

Our World Is One World

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January 14, 2007

I come to you this morning with the sixth in a seven-part series of sermons on our Unitarian Universalist principles. Today we consider the call to affirm and promote “the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.” I think it is very fitting to focus on this particular principle on this particular Sunday, as we once again commemorate the life, the work, and the vision of Martin Luther King, Jr. Of those three, I believe the vision is the most important, because that is what can continue to inspire and guide us as we continue the work that he and millions of others began.

As I prepared for this service, reading various reflections on the sixth principle and material by and about Martin Luther King, it struck me just how well King’s vision complements this principle. As I read this morning’s reading, I couldn’t help but note that King’s Beloved Community is exactly what we’re talking about when we call for world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all. As the reading stated, King’s was a *global* vision of a community “in which *all* people can share in the wealth of the earth,” and in which “peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict.”

And so, while my message this morning does not focus on Dr. King himself – his life and work – it does deal very much with the values and the dreams he held dear. It does deal with his vision and with the struggle to which he devoted his life. And it is the extent to which we hold on to the dream and the vision, and continue the struggle to realize the Beloved Community, that provides the best measure of our efforts to honor Dr. Martin Luther King.

As we look at this sixth principle of Unitarian Universalism, there are several key words, each of which must be considered and understood. First, note that what we are covenanting to affirm and promote is the *goal* of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all. By committing to the goal, we are acknowledging that that community does not at present exist. Furthermore, if we are honest with ourselves, we must resign ourselves to the sad fact that the goal will not be fully realized in our lifetime, or even that of our children. And yet it is essential for the sake of our spiritual health that we continue to strive toward that goal anyhow.

In 1976, the bicentennial of American independence, Unitarian Universalist Henry Steele Commager drafted a “Declaration of Interdependence.” I’d like to share a part of its preamble, which I think expresses a part of why pursuing this principle is so important. He writes:

When in the course of history the threat of extinction confronts humankind, it is necessary for the people of this nation to declare their interdependence with the people of all nations and to embrace those principles and build those institutions which will enable us to survive and civilization to flourish. . . .

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all people are created equal; that the inequalities and injustices which afflict so much of the human race are the product of history and society, not of God or nature; that people everywhere are entitled to the blessings of life and liberty, peace and security and the realization of their full potential; that they have an inescapable moral obligation to preserve those rights for posterity; and that to achieve these ends all the peoples and nations of the globe should acknowledge their interdependence . . . and acknowledge that the forces that unite us are incomparably deeper than those that divide us – that all people are part of one global community, dependent upon one body of resources,

bound together by the ties of a common humanity, and associated in a common adventure on the planet Earth.

The simple fact is that we are already a part of one global community, bound together by the technology of communication, and by the economic reality of globalization and our dependence upon one body of resources. Our world is one world, and we have no choice about that, for indeed “what touches one affects us all.” What we do have a choice about is what qualities will characterize that world. In espousing our sixth principle, we choose the qualities of community, peace, liberty, and justice. And we insist that those qualities be accessible to *all* people, not just those in positions of particular privilege.

Let’s look first at the quality of community. I’ve spoken about the concept of community several times in the past, and will no doubt do so several times in the future. So today, let me just say a few words about it. I often speak about the creative tension between individuality and community. The Rev. Kenneth Collier approaches this phenomenon by considering the Chinese diagram of Yin and Yang. He writes that:

This diagram has symmetry to it, but it is not the static symmetry of a mirror that we in the West like so much. It is a dynamic, circular symmetry. Think of Yin and Yang as two fish in constant motion, swimming together, chasing each other, one constantly moving in to replace the other, on and on in a circle forever. There is a tension between them, but it is not a destructive one. It is a dynamic, creative, ongoing, and powerful tension. It is the kind of tension created in music between contrasting keys and in painting between colors and in dance between moving bodies. . . That is what community is about, the kind of dynamic, creative tension that requires people to move together in a sort of dance. You can’t have a community of one, just as you can’t have Yin without Yang. You can’t have full, deep, and healed humanity in isolation.

I spoke last week about the quest for fulfillment as a quest for wholeness. The concept of community embodies the paradoxical truth that real wholeness comes only with the discovery and understanding of our role as an integral *part* of something greater.

One of the major components of the effort to move toward world community over the past half-century has been the United Nations, which has always had strong Unitarian Universalist support. The Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office, or UU-UNO, is one of a handful of “Associate Membership Organizations” of the Unitarian Universalist Association. It has broad voluntary membership, a network of “UN envoys,” and programs that represent us among Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) at the United Nations. Unitarian Universalists have chaired important NGO committees at the United Nations – on disarmament, religious liberty, and other justice issues.

Locally, our congregation is a participant in the local chapter of the United Nations Association – USA, which sponsors UN Day events and promotes educational efforts in our schools. Mike Sletson is currently our representative to that organization. I think that such citizen-based organizations are important, not only to support the work of the United Nations, and to educate people about it, but also to call on our own government to use the United Nations as a vehicle toward world community and not simply as a tool for advancing our particular national interests. That is a real challenge, but worthy of our efforts.

Peace, liberty, and justice. Elusive goals indeed. All three are notably missing from our current “War on Terror,” and its most visible manifestation in Iraq. Four years ago this week, at

our annual observance of Martin Luther King Day, I spoke of the relentless march toward war with Iraq. That day, many of us signed on to an interfaith statement opposing unilateral American military action. That open letter to our government leaders called on them to stop, look, and listen before acting rashly. Of course they did not listen, and they did not stop, and thousands of Americans and millions of Iraqis have paid the price.

We are still calling on our government to change its direction, and at least its top leaders are still not listening. As frustrating as it is, we must continue to speak and call for an end to the horribly destructive policies of our administration. One hopeful sign is that many, many more voices have joined us in the call for new directions. I was happy to see many of you down at the Allen Street gate Thursday evening in one of hundreds of such gatherings across the nation saying “No!” to further expansion of the war. That same day, Unitarian Universalist president William Sinkford released an open letter to President Bush. If you would like a copy, let me know; I’d like to share just a bit of it with you this morning:

Mr. President . . .

Your policies have betrayed the trust of thousands of patriotic Americans who volunteered in good faith to serve our country. Four years of a failed war has robbed us of beloved brothers, wives, sons, and daughters. And yet you ask us to order our troops to endure more bloodshed and to inflict more harm on a broken country. . . . If we ask them to risk death daily, we had better have a just and sound reason for that request. Their willingness to lay down their lives is a sacred trust. I implore you not to betray that trust any further. . . .

Do we need to spend more, fight harder, sacrifice more American lives, and kill more Iraqi citizens in order to secure peace in their country and in our own? People of conscience the world over say No!

I am under no illusion that the administration will suddenly begin listening, and so our job now is to keep the pressure on our legislators to stop enabling this terrible fiasco.

I want to shift gears a bit now and make the point that working *for* peace and justice means more than simply protesting *against* war and *injustice*. There must be a positive component to the effort as well. And before we can hope for those qualities to infuse the life of the planet, we must learn how to embody them closer to home. There’s a piece in the back of our hymnal by the Chinese sage Lao-tse that says:

If there is to be peace in the world, there must be peace in the nations.
If there is to be peace in the nations, there must be peace in the cities.
If there is to be peace in the cities, there must be peace between neighbors.
If there is to be peace between neighbors, there must be peace in the home.
If there is to be peace in the home, there must be peace in the heart.

It all starts in the human heart. If we want to see peace, liberty, and justice in the world, then we must first cultivate them in our own hearts, and bring them to bear at every level of our lives. We must look at family and friends through the lenses of love, compassion, and understanding. We must continually expand the circle of those embraced by our love and compassion. I want to mention briefly one positive local opportunity for such efforts: Global Connections, which used to be called the International Hospitality Council. The mission of Global Connections is “to bring people of diverse cultural backgrounds together to foster cross-cultural understanding, create goodwill, and enhance awareness of the wider global community.”

I know several in this congregation have been involved with Global Connections through its Conversation Partners Program, International Friendship Program, and other activities. I encourage others of you to take a look and see whether there's something there for you. Their work clearly falls within the scope of our principle of seeking world community.

In my sermon on one of the earlier principles, I closed with a poem by the Rev. Kenneth Collier. Well, it turns out that he has written a poem to go along with each of the seven principles, and I find that they often do a really good job of internalizing the *spirit* of the corresponding principle. Today I would like to close with his poem, "Sometimes":

Sometimes,

When dawn begins to spread
Across the sky like melted butter and honey
And the air is trembling and still with waiting;
When the doves call out from the oaks
And my cat crawls on my chest and purrs
And kneads the covers like a nursing kitten;
When I hang like a drop of dew
On the cobweb spun between consciousness and sleep,
When I hang and quiver and slide slowly awake;
For just that moment of complete stillness,
I hear a music in my soul and I know
With the certainty of roses growing in the garden
That the world holds out a promise of peace
And it is my work to redeem the promise.

Sometimes,

When I climb in the hills and surprise
A deer or a bobcat or a hawk
Gliding and circling and hovering in the air before it dives;
When I stop and look over
The valleys and sip some water from my bottle
And rest in the green and glowing light;
For a moment, when the sun dances with the wind,
Free and laughing and filled with harmony
And joy, young and growing and bright;
For just that moment of fullness and knowledge,
I feel something touch my heart and I know
With the strength of stone and flowing water
That we all touch each other and sing together
And create the dancing peace of harmony.

So may it be. Amen.