

Sermon – Love is a Choice/ AKA Choosing Love/ Love at the Center
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Delivered February 18, 2024

READING -

“We assert that our deepest common theological grounding and value is this: Love.”

This reading is from a study commission reviewing the 7 principles of our faith tradition that Unitarian and Unitarian Universalist congregations across North America covenant together to affirm and promote.

“Love “ the commission reflects “We find it peeking through the words of the currently existing (7) Principles. We see it in our insistence on the worth and dignity of every person. We see it in the call for demanding and embodying justice, equity, and compassion in human relations. We hear it in our urging of acceptance of one another and our support for each person's spiritual growth. We discern an accountable love in our call for a responsible search for truth and meaning. Our affirmation of the right of conscience, and the right of every individual to participate in shaping those institutions that govern them, displays a deep respect and love for every person. We hold up the goal of a peaceful, free, and just world community as an expression of what love can and should bring into being. And we believe that our call to respect the interdependent web that we are a part of is an articulation of love for all that is and our own place and role in that web.

We see love called out as what demands that we be active in our justice work and justice-making. We note that our hymnals contain many assertions of what we aspire to, and what love can do, and be;

"Let us build a home where love can dwell," "Love will guide us," and "we are answering the call of love" among them.

*We respond to the call of love because it **is** our common theological core. It is what can and does motivate us and illuminates our deepest commitments to each other."*

So ends the reading.

<https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/article-ii-study-commission/blog/love-common-theological-core>

SERMON

Unitarian Universalism? What is that? ‘What does it mean to be a Unitarian Universalist?’? What do you believe in? Is it a church? Raise your hand if you’ve ever either asked or been asked these questions. I used to carry around a little red folded wallet card with the 7 Principles on it for whenever I had an awkward conversation about what Unitarian Universalism is. – this was before I went to Seminary! Anyone remember these cards? Now, I am sure we all have honed the perfect 1-minute “elevator speech” response, but, please indulge me a bit of an expanded version this morning.

Skipping over 5 centuries of history we will begin in 1961, when Unitarians and Universalists across North America merged to become the Unitarian Universalist Association, a collection of independent congregations, largely bound by covenant. It took a few years to hammer out the agreement, but after a lot of debate and wordsmithing and 57 amendments to language, the delegates adopted a brief statement of faith intended to hold these two historic groups together.

Because both groups were non-creedal, they were concerned about putting anything in such a document that might, over time, ossify.

They were afraid that in outlining a theology even in the barest of terms, people might grow too attached, ultimately not allowing the language or the theology to evolve over time. So, the founders built in an automatic deliberation of that statement every 15 years, forcing people to at least consider changing the language periodically placing it in the Association Bylaws under the innocuous title of Article II. Article II is a section of the UUA's by-laws that contains language about the purpose of the UUA; an articulation of principles, values, and commitments we share; a description of the spiritual sources of our faith; a statement of inclusion; and a freedom of conscience clause. A very important clause with a decidedly unsexy name, Article II became known as our 7 Principles.

Liberal theology holds that religion should be oriented toward the present context, taking fully into account modern knowledge and experience. As a result, Unitarian Universalists tend to embrace societal developments and incorporate them into our religious worldviews, such as gender equality, LGBTQ rights, approaches to environmental justice and addressing systems of oppression and racism.

Our commitment to religious freedom, our openness to new ideas, our insistence that religion should live in the present and not in the past, our ever-widening circle of cultural and theological pluralism—all of these, the very theology that makes us liberal, mean that our collective religious identity will inevitably be difficult to pin down at any particular moment in our history.

So we often point to our 7 Principles, as printed on that wallet card, they are a succinct statement that we can mostly agree to. But they are not perfect, and never were meant to be permanent.

About 20 years after the merger, in 1985 UU feminists persuaded the General Assembly to adopt new Gender-inclusive language for the Principles, resulting in wording changes which not only reflected the full

humanity of women, but also added the important seventh Principle about the Interdependent web plus a list of Six Sources to draw from. That was the only major change in the last 39 years to the Principles and Sources statement.

In 2020, a Commission was convened and charged to review,

“and propose any revisions that will enable our UUA, our member congregations, and our covenanted communities to be a relevant and powerful force for spiritual and moral growth, healing, and justice. Proposed changes should articulate core UU theological values.”...” They should be honest about our past, name what we are facing and our aspirations and where we hope to be not for just today but looking out at the horizons. They should ask us to choose Love in Action as the path forward. Our commitment to anti-racism, anti-oppression, and multiculturalism is love in action, and should be centered in any revision of Article II. Finally, the Principles and Purposes should lead us into the second quarter of the 21st Century, while honoring the historic roots of our liberal, progressive faith.”

After countless hours of faithful work, conversations, reports, curricula, emails, panels and rabbit holes, the draft proposal by the commission was presented to delegates at last year’s General Assembly for consideration and received strong support for a further year of review and further amendments. Now, the final draft, which is still open for amendments, will be voted on by congregational delegates for adoption this June. This is why it is important for us to talk about, or at least be aware of this now, because Unity will be sending delegates to vote on this historic proposed revision.

This new proposed statement incorporates and updates the original 7 Principles 6 Sources while including new words for how we actually live

into and embody them. It articulates our common values and our commitment to them.

While I want to read the whole thing to you, being a closet governance wonk, I encourage you to do some reading on the UUA website and attend the Wellspring Wednesday session that Rev. Kathleen will do on March 6.

I do want to read for you the statements of Shared Unitarian Universalist values that correspond with the graphic on the front of your order of service. Think of it as a Lectio Divina exercise. See how they resonate for you.

Values and Covenant

As Unitarian Universalists, we covenant, congregation-to-congregation and through our Association, to support and assist one another in our ministries. We draw from our heritages of freedom, reason, hope, and courage, building on the foundation of love.

Love is the power that holds us together and is at the center of our shared values. We are accountable to one another for doing the work of living our shared values through the spiritual discipline of Love.

Inseparable from one another, these shared values are:

Interdependence

We honor the interdependent web of all existence. With reverence for the great web of life and with humility, we acknowledge our place in it.

We covenant to protect Earth and all beings from exploitation. We will create and nurture sustainable relationships of care and respect, mutuality and justice. We will work to repair harm and damaged relationships.

Pluralism

We celebrate that we are all sacred beings, diverse in culture, experience, and theology.

We covenant to learn from one another in our free and responsible search for truth and meaning. We embrace our differences and commonalities with Love, curiosity, and respect.

Justice

We work to be diverse multicultural Beloved Communities where all thrive.

We covenant to dismantle racism and all forms of systemic oppression. We support the use of inclusive democratic processes to make decisions within our congregations, our Association, and society at large.

Transformation

We adapt to the changing world.

We covenant to collectively transform and grow spiritually and ethically. Openness to change is fundamental to our Unitarian and Universalist heritages, never complete and never perfect.

Generosity

We cultivate a spirit of gratitude and hope.

We covenant to freely and compassionately share our faith, presence, and resources. Our generosity connects us to one another in relationships of interdependence and mutuality.

Equity

We declare that every person has the right to flourish with inherent dignity and worthiness.

We covenant to use our time, wisdom, attention, and money to build and sustain fully accessible and inclusive communities.

These Values statements are followed with sections on Inspirations that describe the sources of our faith: sacred, secular and scientific understandings that help us make meaning in our lives.

And a section on Inclusion, identifying the systems in inequality and pledging to be truly welcoming and empowering of all.

And a section of Freedom of Belief, upholding congregational and individual autonomy and rights of conscience.

All of this with Love writ large at the center, like a beautiful, aspirational pinwheel of promise, with Love being the source that holds and fuels the Values that give shape, purpose and meaning to how I choose to live my life.

UUA President, Sophia Bettancourt, shared on her Facebook page last week,

“On this #ValentinesDay, with its many practices and expressions of love, I encourage all Unitarian Universalists to explore what it means for love to live at the center of our faith tradition. This is a love that surpasses the confines of simple definitions; a love that will live into its own fullness long after we are gone — a love that sets us free.

...

When I talk about a love that frees, or love as part of our theology, I mean that choosing to live one’s life guided by what love asks of us cannot help but drive us to work together in community until everyone is free.”

So, What does it mean to be a Unitarian Universalist? For me, it means choosing to put Love at the center. It means choosing Love.

May it be so. Amen