

Thoreau Woods UU Church – Worship Service *Where's the Love!* February 6, 2011

Prelude

Chalice Lighting

We light this candle

For the light of truth and reason

For the warmth of love and friendship

For the flame of strength and action

And for the vision of tolerance and justice.

Opening Hymn

Please join me standing as you are able in our opening hymn No. 1023 “Building Bridges”

Announcements

John Pepper

Visitors, Welcome! We are happy to have you here. (Pause)

If you would like, please sign our guest book on the table in the entryway and give your address or email if you want to receive our newsletter. If you would like to become a member, please pick up one of our application forms also located on the table and put it in the offering plate or look it over and turn it in when you feel ready.

Next week our guest speaker will be Tony DiNuzzo and the title of his talk will be, “Is There Enough Love in This World?”

This month we are giving our special collection to the SAAFE House, which provides a safe place and support for those who have experienced sexual assaults or domestic violence. Please make your checks directly out to SAAFE House, and that's S.A.A.F.E House.

After services today we will be go to Imperial Garden for lunch. It is just next to El Chico's on the I-45 feeder road. Please join us if you can.

Are there any other announcements from the floor?

Opening Words

John Pepper

These are the days that have been given to us; let us rejoice and be glad in them.

These are the days of our lives; let us live them well in love and service.

These are the days of mystery and wonder; let us cherish and celebrate them in gratitude together.

These are the days that have been given to us; let us make of them stories worth telling to those who come after us.

Rejoice Together, p4, William R. Murry

Hymn

John Pepper

Please join me standing as you are able singing hymn No. 128 “For All that is Our Life.”

Joys and Concerns

John Pepper

As an expression of our connectedness and community, you are invited to come forward and share a joy, sorrow or concern as you light a candle. Or you may choose to light a candle without comment. Visitors, you are also encouraged to participate.

Please form a line to my left.

(Pause)

I will light one final candle for all those joys and concerns left unsaid.

Offertory Statement

Offertory Music

Story for All Ages – *The Three Questions* by Jon Muth

Readings

My first reading this morning is from the book titled *Oneness: Great Principles Shared by All Religions* and the principle I have selected is titled “A Man is Known by his Deeds, Not by his Religion.”

From Sikhism: God will not ask a man of what race he is. He will ask what he has done.

From Christianity: God will render to every man according to his deeds.

From Islam: A man asked Muhammad how to tell when one is truly faithful, and he replied: “If you derive pleasure from the good which you do and are grieved by the evil which you commit, then you are a true believer.”

From Judaism: But I say unto you: deeds of love are worth as much as all the commandments of the law.

And finally, from Buddhism: No Brahmin is a Brahmin by birth. No outcaste is an outcaste by birth. An outcaste is an outcaste by his deeds. A Brahmin is a Brahmin by his deeds.

(Pause)

My second reading this morning is from *A Policy of Kindness* by The Dalai Lama.

It is very important to recognize the basic nature of humanity and the value of human qualities. Whether one is educated or uneducated, rich or poor, or belongs to this nation or that nation, this religion or that religion, this ideology or that ideology, is secondary and doesn't matter. When we return to this basis, all people are the same. Then we can truly say the words *brother, sister*; then they are not just nice words – they have some meaning. That kind of motivation automatically builds the practice of kindness. This gives us inner strength.

What is my purpose in life, what is my responsibility? Whether I like it or not, I am on this planet, and it is far better to do something for humanity. So you see that compassion is the seed or

basis. If we take care to foster compassion, we will see that it brings the other good human qualities. The topic of compassion is not at all religious business; it is very important to know that it is human business, that it is a question of human survival, that is not a question of human luxury. I might say that religion is a kind of luxury. If you have religion, that is good. But it is clear that even without religion we can manage.

However, without these basic human qualities we cannot survive. It is a question of our own peace and mental stability.

Prayer

John Pepper

Please join me now in a time of quiet meditation. Close your eyes, look out the window, center yourself in whatever way feels right for you. Let us reflect for a few moments in silence.

(Pause)

As Unitarian Universalists we believe that each individual is free to determine what is finally good and right and true, and that freedom carries with it the responsibility for each of us honestly and vigorously to seek out life's deeper meanings. So let us remind ourselves that our quest is neither trivial nor inconsequential, but of primary concern, if we are to live well and fully.

Therefore, let us reflect on the ways in which each of us feels called upon to change and grow. And let us resolve that in the days and weeks to come we may live closer to that ideal.

Let us reflect for a few moments in silence upon the possibilities for our lives.

(Pause) Amen!

Rejoice Together, 63, Douglas Gallager

Sermon – *Where's the Love!*

A dear friend of mine knew the marriage was over when for Christmas her husband gave her cash and said, "Get something you like." It appeared she was no longer worth any effort whatsoever on his part. Yes, there were many other signs the marriage was over, this was just the one that broke through and reminded her that in good relationships individuals actually demonstrate their love for each other from time to time, especially on big occasions like Christmas.

One's mere presence or one's cash aren't always enough. Over the years enterprising marketing professionals have created a huge billion dollar business out of helping us remember. We should show our appreciation for our loved ones all year round, but in case you don't, these marketing professionals latched on to Valentine's Day in order to remind you to show that special person how much you love him or her.

This year, you won't be able to say, "I forgot" because I just reminded you. Valentine's Day is just a clever reminder for those of us who need reminding, and not all of us do, that in good relationship, individuals actually demonstrate their love for each other in tangible ways.

Maybe chocolate and flowers aren't your particular way, but they are one way. If that doesn't work for your relationship, you know your loved one, so do something that is meaningful for you.

But this same principle is true for other relationships as well. We should show our love for others and not just our significant other. Over the last year I've been given the honor to speak at the memorial services for several special individuals. In each of the cases, the individuals were

loving, giving, and caring people. Over and over again they physically gave of themselves, their time, and their efforts, both to the ones they loved and to the causes that they championed.

Back in the 60s, one watched a child get hurt on the church playground and from that experience she researched playgrounds and playground materials and submitted to the Board a detailed plan to build a safer playground. The plan was soon acted upon and the church built a new kid-friendly playground on church property.

Yes, she also financially contributed to the project, but she saw a need and she personally made the project a reality by researching and designing the playground.

Another loving individual helped start a Montessori school, also in the 60s, which is still active today and early on she even cleaned toilets at the school to help the school make ends meet. She clearly wasn't afraid to do the dirty work.

Still another treasured person urged his church to take a stand in the 60s and 70s on the desegregation issues and together they stood up against the all too visible oppression common back then.

And finally a beautiful young man used his own computer skills to repair computers making them available for inner city and disadvantaged children who didn't normally have access to computers. This of course has opened up the world to these children through their ability to get to the internet.

These and many other stories about these remarkable and loving people show that in good and loving relationships, individuals often physically demonstrate their love for each other, and for others in the world through their concrete actions.

Reflecting back on these remarkable lives helps us see how their small or large individual efforts helped make a difference, a difference to individuals, to the church, to the community, and even to the world.

When we tangibly demonstrate our love through our actions and our efforts, we can grow the relationships that matter most to us and we can build a legacy that will last long after we are gone – a legacy of love.

In 20, 30, or even 50 years, when the people of this church look back, what legacy will they see? Which of your values will have come to life in small or in grand ways? What are your current hopes and dreams for the future which will be their past and how will you make those hopes and dreams come true?

Before I expand on these questions a little more, I'm going to change gears just a bit. All too often, people come to our UU churches out of anger, anger with other religions, and anger with society for a variety of reasons. Part of our mission must be to nurse those angry people back to health because anger isn't healthy. And of equal importance, anger is seldom an effective tool to manage change or promote healthy growth.

Marianne Williamson in her book *The Healing of America* says, "As Gandhi was influenced by Thoreau (one of our early Unitarians), Martin Luther King, Jr., would then be influenced by Gandhi.

Dr. King found great inspiration in the Mahatma, enthusiastically studying and applying the principles of nonviolence to the crusade for civil rights in America. He believed, as did Gandhi,

that only the universal awakening of conscience could cast out institutionalized systems of injustice.

Dr. King traveled to India, and said about Gandhi, “He was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful effective social force on a large scale.” Gandhi argued the notion – and both men displayed it – that “soul force is more powerful than brute force.” Dr. King and Gandhi believed in a God who concerns Himself with the problems of the world, and they believed His power is a spirit we can personally access. The Quakers sought to experience this power, the Transcendentalists sought to exalt it, and Gandhi and King both sought to use it to heal a broken world.”¹[1]

Williamson goes on to say, “To be effective, moral outrage must express itself in a nonoutrageous way. ... With anger we gain the power to agitate, but with love we gain the power to persuade. Anger can make us active, but love makes us insightful.

With anger, we can move armies, but with love we can move hearts. With anger we can fight war, but with love we can obliterate war. With anger, we might end the world, but with love we can recreate it.

We must be morally aroused by divine love and commit ourselves fully and without reservation to the struggle for universal social justice. That is our imperative as American citizens and as children of God. We must point out the darkness, and in some cases explain it, but our major task it to exalt the light in everyone. Particularly in those with whom we disagree.”²[2]

If anger isn't the answer and love is, how do we as a people of a faith community express our love? One way is through our actions and they will speak louder than our words, but what will our actions be? Our love and our actions must in some ways be guided by our values, but what are our values?



In Houston we went through a Covenant workshop and came up with the following as our core values and if we were to go through the same process here, I'm fairly certain these would be in your overall list as well. They are Community, Acceptance, Caring, Knowledge, and the Democratic Process.

Saying you value Community is one thing, but what exactly does that mean? Is it the community of our members and guests or is it the broader community outside the doors of this church?

Internally our community includes our children, but how do we support and nurture our children? Nationwide the way UU churches often interact with their children sometimes poses some concerns. Cindy Spring a UU Religious Education consultant in New Hampshire says,

“The children and youth are our future. Our churches were full in the 1950s and 1960s, but only 8 percent of us were brought up Unitarian Universalist. What happened to all of those youngsters from the fifties and sixties? ... We need our children and youth with us in our church lives to remind us that we are all learning and growing. And they need us. The bright wondering three year old, the careful, considering nine year old, the idealistic sixteen year old – they all should be part of who we are as a religious people. We need to hear their questions and to search with them for the answers. We need to see ourselves through their eyes.

At a recent General Assembly I was in a small group with a number of adults and three teens.

Near the end, one of the adults who had been particularly hard on the youth said, “I want to thank you for helping me see how jaded I have become.””³[3]

The fact remains, we as a denomination can't seem to hold on to our youth after they grow into adults. Knowing this, what can we do here today, to influence positively their desire to remain UUs in their future? How can we demonstrate that they are a crucial part of our community and our future? Will we ask them and will we listen to their answers?

If by community you mean the broader community, in what ways are we known to the broader community? Which of our principles are reflected out into the community? Since we can't be all things to all people, which of our defined principles will we consciously focus on so that the broader community will be inclined to point to us as a reflection of that principle?



The answers to these questions and to the challenges they imply if you choose to take them on are up to you.

(Pause)

Another value we often claim as our own is acceptance, acceptance of one another, acceptance of others different from us.

Yes we know we accept women in all positions of power and authority, and we know we accept and promote the concept of gay marriages, and of course we accept people from different ethnic and religious heritages, but do we accept and affirm introverts when we are extroverts and vice versa? Do we accept and trust others when they take on volunteer jobs within the church and support them in those jobs in positive ways? Do we acknowledge vast lifetime experiences others bring to our religious community and how those experiences might benefit us here in this religious setting?

Accepting others is much more complex than we often admit or even imagine. When we, or others, look back down the road, what will we have done in our community or in our church to demonstrate that we diligently accept one another and the inherent worth and dignity of each person?

The answers to these questions and to the challenges they imply if you choose to take them on are up to you.

(Pause)

Another value we religiously promote, is knowledge, knowledge about human rights abuses, climate change, ethical eating, and every other imaginable issue.

And sometimes this quest for more and better information and its well deserved dissemination to both us and the world from our sanctuaries makes us look from the outside more like a lecture hall on campus rather than a church or a religious community. Well why can't we do both? What do we need to do to ensure that our programs, regardless of their content, maintain the flavor and character of the sacred?

If we truly believe in the interdependent web of which we are all a part, as one of our core principles, then how will we share new or even neglected knowledge which obviously affects that web in sacred ways?

The answers to these questions and to the challenges they imply if you choose to take them on are up to you.

(Pause)

The final value I'll delve into today is our belief that we are a caring community. How do we demonstrate that we are in fact a caring community?

Do we take care of one another in times of crisis? Do we help out when someone within our community is sick or dying?

Do we have structures in place and people to back up those structures to ensure that the caring acts we believe to be necessary are actually carried out?

Do we connect with prospective or new members and do we keep up with older housebound or facility bound members who can no longer get here on their own?

Was the conclusion of my children's story this morning correct? Is there only one important time and that time is now? Is the most important person the one you are with? And is the most important thing to do, the good you can do for the one who is standing at your side? Is that what a caring and loving individual and religious community looks like?

And when we look back in the years to come, will we see a caring community that took care of its own members?

The answers to these questions and to the challenges they imply if you choose to take them on are simply up to you.

Once again however, talk is cheap and actions do speak louder than mere words.

Your answers to the questions of what community means to you, of what accepting actually means in a broader context, of how knowledge can be made sacred in a religious community, and exactly what a caring community looks and feels like for its members and its friends, the answers to these questions are far less important than the tangible actual evidence of our actions in response to these questions.

Over time our actions positively demonstrate our real and honest belief in our answers. And more importantly our actions demonstrate our love for one another and for the world.

Where's the Love?

It's in our hearts and it expresses itself with our own individual acts of Love.

Happy Valentine's Day and Namaste!

Sermon Response

Closing Hymn

Please join me standing as you are able singing our final Hymn, No. 95 "There is More Love Somewhere" and remain standing for our Benediction.

Benediction

John Pepper

Mother Teresa said the following:

Prayer in action is Love. Love in action is service.

Amen, Namaste, and Go in Peace!

Extinguish the Chalice

Postlude
