

“Coming Out as Allies”

Rev. Gabi

I wrote this sermon originally 10 years ago, to observe the annual National Coming Out Day on Oct. 11. Back then, we were still fighting for marriage equality. We got that now. And yet, still not everybody in this community is free from discrimination and oppression, so I was going to rewrite the sermon to focus on transgender issues. And then, as happens so often lately, tragic events and stupid remarks made me rethink what I had planned to say. But, what CAN I say?

As a UU minister, I always worry that I'm preaching to the choir here. You all know what's wrong, right? Who am I standing up here and repeating what you have heard in the news, or from Stephen Colbert?

At times like these, I often wish I could be like one of my more fundamentalist colleagues at a traditional Christian Church. You know, the pastor who can bang on the pulpit, and preach fire and brimstone. I could show you pictures like that and point out that these are actually sons of bitches. And the same on the next picture, those canines are all sons of bitches. And then, I could bang on the pulpit again and show you the third picture-those are NOT sons of bitches.

I just wish I could, like my colleagues, start ranting and raving-how is it that this is still possible in the 21st century? How can an elected leader in a democracy, probably the most powerful man in the world, use language that is so inappropriate and so hurtful? And then I would show you the next picture, and rant some more. How is it possible in a modern city like York, to find anti-Semitic graffiti in a middle class neighborhood? The mother and daughter living there are Jewish, that's true, but they are definitely not whores. I would conclude my rant with showing you the last picture. And I would smirk when I told you that this transgender gentleman is now forced to use the Ladies Room because he is born biologically female.

Alas, being a UUA minister I cannot pound my fist on the pulpit. I cannot rant and rave. I should not smirk. We are cool and controlled, right? We Unitarian Universalists are all upset about it, and to a degree, we are fighting to make changes. But is that enough? Is it enough to donate money to the Crispus Attucks Center for Education and Training? Is it enough if we participate occasionally in candlelight vigils? Is it enough if we display a framed certificate that declares us to be a Welcoming Congregation? Is it enough if we talk about putting out a Black Lives Matter banner on our front lawn?

You probably guessed that my answer is no, this is not enough. We need to do more. Everyone of us. We need to come out as allies. Everyone of us. Everyone of us needs to be an ally. Straight allies are some of the most effective and powerful advocates for the LGBTQ movement. White allies are the most effective and powerful advocates for people of color. Christians and Buddhists and Hindus— fill in the

blank—are the most effective and powerful advocates for Jews and Muslims and — fill in the blank.

Everyone in here needs to speak and act and fight for the oppressed in this supposedly democratic and enlightened nation. We, as religious people, are even more called to be allies! There are many ways to do this—small ways and big ways. One of the bigger ways may be to put up the Black Lives Matter banner right out there, by the road, and replacing it whenever it gets vandalized. Many UU congregations in this country are now on their 10th or 12th banner! We can display a rainbow flag with our sign. We can invite guest speakers and offer lectures or classes to the congregation and the community, to get ourselves educated on how to address racism or homophobia or anti-Semitism more effectively. We can provide space for allies to come together to plan strategies. We can let the immigrants in the community know that our doors are open for them if they need help. These are some of the big things.

The smaller things are easier: showing on a daily basis that you are an ally. Wear T shirts, carry tote bags, display bumper stickers on your cars. Be prepared—no, encourage the questions from people who will ask you why you are wearing this.

We have to stop being silent when we leave this building after coffee hour. We have to come out as allies, as supporters. We have to speak out whenever we observe any form of oppression, whenever we hear people talk about it. Why? I will let Dr. King answer that: *“The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people—but the silence over that by the good people.”* Martin Luther King, Jr.

You have to say something when you are in your doctor’s waiting room and hear the leader of the most powerful nation on Earth talk about the fact that an island is surrounded by water, a lot of water. You have to speak up when you are waiting in line in the grocery store, and see racist propaganda cleverly disguised as news in the headlines of the magazines on display.

I almost spoke out a few days ago, when I needed to buy a bright orange vest for my dog, since the trail where I walk him has big warning signs about hunters. I finally found one in the hunting and fishing department at Walmart. I looked at the tag to see whether it was machine washable, and happened to see the tag line of the company who made the vests. Are you ready? *“It’s not a passion, it’s an obsession.”* Are we now proud to be obsessed? I just wish I had had an audience to share my disgust! But there was nobody around. I know, politicians and the NRA tell us that this is not the time to talk about gun control, so I will just share with you what David Pyle posted on his Facebook page:

“When you ask someone why they own a gun (guns) the answer is usually either ‘self defense’ or ‘to protect what is mine’. Defending my life or defending my property. But there is a follow up question that never gets asked....Defending you life or property from

whom? In the honest answer to that question lies our nation's racist and misogynist identity."

Coming out as allies also means building personal relationships with people who are being harassed, defamed, oppressed, or persecuted simply because their skin color, ethnicity, theology, or sexual orientation is different; or because they emigrated from their homelands out of fear or despair.

As an ally, you personally advocate for equal rights and fair treatment of all. The UUA calls it: **Answering the Call of Love!** Our Unitarian Universalist theology in this context is most strongly expressed in our 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 6th principles:

#1 *"the inherent worth and dignity of every person"*

#2 states that we *"affirm and promote Justice, Equity, and Compassion in human relations:"*

the first part of #3 states that we affirm and promote the *"acceptance of one another..."* and #6 affirms and promotes the *"goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all..."*

We UUUs are not alone in the fight. Anyone who really follows the teachings of Jesus Christ cannot possibly condone oppression of any kind! Just two very public examples: In 2010, an organization called Catholics for Equality started to *"support, educate, and mobilize Catholics in the advancement of freedom and equality at the federal, state, and local levels for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered family, parish and community members"*. And Pope Francis consistently sends the message of Love and support loud and clear. He says: *"The Church without frontiers, Mother to all, spreads throughout the world a culture of acceptance and solidarity, in which no one is seen as useless, out of place, or disposable. Migrants and refugees are not pawns on the chessboard of humanity. They are children, women, and men who leave or are forced to leave their homes for various reasons, who share a legitimate desire for knowing and having, but above all for being more."*

The Pope frequently points out that the word compassion means "feeling with" someone else. Most of us know the term compassion from Buddhism; but I probably do not need to point out that in every religion we know the Golden Rule is articulated as the most important guideline for human relationships. So, you see, we can become even stronger allies in the fight against injustice and oppression when we attack those together with other religious folks.

We will sing Hymn #1023, "Building Bridges". These are the simple lyrics: *"Building bridges between our divisions, I reach out to you, will you reach out to me? With all of our voices and all of visions, friends, we could make such sweet harmony."* Let us build bridges, bridges to people who are different and are oppressed or persecuted because of different-ness. Let us create harmonious relationships and become allies. Let us build bridges across our differing theologies, and create harmonious relationships with

folks from other denominations, so that we become stronger together. Let us come out as allies who join in the fight against prejudice, hatred, and cruelty.

Here's Martin Luther King, Jr., once again: "*The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people but the silence over that by the good people.*" Please, let us **not** be good, but silent people!