

WELCOME TO THIS FRIENDLY CHURCH

First Universalist Church of Norway

Sept 5, 2010

**“Our mission, as we live our historic, liberal faith, is to nurture
spiritual growth, honor diversity, and offer service with love”**

PRELUDE(s)

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

UNISON OPENING WORDS # 505
from the Buddhist tradition, by Thich Nhat Hanh

INTROIT Spirit of Life # 123

UNISON CHALICE LIGHTING WORDS # 529
from the Brahma Samaj

COVENANT

*Love is the spirit of this church. These are our goals.
To worship God in Freedom,
To affirm the dignity of all people,
To dwell together in peace,
To serve one another,
And to seek the truth in love.*

HYMN Morning Has Broken # 38

RESPONSIVE READING “Connections Are Made Slowly” # 586
by Marge Piercy

CANDLES OF JOY and CONCERN

OFFERING, OFFERTORY, and Sung Response

*From you I receive, to you I give
Together we share, and from this we live.*

SPOKEN and SILENT

PRAYER, MEDITATION, REFLECTION

Richard

Ours is a silent prayer today, but there are introductory words to our silence by Mark Belletini, which he titled “Another Psalm 139:”

**To be present to the life of this place,
and to the deep that calls unto deep,
it matters only that we know there is no place
to flee from what presents itself to us here.**

**We can imagine flying to dark green islands
far away in a teal [blue] sea bronzed by sunset,
but still the questions and answers
will dance within us, knock at our doors,
haunt us in the dark.**

**We can imagine pulling up the corner
of the autumn morning sky,
and slipping away into a place too strange to name,
but still the questions and answers will glide within us,
pound on our doors, call us in the dark.**

**We can imagine running away
to the dark side of the earth,
where spices float in the rivers
and children nurse at midnight breast,
but still the questions and answers
will circle within us, rap at our doors,
and touch our shoulders in the dark.**

**For there is no place to to flee from the presence
that presents itself here, the face we all recognize**

**in the mirror of our lives, the yearning that is
the yearning in our own breath.**

**Flee to the presence, or stay here for it. It makes no difference
for we are here, present to what presents itself to us.**

Welcome.

Welcome to the silence.

SILENCE

READING(s)

(1) “Reading For the Day” by Mark Belletini

**Let the sky above [us] unroll like a scroll,
and let [us] read upon it today’s text for [our] life:**

“You are alive, here and now.

Love boldly and always tell the truth.”

**Let the wind arrange the [leaf strewn] branches
of the maples and [birches] and oaks
into letters which proclaim this sacred text:**

“Your heart beats now,

Not tomorrow or yesterday.

Love the gift of your life and do no harm.”

**Let the eyes and hands and faces
of all men and women and children
with whom [we] share this earth
be chapter and verse in this great scripture text:**

Life is struggle and loss, and also

tenderness and joy,

Live all of your life, not just part of it.”

**And now let all the poems and scriptures and novels
and films and songs and cries and lullabies and
prayers and anthems open up before our free hearts.
Let them open like a torah, like a psalm, like a gospel,
like an apocalypse
and let them proclaim:**

**“Do not think you can take away each other’s troubles,
but try to be with each other in them,
Remember that you are part, not all,
great, but not by far the greatest,
[you are] small, precious, brief breaths
in the great whirlwind of creation.”**

**And remember that every single human word is
finally and divinely cradled in the strong and secure
arms of silence.**

(2) by Peter Landry

Proceeding from

Aristotle's definition of Philosophy, "knowledge of truth," leads us to consider the meaning of two words: knowledge and truth.

Knowledge is the mental image, a faithful reflection of the true state of things as they really exist. In spite of the traditional idea that knowledge is subjective: It is objective, outside of oneself. Being objective, it can be attacked and defended without reference to the individual who holds the assertion that a particular piece of knowledge is correct, or that it is false.2

As for what is truth? Well, that is a question over which philosophers argue. It is a state of mind free of error, a state of mind which is an accurate reflection of things in existence, of the things about you. The first thing to know about truth is that it is unchangeable; it is ageless and constant. Truth does not vary or shift, it is a piece of unalterable reality. It follows, therefore, that truth is the same for all of us, thus, one should be repelled by the expression that "what is true for you is not true for me."

The second thing to know about truth is that the discovery of truth serves a purpose. To determine the true state of affairs of your physical surroundings is essential to a person's life; to take a simple example, it is important for one to know what is immediately ahead when walking about, a nasty fall can lead to the hospital, or worse. Some of our "higher" mental concepts, if wrong, can lead us, equally as well, to an unhealthy state. It was Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), the English evolutionary philosopher who said, "Ethical truth is as exact and peremptory as physical truth." (A number of our scientific concepts are true, and the proof is to be had by beholding the modern technical world; so, too it can be

said that a number of our ethical or moral concepts, are not true, and the proof, likewise, is to be had by beholding the starvation and misery existing in today's world.)

The road to truth can be long and difficult; and, to be sure, it is never ending; but there are rules, Bacon's Rules.

"There are in fact four very significant stumbling blocks in the way of truth, which hinder every man however learned, and scarcely allow anyone to win a clear title to wisdom, namely, the example of weak and unworthy authority, long standing custom, the feeling of the ignorant crowd, and the hiding of our own ignorance while making a display of our apparent knowledge." (Roger Bacon, 1214-92.)

HYMN

Love Will Guide Us

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SERMON

“Truth-Telling”

Mr. Beal

I’ve spoken before – and I’m far from being the only one who has done so – of my concern about the very low level of political discourse that seems to me to characterize too many members of both major parties. It has always been the case that the most extreme elements on both sides of the political spectrum have made extreme statements ... and not just calling names or casting aspersions but lying through their teeth. A particularly virulent campaign was one that took place between two Unitarian candidates, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams when they were running for the presidency of the United States. Nor was it the people speaking on their behalf or the partisan newspapers which were willing to print the most scurrilous of charges back when no one paid any attention to libel laws. Both Adams and Jefferson were themselves bitterly and not always truthfully attacking of each other. The kind of charges leveled against

Abraham Lincoln would have defeated him in his reelection bid had it not been for General Sherman's capture of Atlanta, the relief the North felt at what was seen as bringing the war closer to an end accruing to Lincoln's benefit. But the claims that had been made against him were vicious.

Little of that ilk makes its appearance in what is left of the mainstream media. Columnists and particularly partisan newspapers and cable television news and interview shows certainly shade the truth and make exaggerated claims. But today it's more likely to be blogs, tweets or statements on facebook pages that go over the top or, perhaps more accurately strike so low as to be at cellar or sewer level. And while this passionate partisanship was true during much of our country's history, it had begun to become more measured. President Regan – whom no one doubts was a conservative – and Tip O'Neill, a famously liberal speaker of the House, often got together at the White House to share a drink, a conversation, and decide on how to proceed with the legislative agenda.

I read, and I believe, that it's not possible for conservatives and liberals to meet in the Congress today without being charged with disloyalty to their party and disguising their true political philosophy.

Probably the best known canard – which means a false report made with the express purpose of doing harm – is the oft-repeated claim that President Obama is a Muslim. Like unto it is the claim he is not in fact a United States citizen and therefore not legally eligible to be President. Its clearly a fringe element that believes and repeats these statements – or repeats them knowing them to have been disproved by responsible

reporters and researchers. What is claimed in these particular lies is triply insulting. It's insulting to the President because being lied about, and especially if there is a racist aspect of it is insulting. It's insulting to Muslims because having your religion used as a slur is insulting. And it's insulting to the American people as a whole, for the implication in spreading a proven falsehood is that a sufficient proportion of the population of the United States is gullible enough or stupid enough or so lacking in the ability or the willingness to check even the most easily located sources that it can be easily fooled.

My personal opinion is that only a small proportion of the American public are easily hoodwinked. But in a country as populous as this one is now that's still millions of people. It's unfortunate so many exist, but the danger is not in the current number of such people. The danger is that there are fewer and fewer responsible and balanced voices being heard, and fewer and fewer people seeking those kinds of voices out. Newspapers are closing down almost daily. Cities that have two or more competing papers are practically non-existent. Network news is losing its audience, and while the three major networks were never really inclusive in the points of view they sought out or reflected, at least they were sufficiently broad-based and representative of the large majority of the viewers they influenced and then mirrored.

In the absence of balanced and responsible reporting, in the absence of rational and as nearly objective dialogue as it's possible to get, the least rational, balanced, objective and responsible voices will rise to the top.

Rhetoric will replace reporting. Demagoguery will take the place of reasonableness. And all of us who are not extremists will suffer, as will the kind of social order and the sound and judicious politics a democracy depends upon. Polemic is not a healthy substitute for discernment nor cant for wisdom.

The history of both Unitarianism and Universalism reveals a bedrock commitment to what our current Principles call “a free and responsible search for truth and meaning.” We’ve placed a premium on reason and reasonableness, with rationality and responsibility as tools in search for truth. And as the Unitarian side of our dual heritage moves closer to the traditional Universalist acceptance of the spiritual and the mystical, neither heritage ever did or now does dispense with reason as a core, as a primary value.

The search for truth and meaning presupposes the use of truth, of all we know so far as being true even if it is still incomplete, still a goal rather than a realized, graspable, quality with all of aspects of an intellectual entity. Hence Unitarian Universalists cannot knowingly mis-state or use falsehoods, at least not without denying the faith they claim to hold, nor lie, without opening ourselves to the knowledge we’re being hypocritical. The cost of being truthful can be very high and very hard. The “little white lie” can be a powerful temptation. Especially when we think we use it for someone else’s “good.” And perhaps sometimes it avoids or denies pain, or temporarily prevents someone’s feelings – even their sense of self – from being hurt. But whether a lie, little and white or not, eventually, I believe, exacts a price, if not from the person or persons lied to, then from

ourselves.

If we choose to avoid the truth by lying, however good we think the reason, then we should consider what the price might be and contract with ourselves to willingly pay it. Often that price is a diminished sense of self-esteem, a realization we have not lived up to our own expectation of ourselves, failed the better angels of our faith.

Given our heritage and the difficult but rewarding principles of our faith, we're in a position where advocating truthfulness as both a personal and inter-personal, a social, a political, and, perhaps most important of all, an educational goal might well be seen as incumbent on us. Where, to the extent we pursue a free and responsible search for truth and meaning, we have to also choose to do our best to make truth-telling a part of our personal ministry to ourselves, to others, and in whatever ways are possible for us, to the worlds in which we live.

It seems worth a thought or two, perhaps at least one act of conscience, and, since we have some minutes before our hour is up, some time for discussion.

HYMN Oh, Give Us Pleasure In the Flowers Today # 64

or

As We Come Marching, Marching # 109

CLOSING WORDS are found in **Philippians 4:8**

Finally beloved, whatsoever thing are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report;

If there be any virtue, and if there be any praise,
think on these things.

PARTING CIRCLE

“Carry the flame of peace and love until we meet again.”

POSTLUDE(s)