

Shoreline Unitarian Universalist Society
Online Worship Service
September 20, 2020

A World Community, 6th Principle
Rev. Jeanne Lloyd

We are moving toward the end of the review of our 7 principles, and in October we will revisit the 8th principle currently under consideration by our denomination.

Today we delve into the meaning behind the words of the 6th principle, which is:

“We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote . . . the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all.”

I must admit, that in these troubled times, that goal, that hope, that wish, that longing for a world community with “peace, liberty and justice for all” seems so far away at times. Sometimes, it seems as though the creation of a peaceful and just community, even just locally, let alone globally, are not the principles to which our leaders and politicians are committed. I sometimes wonder if people in the larger world remember the power and meaning of the word “community”? I wonder if humanity is still up to the task? Are we too divided to work together to accomplish what The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King called “beloved community”?

Personally and professionally, I was first called to “community ministry,” meaning the ministry of creating community by addressing the “sins” of the world that divide us. When I first entered Hartford Seminary, I was mentored by The Rev. Dr. Carl Dudley, a teacher and minister whose focus was on “. . . the application of the sociology of religion to the everyday needs of communities . . . [He] was nationally known for his work in mobilizing local churches for community ministries, and [was] recognized for his long history of working for such causes as the peace movement, civil rights for the incarcerated [, . . .] housing reform, and, [legislative reform regarding] employment, food stamps, welfare, abortion and [GLBTQ rights].”¹

I remember that in one class, he kept using the words “liberal” and “conservative”. As I listened to him, I began to realize I was no longer sure of what those words actually meant. I know they are used a lot in our media and politics, but underneath it all, what did they really mean, what were their root meanings? And, so I asked him in front of my peers, what he meant by those two words? He looked at me as though I should know already their meaning, but he answered me anyway, saying (and I am paraphrasing here), “that at the essence of the word ‘liberal,’ is the willingness to change. To be liberal is to enthusiastically embrace and promote one’s personal and societal growth toward the future. Buried within the concept of ‘liberal’ is a willingness to risk, and indeed an imperative that if we don’t risk, we will not grow as human beings or as a society.

¹ <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/about/dudley.htm> September 19, 2020

'Conservative' on the underhand focuses more on keeping the same what it is that we already know works. Beneath the word conservative,:

- is a trust in that within which we have confidence, and,
- a trust in that upon which we rely on our day to day lives to stay the same,
- and there is a desire to be able to continue to rely on those fundamental cornerstones around which we may then dance the rest of our lives.

There are sundry reasons why a person or a people choose to risk, or not risk, choose to trust or not trust. And/but, when we choose to label those many reasons with judgmental characterizations, we promote division as do many others. Such characterizations undermine the sanctity of a just, free, and peaceful community, driving it ever further from our lives.

PAUSE

Now, Unitarian Universalism is an aspirational faith, it is a relational faith, meaning that it is a faith that incarnates within its principles and our hearts the expectation that *through* the risk of knowing one another, along with a willingness to change, and faith in the future, our lives and this world can become a better place. To these qualities we can apply the word "liberal," meaning that in theory we are willing to take risks if it means creating a healthier spirit or community.

PAUSE

That said, I will be the first to say, and perhaps some of you will agree, that this year there has been too much change, and many of us are ready for the sheer frequency of these life altering changes, to stop.

Some of us are drowning under all the changes we're grappling with and we need calmer waters to get our head above those waters just so we can breathe. In these moments, in some personal ways, some might want to slow down the pace of change and find some firm ground to stand on, ground we can all trust again.

That ground can be, and must be, community. A place where we can turn our lives toward peace, justice, and freedom. A place where we can be the place others need to find their footing in the rough and tumble of these times. A place where collectively we can apply our power to improve our lives and our world.

PAUSE

Most of us remember our first principle best, the “inherent worth and dignity of every individual.” The others are harder to remember. And, I have always argued that our 7th and currently last principle should be first, “*the interdependent web of all existence.*” Principle 6, “*a world community of peace, liberty, and justice,*” sidles up very closely to the 7th, “*the interdependent web of all existence.*” When we and others focus only on the first principle that highlights the merits of the individual, we lose the power to make meaningful changes in our society. It is an abdication of our collective power to only focus on the inherent worth and dignity of the individual.

We forget that, as Kenneth Collier says, “individuals standing alone have about as much strength as a bunch of stones lying on the ground. It is only when a mason picks up these stones and builds a wall that [the stones] become powerful. And that is how it is with communities. Alone [we don’t have that much power]; **together** we have [the] power [to heal violence and injustice, but apart] . . . [healing is elusive] . . .”² (Emphasis added)

A story:

In the Middle Ages, a certain order of monks lived quietly at their monastery and part of their [spiritual practice] was that periodically they each [would] go on a . . . retreat [by themselves, to live a hermit’s life]. The length of the retreat was up to the individual monk and [some would leave for a very long time indeed]. One day, a monk [sought permission from the Abbot to go on his retreat, permission was granted, and off he went].

The monk came to the hermitage and opened a Bible . . . It [fell] to a passage [where Jesus is described] as washing his disciples’ feet. The monk [contemplated its meaning for a couple of days]. [Then, abruptly, he] got up and returned to the monastery.

[Upon arrival], he presented himself to the Abbot, who was surprised to see him return so soon!

“So. You have returned already,” said the Abbot.

The monk replied, “Of course. For whose feet would [I wash, alone?]”

That is community. “It is about washing feet, serving each other in humility and generosity. It is about creating ways to help each other. . .”³ Without having someone’s feet to wash, “it is

² Collier, Kenneth W. **Our Seven Principles in Story and Verse** (Boston: Skinner Books, 1997) 88-89.

³ Collier, Kenneth W. **Our Seven Principles in Story and Verse** (Boston: Skinner Books, 1997) 90.

impossible for [their] worth and dignity to be manifest and celebrated.”⁴ It is about reaching [out to each other, offering help, lending our power, and also asking for help . . . giving others the opportunity to connect to us]. This is the bond of love that creates community, healing, justice, and freedom. These are the radically liberal acts of power that can create a world community that promotes peace. “In community it becomes possible for our humanity to grow, flower, and bear fruit. We never come to fruition alone and in a vacuum, but only in community, touching and serving each other, [even while we live] in a creative tension [with each other]. [That tension emerges as we enter relationships where we unpack the meanings of the labels we give others or they give themselves].”⁵

This is a tall order. I know that. I know it only too well in these times when division is the only thing we seem to have in common. But, that division is ripping our communities and lives apart. It is as serious as the pandemic, perhaps more so, and may even be at the root of the many catastrophic issues we face. Collier says, “How is it possible to achieve a measure of peace when we use our power not to heal but to harm, not to build but to destroy, not to bring people together but to drive people apart? How is it possible to bring liberty to people when we deny them the right to live as they will and take from them the opportunity to freely become the precious and holy human beings, they are? How is it possible to achieve justice when [we relegate Love for each other to the margins of our lives]?”⁶

To realize a world community of peace, liberty and justice, we cannot stand alone. We must use the only power we have, that of community and love to heal this world. We must wash our neighbor’s feet without casting dispersions on their character. We must look for the fundamental principles in which they place their faith and trust, and we must actively reach out to create a wider circle . . . a wider community, and perhaps one day, a world community.

PAUSE

I end with these words from Supreme Court Justice, Ruth Beder Ginsburg:

. . . Do something outside yourself. Something to repair the tears in your community. Something to make a life a little better for people less fortunate than you. That’s what I think a meaningful life is - - - living not for oneself, but for one’s community.

So may it be.

⁴ Collier, Kenneth W. **Our Seven Principles in Story and Verse** (Boston: Skinner Books, 1997) 90-91.

⁵ Collier, Kenneth W. **Our Seven Principles in Story and Verse** (Boston: Skinner Books, 1997) 90-91.

⁶ Collier, Kenneth W. **Our Seven Principles in Story and Verse** (Boston: Skinner Books, 1997) 92.