bow down.

Lay your head on the hard earth and let your brokenness join the  
death that is stirring there.

Life rebels against death, takes the very dust of our bones and  
reweaves it into glory.

You were made for Life, and Life does not intend to let you go.  
But rest, you can.

Decay and falling away from ourselves are part of that process.  
If you need to fall apart, then do — for Life will hold you in that, too  
Will teach you how to desiccate and blow away,  
And then will call you back from the four corners of the earth and  
renew you with the water of the tears of others who, like you, weep for all  
that is lost.

She will breathe back into you the breath that washes from the  
mouths of children laughing from the lion's roar, from the exhalation of  
trees.

You will be reborn into the arms of beloveds, and together, we will  
sing a new song.

## **Reading – A Survival Meditation by Nathan C. Walker**

The following meditation will begin and end with the sound of the mind-  
fulness bowl – strike it twice now.

breathing in, i am aware of my pain.  
breathing out, i am aware that i am not my pain.

breathing in, i am aware of my past.

breathing out, i am aware that i am not my past.

breathing in, i am aware of my anger.

breathing out, i am aware that i am not my anger.

breathing in, i am aware of my despair.

breathing out, i am aware that i am not my despair.

breathing in, i am aware of peace.

breathing out, i am aware that i am worthy of peace.

breathing in, i am aware of love.

breathing out, i am aware that i am worthy of love.

breathing in, i am aware of joy.

breathing out, i am aware that i am an agent of joy.

breathing in, i am aware of hope.

breathing out, i am aware that i am an agent of hope.

breathing in, i am aware.

Strike the mindfulness bowl twice at the end, wait for the sound to fade before beginning to speak again.

## **Sermon: “Unshakeable: Inner Strength and the Gifts We Carry” by Rev. Dianne M. Daniels**

### **What**

Life has a way of testing us—not always in sudden, dramatic moments, but in slow, persistent ways that wear us down over time.

Many of us arrived this morning carrying invisible weight.

The weight of uncertainty.

The weight of responsibility.

The weight of having made it through hard things before and wondering, quietly, whether we have the strength to do it again.

We don't always name these questions out loud, but they live in us nonetheless: Am I strong enough for what lies ahead?

Do I still have something meaningful to offer?

Can I stay grounded when everything feels unstable?

Our culture offers a very narrow definition of strength.

Strength, we are told, looks like endurance without complaint.

Productivity without pause.

Confidence without doubt.

Strength is framed as pushing through, holding it together, and never letting the cracks show.

But that is not the kind of strength most of us need.

Unitarian Universalism invites us into a broader, more humane understanding—one rooted in inherent worth and dignity, in Love, rather than performance.

From this perspective, inner strength is not the absence of fear or fatigue. It is the capacity to remain present to ourselves in the face of fear and fatigue. It is what allows us to meet life honestly, without abandoning ourselves in the process.

One of the insights that I used to guide this reflection encourages us to look backward before we try to move forward.

When we reflect on the difficult moments we have already survived—times when we felt afraid, overwhelmed, or unsure—we often discover that we were stronger than we realized at the time.

When we ask ourselves, sometimes incredulously:

- “How did I get through that?”
- “What did I tell myself?”
- “Who or what supported me?”

We begin to see evidence of resilience that has been with us all along

### **Discovering Inner Strength.**

Inner strength is not theoretical. It is lived. It is shaped by experience. And it often becomes visible only in hindsight.

Paying attention to how we speak to ourselves amid challenge. Many of us would **never** speak to a friend the way we speak to ourselves when things go wrong.

Yet inner strength grows when we learn to offer ourselves encouragement rather than criticism—when we practice talking to ourselves with respect, care, and honesty, as we would to someone we love.

This kind of self-relationship matters, because when storms arise—and they will—we always carry ourselves with us.

Which brings us to the idea of being unshakeable. To be unshakeable **does not** mean that nothing ever shakes us. It means that even when the winds are strong—when thunder and rain surround us—we remain rooted, secure, and we continue to **stand** – in our strength, in our values, in our certainty of what we believe and what we choose to live by.

Consider this imagery: standing with arms outstretched, grounded to the earth, **meeting** the storm rather than fleeing from it. This is not denial; it is presence. Not rigidity, but rootedness.

And from that rooted place, something else emerges: our spiritual gifts.

In Unitarian Universalist language, we might understand spiritual gifts not as supernatural endowments tied to belief, but as innate capacities—***ways of being and contributing that flow naturally from who we are and connect us to something larger than ourselves.***

These gifts are not about status or hierarchy. They are about service, relationship, generosity, and love in action.

Some people are gifted with encouragement—the ability to speak words that steady and support others.

Some with wisdom—the capacity to see patterns and offer perspectives to those who do not yet see them.

Some with compassion—the instinct to respond to suffering with care, grace, and empathy.

Some with leadership, organization, creativity, hospitality, or quiet, consistent help that empower those who hear their words.

These gifts show up not because we strive for them, but because they are already woven into us. Every one of us carries such gifts. The question is not whether we have them, but whether we recognize them—and whether we trust them enough to let them evolve as our lives change.

If inner strength and spiritual gifts are already present within us, why do so many people feel depleted, uncertain, or disconnected from them?

One reason is that many of us are living from ***outdated stories*** about who we are. We learned how to be strong in earlier seasons of life. We developed coping strategies that helped us survive—by working harder, staying quieter, fixing problems quickly, or taking care of everyone else first. And those strategies may have been wise and necessary ***then.***

But strength that no longer adapts eventually becomes strain. When life changes—as it inevitably does—the same approach may no longer serve us.

And when our old methods stop working, we often internalize that as personal failure, rather than recognizing it as an invitation to grow differently.

There's something crucial here: resourcefulness is not just about endurance; it is about problem-solving, reflection, and adaptability. When we allow ourselves time to think through challenges—acknowledging confusion, considering multiple approaches, and naming what support we might need—we reclaim a sense of agency. That sense of agency is itself a form of strength.

Being unshakeable, then, does not mean holding fast to one way of being. It means knowing where your center is, even as your strategies shift.

This is where spiritual gifts become especially important. Our gifts are not static traits. They are living expressions that change with our circumstances.

Someone whose gift once expressed itself through visible leadership may now offer quiet wisdom. Someone whose gift was once productivity may now be presence. Someone who once served through action may now serve through listening.

The spiritual gifts exist for the common good—not for personal glory. When we try to force our gifts to look the same in every season, we often burn out, disrespecting our gifts even as we stifle their growth and potential. When we allow them to mature, they remain life-giving.

Another reason we lose touch with our strength is that we expect certainty **before** we act.

We want assurance that our efforts will matter, that our gifts will be received, that the risks we take will lead to visible outcomes. But life rarely offers that kind of clarity in advance.

Inner strength often shows up as the willingness to take the next step without guarantees, without seeing the whole staircase—to act in alignment with our values even when the path ahead remains unclear.

An affirmation I read while crafting this sermon says, “I understand I have the power to react to challenges in a way that benefits me,” which captures this beautifully.

It does not deny hardship. It asserts agency. It reminds us that while we cannot always control what happens to us, we can choose how we meet it—and that choice shapes who we become.

Unitarian Universalism does not promise us certainty. What it offers instead is a grounding in shared values—love, justice, interdependence—that help us orient ourselves when the way forward feels uncertain.

To be unshakeable, then, is not to dominate the storm. It is to remain connected to yourself within it.

So how do we live this wisdom in everyday life?

**First**, we redefine strength.

Strength **includes** rest.

It **includes** asking for help.

It **includes** setting boundaries.

It **includes** letting go of roles that no longer fit.

Strength is not proven by suffering in silence; it is revealed through self-respect and discernment.

You might begin with a simple practice: reflect on past challenges you are proud to have survived. Not because you were fearless, but because you were resourceful.

Let those memories remind you that resilience is already part of who you are.

**Second**, we gently name our spiritual gifts as they show up now. Instead of asking, “What should I be doing?” try asking, “Where do I feel most alive?”

Instead of “What am I good at?” ask, “What feels meaningful even when no one is watching?”

Gifts often reveal themselves through resonance rather than recognition.

You might notice that your gift is encouragement, wisdom, mercy, service, or steady faith in difficult times—not as belief certainty, but as trust in possibility. These capacities are not small. They are how love moves through the world.

**Third**, we embrace different approaches without shame.

If pushing harder no longer works, perhaps strength is asking for softness.

If staying quiet costs you your integrity, perhaps strength is asking you to speak.

Being unshakeable means being flexible enough to change without believing that change is a sign of failure.

**Fourth**, we cultivate practices that return us to our center. Journaling, reflection, time in nature, prayerful silence, honest conversation—these are not luxuries.

They are how we remember who we are.

They help us stand firm without becoming hardened.

And **finally**, we root all of this in Love.

Not love as sentimentality, but love as **commitment**—to us, to one another, and to the wider web of life. The unshakeable presence that holds both strength and compassion together: rooted, resilient, and still open-hearted.

May we trust the strength already within us.  
May we honor the gifts we carry, especially the quiet ones.  
And may love remain the ground beneath our feet, no matter what storms arise.

**Closing Hymn: #146 – Soon the Day Will Arrive**

**Closing Words: Be On the Lookout by Rev. Scott Tayler**

Trust, friends, that the seeds of new beginnings are always taking root, even when the ground is cracked and dry.

Know there is always a way forward, even if it's not the one you wished it would be.

The lights never stay off, friends.  
Life is too wild for that, for there is something unruly and loving at the heart of it, that is always sneaking in from the side, wanting us to take its hand and dance!

So be on the lookout, beloveds, as we go on our way.

Please pay attention to our announcements, and when this service is over, I ask you...Go forth and share YOUR unique personal gifts and perspective with the world. Share what you've found here in this sacred place with just **one** other person.

Thank you for your time and attention.