

WILL UU BE MY VALENTINE?

UU Valentines Service

February 12, 2017

Chalice Lighting

Love is the aspiration, the spirit that moves and inspires this faith we share.

Rightly understood, love can nurture our spirits and transform the world.

May the flame of this chalice honor and embody the power and the blessing of the love we need, the love we give, the love we are challenged always to remember and to share. Maureen Killoran...UU Minister

Readings:

R Rohr...

Only love can move effectively across boundaries and across cultures. Love is a very real energy, a spiritual life force that is much more powerful than ideas or mere thoughts. Love is endlessly alive, always flowing toward the lower place, and thus life-giving for all, exactly like water. There is no form of life that does not need water... is Love the same?

St Francis...

Can true humility and compassion exist in our words and in our eyes unless we know we too are capable of any act? —St. Francis of Assisi

1 Corinthians 13: 4-7

⁴Love is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, ⁵never haughty or selfish or rude. Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong. ⁶It is never glad about injustice, but rejoices whenever truth wins out. ⁷If you love someone, you will be loyal to them no matter what the cost.

You will always believe in them, always expect the best of them, and always stand your ground in defending them. Love is Eternal.

Message:

For some time now, I have wanted to speak at Easter on the Resurrection from the point of view of a Unitarian Universalist. I was thinking that THIS had to be the year that I put that message together. Furthermore, from the standpoint of a Program Committee member, we try to schedule with serious consideration for topic on several Sundays during the year...ML King, Presidents Day, July 4, Labor day, Earth Day...but the toughest two to fill are Easter and Christmas... Soooo...I was just getting ready to propose an Easter message when a retired UU Minister agreed to speak on Easter Sunday...and I was relieved! My thoughts on that, and the collection of articles that I have amassed on that topic, need at least another year to marinate... Only one Sunday was open in the first 9 months of 2017...and it was today...the Sunday right before Valentines Day. I had first thought that I would come up with something bridging Valentines Day and Presidents Day...but then I thought better of it. My mind started to turn into a pretzel just thinking of it... So...here we are...looking toward Valentines Day...

According to statistics, Americans spent \$18.9 billion for Valentines Day in 2016, an average of \$142 for each of the 56% who celebrated. We send 180 million cards, give 198 million roses, and conceive over 11,000 babies. In one survey, 53% of women say they would end a relationship if they received no present...***and thus I guess I finally know what my problem has been...***

56% celebrate...But even some of that is for teachers, friends, relatives etc. So it is probably fair to say that at least half of our population feels a bit left out on this day... For every one person who feels an emotional charge, there is likely one who is disengaged....one who has less than a happy feeling.

Maybe as Unitarian Universalists, we can do something to make this a more inclusive and meaningful day.

Let's look at a little of the History of Valentines day...

Before Rome was Christianized, there were at least 3 Valentines or men named Valentinius who were martyred for trying to bring some Christian influence to the Roman Empire.

It is said that one Valentinius was martyred for performing Christian weddings for soldiers, who were not permitted by the emperor to marry, much less to be Christians. Just before Valentinius was to be hung, it is said that he performed a miraculous healing of the daughter of his jailer...the reason for his Sainthood...and before his death, sent her a letter...and signed it "your Valentinius," ...thus the first known Valentines card...celebrated by the church with the Feast of St Valentinius beginning in 496.

It wasn't until the days of Chaucer that a Valentines day was associated with romance...in his case, the mating of birds, probably in May...In 1382, in a poem written to honor the engagement of the King of England, Chaucer wrote:

*"For this was on St Valentines day
When euery bird cometh there to chase his mate."*

***Up until that time, St Valentines celebrations and feasts were more about recognizing the Sacrifice of Valentinius. They were more about honoring **Sacrifice** than Love
HOLD THAT THOUGHT!***

As a romantic occasion, the holiday progressed until around 1415, when the Duke of Orleans, sent the first recorded note, declaring to his Dear Valentine... that he was "already sick of love."

Even in 1856, the author of *Madame Bovary* tells us that Emma Bovary only found out about romantic love through "the refuse of old lending libraries."

These books, he wrote:

"...were all about love and lovers, damsels in distress swooning in lonely lodges, postillions slaughtered all along the road, horses ridden to death on every page, gloomy forests, troubles of the heart, vows, sobs, tears, kisses,

rowing-boats in the moonlight, nightingales in the grove, gentlemen brave as lions and gentle as lambs, too virtuous to be true, invariably well-dressed, and weeping like fountains."

During the 19th century, though, the custom of Valentine's day began to spread around the British empire and the around the world...

In Latin America, it tends to be more a day to show appreciation of both Love and Friendship

In modern times, Hindu and Islamic traditionalists have considered the holiday to be cultural contamination from the West:

In Iran... "Printing and producing any goods related to this day including posters, boxes and cards emblazoned with hearts or half-hearts, red roses and any activities promoting this day are banned ... Outlets that violate this are legally dealt with"

So...depending on what you think of Valentines day, you can find a place where you could be arrested for celebrating, or go to South Korea where some form of Love is celebrated on the 14th of every month...

RECOGNIZING THAT 50% OF OUR POPULATION EXPERIENCES NO REAL CONNECTION TO VALENTINES DAY AS IT IS CELEBRATED, MAYBE IT IS TIME TO REVISIT HOW WE LOOK AT THE DAY.

REALIZING THAT TODAY'S CELEBRATION AS WE KNOW IT, IS A RELATIVELY RECENT INNOVATION, MAYBE IT IS TIME THAT WE REVERT TO THE HISTORY OF THE DAY...
AND AS UNITARIAN UNIVERSLISTS, IT SHOULD BE AN EASY SHIFT...

THE GREEKS IDENTIFIED AT LEAST 4 TYPES OF LOVE...

Eros...Romantic love...Song of Solomon

- Love darts from the Gods...fired by Cupid (Latin counterpart of Eros)
- The stuff movies, plays, great art and books are made of
- VALENTINES Day in our culture was made for Eros

Storge...affection...Family Love...ties between Mother, Father, children and extended family

- the most natural, emotive, and widely used of loves:
- given most without strings attached
- This type of **Affection**, for CS Lewis, was responsible for 9/10th of all lasting human happiness.
- AND...it a mature EROS relationship, it comes naturally between the partners.

Philia....Close Friendship...Brotherly love...shared goodwill...rational

- *Philadelphia*...city of brotherly love
- **CS Lewis**...the least biological, organic, instinctive, gregarious and necessary...the least *natural* of loves" - ***our species does not need friendship in order to reproduce*** -
- more profound precisely because it is **freely chosen**.¹
- It is thought that the best of romantic love is a freeflow between philia and eros. That which might start out of eros...in the form of lust grows through philia and then replenishes eros AND Changes eros from lust to deep understanding and its mix with Storge causes a beautiful blend in the best of circumstances.
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AND SO THESE 3 TYPES OF LOVE BLEND TO NURTURE SOME BEAUTIFUL HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS...

THEN, THERE IS...

Agape...Selfless love...Charity...Divine love... sacrificial, unconditional love, the highest of the four types of love

- love that is a sacrifice bringing caring regardless of the circumstance.
- The strange, downtrodden, sick, poor...
- To Christians, Jesus is the perfect example of agape. **HOW QUICKLY WE FORGET...**

If we go back to our original story of Valentinius, we saw LOVE being given in caring for the daughter of the jailer who was about to execute him... One could call his reaching out a selfless act...one that was given to someone who was DIFFERENT, it would never be returned...I would say, though that there was some suspicion that Valentinius also had other thoughts about the jailer's daughter...

...given the circumstances, we might consider it sacrificial... Call it Agape Love.

So for many years...about 900 years to be more accurate...the Feast of St Valentine was a celebration of the SACRIFICE of St Valentinius

The reading from I Corinthians is one of the most common and inspirational passages in the Bible and one, which on a good day, almost everyone can be moved by...It is a lesson to all of us in just what is meant by AGAPE Love...

Just reflect on some of the words ATTRIBUTED TO JESUS...

Patient, kind, never jealous, never boastful, never haughty, or selfish or rude. It is never glad about injustice, but rejoices whenever truth wins out. ⁷ If you love someone, you will be loyal to them, You will always expect the best of them, and always stand your ground in defending them.

Coming right off of 1 Corinthians, let's look at our UU Principles...I think Jesus was a Unitarian...

Let's look at our 7 Principles:

Open the front of your hymnal to Hymn #1, then flip back one page.....

7 Principles of Unitarian Universalism:

We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote:

- The Inherent worth and dignity of every person;^[39]
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;^[40]
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;^[41]
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;^[42]
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;^[43]
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;^[44]
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.^[45]

STAY OPEN TO THAT PAGE...

In at least 5 of the Principles of Unitarian Universalism, we are called to LOVE. And the type of LOVE we are referring to, in most cases is AGAPE....Charity, Selfless or brotherly, Philia. **It might even be said that a 6th principle...our Free and responsible Search for Truth and Meaning is what opens the door to LOVE of others**

Love is never totally easy. Sometimes it can just flow...then it disappoints, it talks back, it is fleeting, it is misdirected. BUT, I feel that as UUs, ***we are in the Sweet Spot*** right now in delivering LOVE...Philia and Agape Love. Why?

I THINK THERE ARE A FEW REASONS:

I.

Many of us were raised in a religious context of “them and us” Richard Rohr calls it duality...

God, or however we view ultimacy, was separate from us, creating an I and Thou mentality. The theistic God was out there somewhere, causing us to look for patterns of them and us...

As a result, we separate nearly everything into God and man, saint and sinner, good and bad, spiritual and non-spiritual, heaven and hell, matter and spirit, smart and stupid, believer and non believer, saved and unsaved

...and so as I grew up, our first obligation, or at least our modus operandi, was to look at others as needing to be like us...either change them to be like us, then treat with Philos, or love first with the hope that they would be like us in the end, ***but to keep somewhat separate as not to be corrupted....is that really LOVE?***

And yet, look at the 7th Principle...respect for the interdependent web of all existence. That should take our judgementalism and turn it on its ear...

Episcopal priest Cynthia Bourgault says this about duality>

If you find yourself a bit confused about what nonduality actually means, you're not alone. A good deal of the confusion originates in the fact that it's a “loan word”: a term imported from Eastern religions, which first

became widely popular in the West during the second half of the twentieth century.

Nonduality is sometimes described as the capacity to be open, inclusive, and tolerant of paradox. The former sense of self dissolves, and in its place there arises a capacity to live a flowing, unboundaried life in which the person becomes “oned” with Ultimacy and oned with one’s neighbor.

Mark Sandin, an ordained Presbyterian minister says:

As I see it, the places where Christian churches are on the decline are in the very places where emphases have started moving from dogmatic religion to a more open and questioning spirituality. Typically, this spirituality has as one of its core elements the connectedness of all of Creation. It suggests a certain equality where no one is more chosen than another. That theological perspective encourages us to engage with the world in an active and intimate way, frequently to the extent of personal sacrifice.

Not surprisingly, that has less appeal to many people than a religion that elevates them to a place of specialness.

I see these factors clearly telling us that our spiritual communities and their century old, and even millennially old, perspectives are in need of massive, thoughtfully-done overhauls

As Unitarian Universalists, we are not perfect...but maybe we’ve already done some of the overhaul that Sandin speaks of...

RR “Dualistic thinking works well for the sake of simplification and conversation, but not for the sake of truth. Most of us settle for quick and easy answers instead of any deep perception, which we leave to poets, philosophers, and prophets. *Yet depth and breadth of perception should be the primary arena for all authentic religion*”.

All you have to do is refer to the Statement of Purpose that we read each week...We celebrate those Truths , ancient and modern...

Our search for truth and meaning accepts the truths of many traditions...

As Unitarian Universalists WE CAN RELEASE THE IDEA THAT EVERYONE HAS TO BE LIKE US.

...just look at the beautiful wall hanging behind me

...just look at the sources of our Living Tradition...I don't think we often stop to realize the freedom of conscience that gives us...Just look at a few...

- Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;
- Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;
- Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;
- Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;
- Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;
- Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

WHO DO YOU MOST READILY RESPOND TO:

- ONE WHO RESPECTS YOUR VERY BEING
- OR ONE WHO THINKS YOU NEED TO BE FIXED??

We can use the words of the Dalai Lama: "The essence of all religions is love, compassion, and tolerance. Kindness is my true religion."

WITHOUT INHERENT DUALITY, AS UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS, WE CAN LOVE WITHOUT EXPECTING SOMEONE TO BE LIKE US, OR WITHOUT HAVING THE ULTERIOR MOTIVE TO MAKE THEM LIKE US.

IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT...As a Unitarian Universalist, the bedrock of my faith is that your guess is as good as mine...

HOW FREEING IS THAT!

SO... IT'S A LOT LESS WORK FOR US TO LOVE! BECAUSE WE ARE NOT IN CHARGE OF THE RECIPIENT SOMEHOW CHANGING, EITHER

BEFORE RECEIVING OUR LOVE, OR SOMEHOW MIRACULOUSLY AFTER WE GIVE IT.

II.

As a **second** point...The SECOND quote read earlier really hit me...let's look at it...

StFrancis...

Can true humility and compassion (LOVE) exist in our words and in our eyes unless we know we too are capable of any act? —St.

Francis of Assisi

AS UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS, WE ACKNOWLEDGE THAT WE ARE FLAWED HUMANS...AND WE LOVE EACH OTHER ANYWAY...and we are responsible for fixing ourselves through our own search for truth and meaning

We can face our own frailties without fear...

Our search for truth and meaning, at its very core, acknowledges that we do not know all...

Look how free we are even in sharing Joys and Concerns... we can truly be ourselves as we relate to one another. I love Jack's weekly writings...funny, reflective, serious, irreverent...where else would there be the freedom to bear one's soul and truly expose self...We can share heartaches that exist in our families without fear of judgement, we can share joys and concerns dealing with cutting edge societal issues...LGBT issues, Climate concerns, Human rights issues, substance abuse problems...all because we LOVE and we know we are loved. We can share without fear of demonstrating that we each have our own issues...**dark spots in our own lives or in our relationships that we can freely acknowledge...without fear of judgement...Might be THE BASIS FOR TRUE LOVE.**

Acknowledging our own imperfections and weaknesses...frees us to OVERLOOK dark spots in those we LOVE...and may just enable us to love more universally

Richard Rohr looks at this quote from St Francis this way:

We are all a mixture of weeds and wheat and we always will be. As Martin Luther put it, we are simultaneously saint and sinner. That's the mystery of holding weeds and wheat together in our one field of life. It takes a lot more patience, compassion, forgiveness, and love than aiming for some illusory perfection that is usually blind to its own faults. **(I THINK WHAT THIS IS SAYING TO US AS UUs IS THAT IT'S OK TO NOT BE PERFECT AND TO STILL SERVE OTHERS...NOW LISTEN TO THIS;)** He says...Acknowledging both the wheat and weeds in our lives keeps us from thinking too highly of ourselves and also from dismissing ourselves as terrible. **In other words...don't take yourself...your good points or your weaknesses too seriously, or it will hinder you from LOVING WITH ABANDON**

HE GOES ON: To accept the weeds doesn't mean that you say, "It's okay to be ignorant and evil." It means you have some real wisdom about yourself. You can see your weeds and *acknowledge* when you are not compassionate or caring. You have to name the weed as a weed. I'm not perfect; you're not perfect; the church is not perfect; SOCIETY is not perfect. RR

So here is what St Francis said again...

Can true humility and compassion (LOVE) exist in our words and in our eyes

unless we know we too are capable of any act?

In St Francis' words...we have what it takes to transcend our own faults to truly LOVE

III.

As a third point...

AS UNITERIAN UNIVERSALISTS, DOGMA IS NOT IN OUR WAY...

WHAT A GIFT OF FREEDOM...Remember what you said earlier..."To explore freely."

TO PUT IT ANOTHER WAY

I think we can forget the impact we can have as non-judgemental servants to others.

William Ellery Channing was pastor at All Souls Unitarian church in Washington DC during the Civil War. He turned his church into a hospital and trained parishoners to be chaplains to the injured. He also served as chaplain of one of the largest hospitals, bringing a loving liberal message to those in war, chaos or displacement...LOVE was granted regardless of belief of the receiver.

A contemporary UU Chaplain recently wrote that “as a UU, I claim a theology that recognizes truth from numerous sources and that various religious paths can lead us toward a life of LOVE and SERVICE.

SOMETIMES WE FORGET HOW GOOD WE HAVE IT...

We currently have a Sustainability Task Force...examining ways in which we can assure that UUFDC will make the right moves so it is even more vital in 5, 10, 20 years than it is today. We have shared lots of articles to look for answers and sometimes research gives ***us encouragement that we are well ahead of the curve...Just because we are Unitarian Universalists...***

From Tom Erlich of Progressive Christianity is a list of “providing for an Extraordinary church for Extraordinary Times:”

All are instructive for us...but let’s celebrate hurdles for LOVE that we have already removed...think of your own examples as they relate to UUFDC>>>

1. Look radically outward. See people outside our walls, recognize their needs, and respond to them. *Understand it as love in action, not as a membership strategy.*

2. Fulfill social responsibilities. Stop seeing other people as “problems” needing to be solved. Instead, see them as neighbors. See “them” as “us.” Stop the once-a-year charities. Invest in people and in relationships all the time.

3. Ratchet down spending on self. To paraphrase JFK, ask not what your church can do for you, but ask what you and your church can do for a broken world.

4. Form action-based partnerships. Stop hanging out only with your own kind. Extraordinary times make for strange bedfellows. Cross the boundaries that separate us in getting things done.

5. Strengthen faithful resolve for the resistance. Build up courage, build up determination, *build up a faith that dares to be non-conformist in repressive times*, build up voices that will speak when speaking becomes dangerous.

6. Provide practical help. Stop symbolic actions. If people need jobs, help them to find work. If seniors need medical care, help them to find it. If immigrants need sanctuary, provide it. If women need ways to escape abusive men, open a shelter.

7. Stop fighting. Just Stop it. Stop worrying about who's in charge. Pull together and get the job done.

THESE THINGS ARE WHAT WE ARE ALL ABOUT! AND IF WE'RE NOT, WE NEED TO BE...THEY GO RIGHT ALONG WITH OUR PRINCIPLES!

IV.

So...with all this talk of love, where does **indignation** at current events fit in? How can we be LOVING and ACTIVISTS against injustice??that is also showing LOVE...but with an edge...we have the example of Jesus who was an activist in a myriad of ways:

John Pavlovetz is a Christian minister who has become quite an active blogger in current times...he says, “we need to consider the activism of Jesus:”

- **When he turned the tables over and drove the money lenders out of the temple.**
- **When he claimed God to be sovereign and solely worthy of worship, in a culture that declared Caesar was.**
- **When he touched the hand of a leper instead of expelling him for his moral filth.**
- **When he publicly called the powerful religious elite a “brood of vipers”.**

- When he healed on the Sabbath when work was forbidden.
- When he spoke to a Samaritan woman in public in the middle of the day to discuss faith with her.
- When he declared the poor and the oppressed to be his very purpose for being.

And it was this bold, unapologetic, activist heart of Jesus that caused him the greatest pushback and ultimately his execution, because it troubled the waters of the powerful and the religious who weren't used to such turbulence.

This is another part of our mission as UUs: to be a disruptive voice for the voiceless even if it sometimes means shouting down those used to being heard, and drawing their wrath. It has been said that we must “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.”

Pavlovitz goes on to say, “This is the beautiful and complex heart of the work we need to do: the specific tension of being an extremist, but an extremist for Love.”

So...it is this question that is appropriate for us today as Unitarian Universalists:

Can we as Unitarian Universalists be *extremists for love*?

So let's remember that as Unitarian Universalists, we can and must be ahead of the curve on LOVE and all the forms it takes:

Guided by our Principles, which speak of LOVE.

Open to the greater web of life

Seeking Truth and Justice

In recognition that we have our faults...as do others

That we love because it is the right thing to do, and

That the expression of LOVE forces us out of our comfort zone, to advocate for justice.

So as we look forward to celebrating Valentines Day...whether we are part of the 56 percent who normally celebrate...or part of the other 44%...let's

look back to Valentinius, who risked his life for the sake of love...The first Valentine was a **sacrifice...**

Can we use our UU faith to sacrifice for AND SERVE others in the name of LOVE. Can we be extremists for love??

The title of this talk was “Will UU be my Valentine.” Let’s turn that from a cute little question that we might ask, and hear what it sounds like coming from those who are in need...from those who are afflicted.

Remember Valentinius?? He served while already on death row!

They are asking...”Will Unitarian Universalists be Valentinius for me??”
Just as Valentinius...are we willing to SACRIFICE in the name of LOVE?

Hymn #95 There is More Love Somewhere...in unison, acapella....

Closing Words:

By [Israel Buffardi](#)

My friends, when you go from here know that our hearts are always in a holy place, for we are always connected to one another.

Know that deep down, our hearts beat in one universal rhythm.

May we each find the sacred space to hear it