



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York

“Love Is Our Greatest Purpose”

Sermon Series Part 2 of 5

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It was in one of my seminary classes, I couldn't tell you which one, when a friend of mine spoke up and said, “We're not just collaborators, we are co-liberators!” Everyone in the room, including our professor, got so excited by the idea that we derailed whatever discussion we were having to explore it. What did we mean by collaboration? What did we mean by liberation?

In 1971, Fannie Lou Hamer gave a speech at the founding of the National Women's Political Congress, and it was in that speech that she uttered the words that are most often associated with her name: “Nobody's free until everybody's free.” Hamer wanted to call attention to the new energy in the women's movement coming from the civil rights movement, the Black Power movement, and student movements in opposition to the war in Vietnam and other social issues. Hamer wanted to challenge and invite white feminists: how do we truly do this together? How do we use our power to seek justice against not just one kind of oppression but all kinds of oppression? If my freedom comes at the expense of yours, how free am I?

“Co-liberation” is a phrase that sums up many of my own values as a Unitarian Universalist minister, in partnership with other ministers, religious professionals, and lay leaders in our faith tradition. In a just world, where the rights of all are truly equal, where all people truly have access to a life of joy and gladness, sorrow and struggle, abundance and self-determination and autonomy - only then are we all free.

When our class stopped to ask big questions about our work - training to be ministers, where are our obligations? Where are our responsibilities? To each other as colleagues? To the congregations we serve? To the faith tradition as a whole? To ourselves? How do we prioritize when the needs of everyone change day to day, moment to moment? When we asked all those questions, we were taking time to clarify our own values, and the way those values would impact the decisions that we made and the actions we took.

In today's story - thank you Carol!! - we thought about a whole village of people who take care of a huge and ancient and beautiful tree, because they know that the life of the tree sustains, improves, and enlightens their own lives, and so they wish to be in reciprocal relationship. The tree is here for us, so we are here for the tree. Not a transactional relationship: "If we do X for the tree, we may pick Y number of fruit" but instead a long ongoing relational acknowledgement of the value of sharing benefit. Sharing care. You might even call it a space of mutual aid. We look out for each other. We look out for the tree. When one of us needs something, we do our best to take care of it, together.

The story, and the image of a classroom full of seminary students imagining a more liberated future together, and Fannie Lou Hamer's invitation to all women to work for a brighter future for everyone, all point toward the value of collaboration. And they speak to the need for change, and to be ready and open to change, even - especially - when the future is uncertain and we might feel apprehensive about it.

If we have thought-partners, question-partners, then we can look to the coming change and not feel so alone. We can take comfort in our networks of support.

In September, I started a sermon series on the Unitarian Universalist Association's Article 2 Study Commission, tasked with taking a long and deep look at Article 2 of the UUA's bylaws. This is where our Sources and Principles

are listed. Today is the second part of that five-part series, and it is about shared values.

The commission has been working on a collective re-imagining of Article II since it was charged to do so by the UUA's Board of Trustees in 2020. They have held countless conversations with Unitarian Universalists - ministers, religious professionals, lay leaders, youth, elders, members of congregations around the country. Their charge? To be curious. We are a living tradition. Rather than being an unchanging monolith in the face of change, we acknowledge and honor that the act of re-examining our own tradition is also sacred work.

This month the first draft of the proposed revisions to Article II has been released. There was a link to this information in last Tuesday's weekly email, and if you missed that you can Google "UUA article 2 study" and you'll find it. [post link in Zoom??]

The wording is shorter, the language more accessible, and it speaks of our values rather than principles. I have heard Unitarian Universalism described as "people who share values, with unique spiritual paths and experiences, working for a more just world."

Here are the seven values named by this first draft. They are presented not in a list but to be thought of as a circle or cloud. At the center is the overarching value of Love, with the other values arranged around it.

I will share some of the new language now, specifically the list of values: "Love is the enduring force that holds us together. [...] Love inspires and powers the passion with which we embody our values. Inseparable from one another, these shared values are:

"Justice. We work to be diverse multicultural Beloved Communities where all people thrive.

[...]

Generosity. We cultivate a spirit of gratitude and hope.

[...]

Evolution. We adapt to the changing world.

[...]

Pluralism. We celebrate that we are all sacred beings diverse in culture, theology, and experience.

[...]

Equity. We declare that every person has the right to flourish with dignity and worthiness.

[...]

Interdependence. We honor the sacred interdependent web of all existence. With humility we understand our place in the web.”

I encourage you all to seek out this document and take some time to read it, to reflect on it, and to engage with it. Many emotions may arise when you think about replacing the seven principles with seven values. As co-liberators, we can make room to name our fear and uncertainty. We can mourn what may change even as we embrace a new way. And, a reminder, this is only the first draft. The study commission has a Google form available for anyone who wishes to submit feedback after they have read the draft. There are also listening sessions happening - this was in Tuesday’s weekly email because most of the sessions are over, but there is one at 2 p.m. today and there is one at 9 p.m. tomorrow - you can sign up to attend either of these on Zoom. Email me at revjen@uucy.org or as noted, simply search for “UUA Article 2 study” and you will find a webpage with this information.

Once all the feedback has been collected, the commission will write another updated proposal, and send it to the Board. There will be another round of hearings on the updated draft, probably sometime in January. We will make sure that information is distributed to you in time to sign up for one if you would like. Then, as we prepare for General Assembly in Pittsburgh next June, the process of considering the final draft for a vote will begin. I attended one of the listening sessions held this week on Zoom - over 130 participants came and listened to a brief presentation, then were placed in breakout rooms to

talk about our feelings, impressions, and ideas about the new language. For me, it was a very positive and inspirational gathering, and I gained a lot to reflect on in my small group as I consider the feedback I will provide to the commission. The feedback form is not due until the end of the month, and anyone may fill it out, so even if you don't have a chance to attend a session, please consider reading the draft document and sharing your own impressions and ideas.

Whew! That's a lot of moving parts, and including instructions! Who wants a sermon with homework!??

Let me tell you, this work of trying to sum up the shared values of hundreds of thousands of Unitarian Universalists - each their own fierce and amazing individual - to find the places of our best and most beautiful shared dreams for the world - that is one BIG job!

And that's why I picked the reading that I did. Thanks, Jim! Jesús I. Valles' "In a Spaceship Somewhere, Long After Empire's Collapse" is a delightful little poem of imagined future. One of the most curative - and liberating! - things that art can do is to show us a future we would love to see made real - that we would love to make real. Valles reminds us of the visceral satisfaction of seeing those old, oft-washed margarine tubs that are now full of salsa, knowing we have an aunty who can help mend our tears and dry our tears. And at the end, we move from those tiny details to the big picture:

"Once, on earth, someone told my Tía Came, 'Go back to your country!,' which she took to mean,
'Go home!' and if the sky is the thing that follows us everywhere, she thought, if the vast black
Blue saw me born, then the sky is my home, and every star is every place I've come from.

Long after the empire was no more, it was all the aunties who led every expedition.

Just like on earth, it was all of the tías who looked at an unknown and threw their heads back,
Cackling as they soared into the sky, showing the children, all of us, where exactly we belonged.”

Who are our beloveds, the ones who will boldly lead us to explore a future tomorrow that we dream of today, a future boldly centered in Love?

Look to your left, look to your right, look at those other little squares on Zoom. We are your dreaming partners, we are your siblings in faith, we are your co-liberators. So may we be, and so may we build. Blessed be.