



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York

“Our Covenant, Our Promise”

Sermon series part 5 of 5

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Late in January of this year, I was on retreat with other ministers in our local chapter of the UU Ministers Association. Ministers can be pretty busy people, and it was lovely that so many of us could make time to learn and reflect together. I arrived a little late to our business meeting, since I had been teaching one of our new member classes on Zoom, and I settled into my seat next to the whiteboard. During the conversation, people kept making a joke that I clearly wasn't getting - they kept using the word “JETPIG” and laughing. Finally I said, “Hold on! What the heck is a ‘JETPIG’ and why are you talking about it so much?” They pointed to the whiteboard next to me, where they had written several things, but one of them was the list of Unitarian Universalist values as spelled out in the just-released report of the [Article 2 Study Commission](#). The list spelled out:

Justice

Equity

Transformation

Pluralism

Interdependence

Generosity

And off to the right of this list of words was the word LOVE written in all capitals and circled.

We got very excited about this list, and about the mnemonic device to remember them - not just because the visual of a JETPIG (is that a jet shaped like a pig? A pig wearing a jetpack?) in orbit around a center labeled "LOVE" was fun to think about, but because this was a big deal. This was the culmination of years of work on behalf of the Article 2 Study Commission and thousands of Unitarian Universalists who sat for interviews and filled out response questionnaires all serving the radical end of possibly re-writing that part of our bylaws that are at the heart of our faith.

This is the fifth and final of my five-part sermon series on the work of the Article 2 Study Commission, all leading up to the initial vote on the proposed revisions - with possible amendments - this June at the annual General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, held close by this year in Pittsburgh.

If it's such a big deal, why were a bunch of ministers laughing about it? I can only answer for myself, but it felt exciting. It felt like an invitation to engage with this important work on a really human level. What would it mean in the day-to-day life of Unitarian Universalists if we updated the language of Article II of our Bylaws, where the current language contains our beloved Seven Principles and Six Sources?

Throughout the course of this series, we have talked about what it means to co-create our Living Tradition together - it is an audacious idea for a faith tradition to reexamine those ideas at its very center. We've also talked about our shared values - how we define them and how we live them in the world. That was the second part, and by then we had the first draft of the Commission's report. In the third part, we talked about being and belonging - about what it means to us when we call ourselves Unitarian Universalists, and what it means to us to be part of a faith community within this tradition. And in the fourth part of the series, we talked about why it is important to do deep self-examination within that faith community and not just on one's own. The journey to truth is too long, and too challenging, to undertake alone. We must

listen to our inner teacher but we must also find a community of trust where we can invite discourse on how we are to navigate what we are called to do.

It is this valuable and challenging work of community that brings us to today's reading. This reading is part of a [sermon](#) delivered at General Assembly in Kansas City, Missouri in June of 2018 by the Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt. At the time, Rev. Betancourt was concluding a one-year shared interim presidency of the UUA that came at a time of turmoil in our Association. This year, Rev. Betancourt is running unopposed for a full six-year term as President of the UUA. Her shared leadership in this time of change can serve as a model to us as we consider this proposed change to the way we talk about the heart of our faith tradition. Let's return to this part of our reading:

“The thing is, I believe in our callings. Yes, many of us are called to professional religious leadership. We agree to be there in the difficult moments, and in the successes and celebrations, and we promise to wrestle and show up even as our hearts are breaking. But we also promise to understand that every member and friend of a Unitarian Universalist community is also there by calling. We are called, collectively, to this great experiment in communal salvation. Whether we arrived in this faith by birth or by choice, our everyday expression of our values in the world matters.”

Our everyday expression of our values in the world matters.

In Unitarian Universalism, we operate under the system of congregational polity, which essentially means that each congregation is self-governing, that we have no presbyters or council of elders or bishopric presiding over the faith life of our communities. This in itself is an audacious experiment. And then for us to openly acknowledge in our bylaws that those same bylaws themselves need to be returned to on a regular basis, that it is a deep act of faith to question our own tradition, to ask ourselves hard questions over and over again - that truly is “a great experiment in communal salvation.”

It's an experiment but it is not purely theoretical. Earlier this month our current President, the Rev. Susan Frederick Gray, issued an [impassioned statement](#) responding to the increased legislative attacks on trans and nonbinary kids and the whole LGBTQIA+ community across the country. The statement reads in part, "As progressive people of faith, we affirm and remain in solidarity with trans and nonbinary+ people because this is a fight for everyone's humanity. We must actively work to create a society where trans children can be free to be who they are and fully live into their identity. And we must strengthen our partnerships across faith communities and with grassroots partners to build networks of safety and care while mobilizing for change that supports a more just, equal, and loving society."

We are called to this kind of support pastorally and personally, we are called to consider the values at the heart of our faith and to act on them in the ways that we can.

Our newly proposed language puts LOVE at the center not because it is easy - love is one of those words that can mean many things to many people. But at the heart of the other six values - Justice, Equity, Transformation, Pluralism, Interdependence, Generosity - we know that love calls us to be in communities of faith and of action with one another even when there is risk. "We agree to be there in the difficult moments, and in the successes and celebrations, and we promise to wrestle and show up even as our hearts are breaking."

To stay in the work even when it is hard - this is a thing I feel we need to remind ourselves about again and again. But I also wanted to start with a story of laughter and joy, because those celebrations are a part of it too. Joy is an act of resistance, as poet Toi Derricotte reminds us, and it is my hope that you feel a sense of curiosity and even joy about what the revised Article II is calling us to.

I am going to share with you right now the [specific part](#) of the proposed revision where these values are articulated. We will be making a webpage where we will put a number of related resources, including the report, so you

can spend some time with them yourself, but I wanted to make sure we listened to this language again, 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.”

The report itself features a lovely graphic which suggests a flower, with love at the heart (and the image of our flaming chalice) and the other six values arrayed like petals around it. Whether that image resonates with you, or you like me keep thinking of that little jetpig circling around planet Love, I want you to remember most that you are called to this faith. You are called to examine and question and to engage with open-heartedness in this hurting world. Or to return to the words from our Chalice Lighting, from dedicated religious professional and candidate for ministry Adrian Graham,

“We are held and carried from day to day, week to week, in the shining of the light.

This flame is mine, as well as yours.

We are brought together on this day, called to growth, to expansion, within its glow.

What does your heart know while beholding this holy fire?”

What does your heart know while beholding this holy fire? What is the work ahead? How can we engage that work with joy? We will only answer these questions together. I am glad to have each of you as companions on this journey. May our way be blessed and may we continue to grow and explore, with love ever at the center.

So may it be.