



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York

“Seeking Wholeness”

Sermon series part 4 of 5

Delivered 29 January 2023

Rev. Jen Raffensperger

“But the kind of community I learned about at Pendle Hill does not presume to do that discernment for us, as communities sometimes do. [...] Instead, a circle of trust holds us in a space where we can make our own discernments, in our own way and time, in the encouraging and challenging presence of other people.”

Last week, I was fortunate enough to attend a retreat with some of my colleagues from the Priestly-Kingsbury Chapter of the UU Ministers Association. The location for our retreat was that same [Pendle Hill](#), the intentional Quaker community and learning center in Wallingford, PA named by Parker Palmer in today’s reading. (Thanks, Lisa!) We are parish ministers and chaplains, we are full-time, part-time, and retired. We come from different generations, different economic backgrounds, different social locations. We are of different genders, of different sexual and relational orientations. What a group to exemplify “the encouraging and challenging presence of other people”!

While at Pendle Hill, I attended my first-ever Quaker meeting. In that silent space, I felt real peace, and real connection, even without words. When people did start to share their own few words of witness - those that Spirit called them to - it felt not like an interruption but an externalization of the work we were all doing inside. That balance - that Parker Palmer talks about and that Quaker meeting exemplifies - between the inner teacher and the necessity of examining the dictates of that teacher in community is at the heart of the work of the [Article II Study Commission](#) of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

This morning is my fourth in a series of five sermons on the ongoing work of this commission. If you are new here, and especially if you are new to Unitarian Universalism as a whole, this is a commission charged to study a portion of the bylaws of our Association of Congregations. (I'll also do a quick sidebar here to note that our past services are available both as video recordings, audio podcasts of the sermon, and the written text of the sermon - visit uucy.org and under the menu for "Worship & Events" select "[Past Services](#).") Back to the commission! The commission was charged to examine, study, and discern in conversation with many other Unitarian Universalists the current Article II of our bylaws, and to suggest any changes that might be called for that arose out of these conversations. This exercise is to be done routinely (as it says elsewhere in our bylaws!) - it's important to note that it is the act of examination that our bylaws call for, not the change itself. Even if the proposed revisions are ultimately not accepted in their current form, the value of the examination of the principles and purposes of our faith will be ongoing.

The conversations held by the Study Commission bring us back again to that dialogue - what does my inner teacher say? And how do others react when I externalize what I am receiving from that inner teacher?

Let's go back to the reading where Palmer talks about this specifically:

"The circles of trust I experienced at Pendle Hill are a rare form of community - one that supports rather than supplants the individual quest for integrity - that is rooted in two basic beliefs. First, we all have an inner teacher whose guidance is more reliable than anything we can get from a doctrine, ideology, collective belief system, institution, or leader. Second, we all need other people to invite, amplify, and help us discern the inner teacher's voice for at least three reasons:

- The journey toward inner truth is too taxing to be made solo: lacking support, the solitary traveler soon becomes weary or fearful and is likely to quit the road.

- The path is too deeply hidden to be traveled without company: finding our way involves clues that are subtle and sometimes misleading, requiring the kind of discernment that can happen only in dialogue.
- The destination is too daunting to be achieved alone: we need community to find the courage to venture into the alien lands to which the inner teacher may call us.”

I'd like to invite you all to think about the kind of cooperation we practiced during the Time for All Ages - the imaginary ball tossed around has a real effect on those who have agreed to the rules of the game, and so in essence we create a truth on which to focus our attention. If we each consider the voice of our own inner teacher and also bring it up for consideration by others, it gains real weight and heft. The act of personal discernment, in dialogue with others, is the sacred act at the heart of what at first glance sounds like a very bureaucratic process of examining our bylaws.

This morning, aware of our time (and impending fire drill!) I would like to share with you a few words from the [final report of the Article II study commission](#), just published last week.

“We recognize the fact the proposed version of Article II we have presented is indeed a significant departure from our current version, just as past changes to Article II were significant changes from their predecessors. The 1985 version which first introduced the Principles was a radical change from the Purposes and Objectives of the previous version. We are continuing in the line of proposing changes that fit the times in which we live. We fully expect that one day another Commission will review our work and significantly change it. We are writing this in pencil, not etching it in stone.

From the very beginning our goal was to listen to what Unitarian Universalists from all sectors of our faith communities felt and thought about the current Article II and what we should keep, what we should change and what we should add. We knew we were not writing this for ourselves alone, but for our larger community. We also knew that we would never write something that

everyone thought was perfect; perfection was not the goal. We knew that no matter what we produced there would be things people wished we had added, things people did not like, and things people appreciated. What we tried, and what we think we succeeded in doing, was to create an Article II that articulated our faith, today and in the near future.”

I'll conclude with sharing a portion of the update - that section that currently contains the Seven Principles, and the newly proposed Seven Values. Considering the words of the commission that I just shared with you, as you listen to the suggested revision, I invite you into a spirit of curiosity. What does your inner teacher say? We will continue to talk about this process as we move towards this year's General Assembly in Pittsburgh in June, when the first of two votes will be taken on this proposal. We'll continue to discern, together, what the best thing is our inner teachers may be calling us to, together.

“Section C-2.2. Values and Covenant.

As Unitarian Universalists, we covenant, congregation-to-congregation and through our association, to support and assist one another in our ministries. We draw from our heritages of freedom, reason, hope, and courage, building on the foundation of love.

Love is the power that holds us together and is at the center of our shared values. We are accountable to one another for doing the work of living our shared values through the spiritual discipline of Love.

Inseparable from one another, these shared values are:

Interdependence. We honor the interdependent web of all existence. We covenant to cherish Earth and all beings by creating and nurturing relationships of care and respect. With humility and reverence, we acknowledge our place in the great web of life, and we work to repair harm and damaged relationships.

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

We covenant to learn from one another in our free and responsible search for truth and meaning. We embrace our differences and commonalities with Love, curiosity, and respect.

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

We covenant to dismantle racism and all forms of systemic oppression. We support the use of inclusive democratic processes to make decisions.

Transformation. We adapt to the changing world.

We covenant to collectively transform and grow spiritually and ethically. Openness to change is fundamental to our Unitarian and Universalist heritages, never complete and never perfect.

Generosity. We cultivate a spirit of gratitude and hope.

We covenant to freely and compassionately share our faith, presence, and resources. Our generosity connects us to one another in relationships of interdependence and mutuality.

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

We covenant to use our time, wisdom, attention, and money to build and sustain fully accessible and inclusive communities.”

So may it be.