

“On Our Way”©
Shoreline Unitarian Universalist Society, Madison, CT
The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd
November 17, 2019

Sounding of the Gong

Gathering Music *Enchantment*, Yanni Nick Stanford, Pianist

#Welcome Sue Schaedler
Board of Trustees

Prelude *In the Morning Light*, Yanni

Chalice Lighting Rev. Lloyd
(The flaming chalice is the symbol of our free faith)

Covenantal Moment Mike Rosen

#*Opening Hymn *UU Principles Song*, Lisa Rubin

Story Jenny Lee

Offertory Words November Share the Plate

Here, we share with generosity what treasure we have with others whose needs are greater than our own. Each week we donate 50% of our total cash offering to a non-profit program that serves others. This month your cash donations will go to the . . . Covenant to Care “Adopt a Social Worker” program. Our donations address the needs of specific children, often living with grandparents, who have been removed from difficult family situations. Donations at this time of year anticipate the holiday season.

Please give generously.

Offering & Offertory Music *A Million Dreams*, Pasek & Paul
Amy Buckley, Vocalist

#Sing the Young People Out *Children’s Recessional* (see back of hymnal)

Honoring Our Joys and Sorrows by Spoken Word & Ritual

Musical Meditation *Pathetique Sonata, Mvt. 2*, Beethoven

Reflection

Rev. Lloyd

As I was thinking about this service, I found myself asking, "Why are we here? Why do we come to SUUS each Sunday? Why do we claim allegiance to it?" And, as I thought about it, the word "integrity" came to mind. I believe we are called to live lives of integrity, and, to support others in doing the same.

There are at least three definitions for the word, "integrity."¹
The first one is:

1. adherence to moral and ethical principles; soundness of moral character; honesty.

But bigger than that, there is a larger definition:

2. the state of being whole, entire, or undiminished: as in to preserve the integrity of the [congregation].

And, then there is the conceptual meaning:

3. a sound, unimpaired, or perfect condition: as in *the integrity of a ship's hull*.

In each of these descriptions there is a call for congruency between what is and its ideal. This call to integrity reaches us when we are in an in-between place, a liminal zone, a place of some tension and discomfort, between what is fair and just, and . . . what isn't.

No matter how far off the mark we wander from living our ideals and beliefs, there is still, always, that "Truth" meter that calls us back to do, to act, to be, with one another in ways that are congruent with our values and ideals.

Now, for many human beings, those values and ideals are profoundly shaped by the teachings and teachers of other world religions.

Like it or not.

For many people living in this world, teachers, preachers and theologians interpret and transmit to a loyal following their understandings of those ethics and morals that they believe their G*d² commands them to follow. It is a calling forth to act justly and

¹ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/integrity> November 16, 2019.

² Rev. Lloyd does not spell out the word, "G*d," because the term is loaded with many misconceptions

compassionately, usually in response to an omnipotent figure that requires obedience with an overt or unstated threat of punishment if one does not surrender and obey the call.

But . . . what about us? We don't always or even consistently claim to follow the commandments of a particular G*d. Our attention, behavior, and meaning in life is usually not focused on pleasing an other worldly G*d. What calls us to live in ethically and morally congruent relationships with each other?

PAUSE

If you spend much time at all in Unitarian Universalist circles, you will hear the term “Right Relations.” You see its living presence particularly at our national general assemblies where 4000 people gather for fellowship and to harness the energy and intent of this denomination for the good of humanity. At General Assembly, there are actually “right relations teams,” wearing neon green T-shirts, that will, upon invitation, intercede in a conflict where injustice is felt, when feelings are hurt. Ya know, it is to be expected, indeed, it is normal, that when probing into justice issues, strong feelings will arise. It is to be expected that conflict lays in wait, waiting to erupt, into that space where the discrepancy between what we wish for and what we do, is acutely felt.

Sometimes, we feel all of that discrepancy, conflict, and incongruency within our own being . . . kind of like a V8 moment . . . only worse . . . We ask . . . “How could I have done that!?!” Or, more often, we *more easily* see it in others, wondering of a particular person, “How could they have done that?” Or, in the case of a congregation, we ask, “Why aren't we doing . . .?”

PAUSE

The concept of “Right Relations” is both an ethical and a theological term. Ethically, it is the consideration of how people ought to behave given what they believe and value. Ethical principles ask us to choose intentionally and to act with integrity on what we believe. We are reminded and asked, “What are we doing here?”

In particular, because the practice of ethical behavior is most difficult and most relevant in the midst of conflict, right relations in Unitarian Universalism is the practice of respecting others and relating to others, especially in the midst of conflict, named and

and preconceptions. That which is the spirit of life and community, the spirit of love and death, the spirit of humanity, cannot be relegated to one three letter word. Rev. Lloyd invites others to reconsider the meanings of this word, and, to contemplate whether it is a noun or verb. Is G*d Love? The reader is invited to expand their vision and understanding . . .

unnamed. It means committing to stay in relationship, to learn together, and to discover mutually satisfying resolutions that can't be discovered or imagined alone. It means giving the other the benefit of the doubt and assuming good intentions, even when all our buttons have been pushed. Let's face it, sometimes our buttons are just waiting to be pushed!

Thus, within the framework of Unitarian Universalist right relations, the concept of "evil" doesn't become personified and projected onto an other-worldly symbol such as the devil, or onto that person with whom you are in conflict. "Evil" is . . . instead . . . **the violation** of relationships in human life. For us, evil's nemesis is our practice of right relations: meaning the practice of forming, maintaining and nurturing one's relation to others.

Justice

And, it is precisely in that practice, in that process, in that way of being with another, within ourselves, or with our communities, that justice is made and re-made. An ethic of right relating calls us to hold ourselves accountable for our part in the perpetuation of injustice. We may not be responsible for what happened in the past (or we may) but we are responsible for how we respond in the present to injustice. Under the ethic of right relations, we hold others accountable when people's rights are violated; **and** we support them in healing. Likewise, we hold ourselves accountable when people's rights are violated; **and** we support ourselves in the healing.

It's not a big step then, to realize that within the ethic of right relations is the moral principle of interdependence. A test then of any action under an ethic of right relations is whether it shows evidence of having considered and valued our connections to others and to ourselves. It asks, "What are we doing here?"

You may remember what I said two weeks ago . . . A good religion, like a good lover, will draw out the best in you, it will call you forth into a new light where who you are and what you do, is congruent with what you believe.

Our Unitarian Universalist ethic of right relations encourages us to do what we can, here and now. It acknowledges that disconnection and estrangement, conflict and breakdown, disappointment and hurt all happen **in relating to other people**. **But**, it is also **in** relating with the stranger and friend that we are transformed, that we learn to forgive, that we foster our own healing, and, in so doing, we grow beyond who we are today.

For these reasons, and more, we, here at this congregation, have a congregational covenant voted on and affirmed by the congregation. It is not a rule book, but it does

remind us of our values and ideals. It offers us a moral compass when lost in the heat of the moment. It asks us to stay in relationship even when it’s hard . . . especially when it’s hard.

Because it represents the moral backbone of this congregation, that’s why we keep working to keep it a living document, but more than that, a living practice, calling us to a larger and more generous perspective even in the face of disappointment. If a congregation, or any group of passionate people seeking to do good in the world . . . is to last into the next generation, we need to practice moral ethics that remind us of our interdependence (as opposed perpetuating behavior that divides and diminishes us and others).

A focus on our interdependence between each other here at SUUS, and in the larger world, IS what we should be doing here. We need that much from each other. And, the world needs that from us. It needs a prophetic church that incarnates this meaning and practice of right relations.

My colleague, Rev. Tracy Johnson, offers us these thoughts . . . “We [covenant to be guided by] our principles, and the sources from which they are drawn; . . . we covenant to affirm and promote, specifically the interdependence of all peoples, the transforming power of love, and human freedom grounded in inherent worth and dignity. . . Justice is a relational concept. It has to do with right relations within our community, between our community and the people outside our doors, and beyond . . .”

She says, “We need to [continue] with the internal work if we are to be believed by those who observe us. Earning the badge of a ‘prophetic church’ requires us to engage one another in difficult conversations that test our practice against the backdrop of our principles. How inclusive are we? What causes do we see as important? Do we do so intellectually only or do we follow through with action? These are the kinds of tough questions we need to grapple with together. The answers can be transformative.”

PAUSE

We at SUUS are here because of the work of previous generations of UU’s on the shoreline - we are the legacy of their commitments. And we will be the cause of yet unrealized effects. This is the challenge with which we are presented: to continuously create ourselves anew and to co-create the holy on this earth.

The word “prophetic” refers to that which is visionary, a prophet or prophetic church sees the potential in connecting who we are to what we do in ways that will impact individual lives and systems, both. A prophetic church holds the spirit that is life, alive

and well, energized, rising up from within our minds and hearts. A prophetic church is relevant - it makes a difference in the here and now, resulting in wholeness for those effected. Most importantly, a prophetic church's overarching theme is justice seeking - the call to right relations for all peoples.

PAUSE

Like many of you, when I first came, I saw that there were systems issues that were holding us back from achieving our aspirations. They were things that had to be addressed before we could, as a congregation, grow into the prophetic church to which we aspire. Our first and most important job, was to build trust between each other. Toward that end, I asked if the Congregational Covenant was imbedded in the church? Everyone admitted that it was not. Since then, we have worked to make it so, and we continue and should always continue this foundational work.

Now, I know that it's easy to think of our covenant as an abstract concept that applies to others. But, when we do, it undermines the ethical heart of this faith, and prevents us from growing into that prophetic church we seek.

Other systems issues that needed to be addressed were: sorting out the leadership roles of board, minister, staff, and congregants; restructuring our social justice efforts to include more members of the church; building a music ministry to speak to our souls; persistently developing policies that promote consistency and continuity between changes in leadership; fortifying our small group listening circles; rebuilding our children's faith formation program; and emboldening our other vibrant ministries. All these things and more have been done, and continue to be worked on, in order that we may answer with conviction, the question of "What are we doing here?"

The answer? We are nurturing and building a prophetic church, that seeks to live in right relationship with each other and with others, when the times get tough. We do not claim omnipotent answers, but we do aspire to living lives of integrity, and helping others do the same. If we continue to reinforce and practice what we preach, we are well on our way to making obvious to all, what it is, that this congregation, is doing here.³

³ Deleted quote: These words from the book, "The Prophetic Imperative" by Richard Gilbert. "Freedom, a central value of Unitarian Universalism, is a **social** concept, and, if it is to be preserved, an obligation is placed on the free person. I believe we are not free to desist from struggling for freedom for self and others. Freedom, by its very nature, places an imperative claim on the free person to *expand that freedom to all.*"

***Hymn 1017** *Building a New Way*

***Closing Words & Extinguishing the Chalice**

Please remain standing as you are able and join hands as you are willing.

We extinguish this flame, but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. We extinguish this flame but not our understanding that we can only be a light to the world, when we are a light to each other. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Please be seated to sing our closing song.

Closing Song 131 *Love Will Guide Us*

Silent Reflection

Let us sit together in silence as we reflect on the message and meaning of today's service.