

Homily – Live Oak UU Fellowship
Nanci Armstrong-Temple
May 19, 2013

"Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind." (Albert Einstein)

There are seven principles which Unitarian Universalist congregations affirm and promote, as Cecilia showed us so artfully earlier:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Even closer to our religious core are our six sources.

The first source is that

- Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;

The question here is “what is direct experience?” And what is that mystery and wonder? Some experience it as nature. Some experience it through yoga or meditation, or a child’s laughter. I have experienced it in all of these ways, both large and small. I feel it every time I wake in the morning and take the time to listen to the birds singing all around my house. That sound of joy and new possibility for the day awakens something in my soul that I cannot really name or define, but that transcends time and explanation. As a UU I am compelled to have a direct relationship, however flawed, and to find transcendence that is my own, and not that which is compelled by another, be they a minister or friend, teacher or parent, child or beloved. I am compelled to seek my own transcendent experiences.

The second source is that of

- Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;

The transforming power of love is what we, literally, are about. When we say 'love will guide us' we are not speaking metaphorically. This is our religious calling.

This means that we see Jesus as someone who resisted the forces of evil in his time. It means that we look to Oppenheimer and his warnings about science isolated from humanity; we look to poets and philosophers, scientists, and activists throughout history, who have done brave work and articulated the human experience in ways that make life more worthy. We look to these women and men for inspiration, and for courage to bring justice, compassion and the transforming power of love into our own place and time. Love will guide us.

The third source,

- Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;

Means that we look to any faith, from Ba'Hai to Catholicism, from Buddhism to Islam, and see where they have sought and found answers to the world's great truths. We study these religions through their documents and histories, by attending religious services in other faiths, and by speaking and listening to their adherents with an open mind if we can.

Fourth, and most contentious for some, is that we look to our roots,

- Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;

At the UU church in Studio City is a Golden Rule garden, put in by the youth group and volunteers. It is a beautiful homage to our Judeo-Christian roots, and an acknowledgement that even the most poison fruit leaves us with new knowledge.

Our fifth source is the

- Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;

This one I will talk about a bit more; perhaps it is most important to me today. But for now I will just say that the creator of The Humanist magazine was the Unitarian Minister Edwin Henry Wilson. He also wrote the song in our hymnal entitled "Where is our Holy Church". While almost unsingable as a hymn, it is one of the most accurate poems ever written to describe Unitarian Universalism. It says:

Where is our holy church? Where race and class unite as
equal persons in the search for beauty, truth and right.

Where is our holy writ? where'er a human heart a
sacred torch of truth has lit, by inspiration taught

Where is our holy One? A mighty host respond, the
people rise in every land to break the captive's bond.

Where is our holy land? Within the human soul,
wherever free minds truly seek, with character the goal.

Where is our paradise? In aspiration's sight,
wherein we hope to see arise ten thousand years of right.

This sixth source is that we look to the

- Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

This is the source that brings to our congregations practitioners of earth and goddess based religions, and probably why so many UU churches have hiking, gardening and nature groups and why UUs have more Priuses per capita than any other religious group. O.k. I made that last part up, but it is true that this source is the basis for the seventh principle, that of respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Those are our six sources.

Recently I attended a service at our sister fellowship, The Berkeley Fellowship of UUs. Although I didn't realize it before I got there, it was their pledge drive and they had hired a very nice minister, a lifelong UU, to give their pitch. Although she was very likable, I left BFUU that day feeling angry and unsettled. And here's why. When she asked the fellowship to dig deep in their pockets to support the work of their church, she said that sometimes we need to just stop thinking and take a leap of faith. Now, although this may be true in some times and in some places, and especially true for some of our friends in other religions, that is not the essence of Unitarian Universalism. It is, in fact, a creeping of essentialism and divine right of power that I have seen coming into our ministry of late. The idea that we should shut up our brains and give more than we think we can is the antithesis of Unitarian Universalism.

In fact we are compelled to do just the opposite. We are compelled to think deeply and clearly, using our own experiences as well as the wisdom of the religions and sciences, and make decisions that support the direct and loving action to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love. At Live Oak we have done that in a myriad of ways, through our support in time and money to APC, by donating 100% of our collections to causes we believe in, by supporting one another in tragedies and difficulties, as well as celebrating our triumphs in beloved community; by taking the time with each other after every service to take a meal together, though we all need to prepare for the busy week ahead. At Berkeley Fellowship they have a long tradition of being guided by the principles of love and justice; in fact they just came out with a book based on an Oral History project that

shows the depth of commitment that they have had since their inception to changing the world for the better and maintaining a space for reason and democracy in faith. And I felt that asking them to shut off their brains and open their wallets was an insult to that history. In fact, UUs have shown our generosity in deep and meaningful ways, despite our fears and financial worries, precisely because of our thoughtful concern for the world we live in and our collective belief that our resources are to be used to care for each other and our world.

Today I am wearing my grandmother's chalice. This chalice is unique; the design is the first chalice used by Unitarians, before the joining of Unitarians and Universalists in the 1961 formation of the UUA. Created by Hans Deutsch at the behest of the Reverend Charles Joy as a symbol to stamp of papers meant to help secure passage of refugees in Europe at the height of Nazi power, this symbol saved lives, and in time became known as the symbol of Unitarian Universalism all over the world. My mother gave me this chalice for Christmas this past year. It is a reminder of my own legacy of Unitarian Universalism, continued in my own life through the work of my parents on prisoner and community justice.

I will end today with a joke about UUs. Many of you know it: The scene is what appears to be a road before the gates of heaven. In this road is a fork. To one side there is a sign that says 'Heaven'. To the other side there is a sign that says 'a discussion about Heaven'. The UUs, says the joke, always pick the sign towards the discussion. But there should be another sign. The sign is one that we could borrow from Buddhism, similar to that of the Bodhisattva. Our path is that we would choose to remain and fight for justice for all human beings, rather than only salvation for ourselves. We do this because we are compelled by our religious calling, and because we hear that whisper of a still small voice when we take the time to answer to it. It says these words. Please join me as you are able and willing:

Love will guide us, peace has tried us, hope inside us, will lead the way on the road from greed to giving
love will guide us, through the hard night. If you cannot sing like angels if you cannot speak before thousands, you can give from deep within you. You can change the world with your love.
Love will guide us, peace has tried us, hope inside us, will lead the way. On the road from, greed to giving, love will guide us, through the hard night.

We UUs believe that the power of love is formidable. We use it as our shield, and our guide. We use it to change our own lives, and to make the world a more just and compassionate place.