



For all that is our life

Rev. Dr. Susan Suchocki Brown

Sermon November 13, 2016

For all that is our life, the good, the bad, the ugly, the agreeable, the disagreeable, the easy, the hard, the soothing, the challenging, all of it, every bit of it; that is our life - this is what we have and it is up to us to make and do the most with it. This past week, more than ever, has made it clear to me that we are being called to different times and to use different skills.

There is no better time than now to tap into the saving message of Unitarian Universalism and especially the saving message of 'Standing on the side of love.' It matters not how you voted last week, because the reality is that when we woke up on the day after [that election] our perception of the world had to have shifted. I want to read parts of a note sent from Rev. Sue Phillips who is the UUA regional lead staff person. She writes:

Dear ones,

However, each of us voted on November 8, we woke up together on November 9 to a blazing moment of clarity in which we see our fractured nation as it truly is: torn by political polarization and wracked by economic alienation.

It will be tempting to hunker down in the face of these divisions, to retreat into spaces where we might be soothed; our realities affirmed and unchallenged.

Those of us who are mourning must, of course, grieve. But in our grieving, we must not hide, or we risk being unfaithful to the call at the very center of Unitarian Universalism: to co-create a world of love and justice. The currency

of this call is not relationships with like-minded people in like-minded places but compassion, grace, and love in the midst of every kind of difference.

Creating beloved community is messy, gritty, fearsome, and hard. This is the time we have been practicing for.

The only faithful response to this moment of extraordinary division is to show ourselves and our communities that another way is possible. The antidote to polarizing fear is love. The antidote to alienating isolation is connection. My friends, we were made for this work. And now we have to actually do it.

In faith,



Rev. Sue Phillips
New England Regional Lead”

It would be too easy for us to stand only on one side or the other, to find people who share our visions or common thoughts and to gather into those cliques but we know that cliques can kill and maim groups. Isn't it true that we have worked very hard in this congregation to break down those cliques? You know what it feels like to be on the outside of a group. So, our call is to stand not on a side but in a place of centered and grounded beingness to be bridges between, to be conduits for conversations, to be avenues broad and wide enough to lead to a common way. What is that common way? Love, equality, and justice must be the common core and our common way.

One of my criticism of the UUA's campaign "standing on the side of love" was and continues to be the ability for it to be a polarizing message, with the possibility of establishing sides, and to say I am standing on the side of love and you are not. I know my own propensity for too quickly dismissing the thoughts and opinions of those who have opposing political, religious, social views than mine. I have to stop that. I must now understand that I have not been doing enough listening to the deep concerns, fears and anxieties that a huge number of people have and that now assume will be attended too and taken care of. And at the same time, I must develop other skills so that negativity, bigotry, lack of respect and lack of compassion, abuse of privilege and position aren't allowed to

gain hold. Unfortunately, I have lived in a UU, maybe even a religious bubble, of assuming that everyone really at their core feels compassion toward the marginalized and the oppressed. I might have to adjust my thinking that overall there are feelings of good will toward others. At my peril, it is more important than ever, that I learn to listen to hard to digest words from those I disagree with. The reality is that no matter the outcome of the election we are living in a world that is fearful and in need of justice speaking, justice seeking, love making people. That would, could and dare I say must be us.

The poet Alta, in a reading I often use about joining the church writes "loving your neighbor is all very fine when you have nice neighbors. this is why people chose the town they live in. we all want nice neighbors. It's the folks in the next town who are the bad guys... funny how essays on politics, on war and peace seem to talk about love.

" [56- 57] 2:7 (Excerpt)

Love, that is what I am talking about this morning and all the gifts of life must now include and be broadened beyond my comfort level. I will need to develop my community organizing skills so that when and or if the least of these, as the bible story tells us, is beginning to be affected I can step in positively and helpfully. I was telling my spouse and a couple of people the other day that it is time to bring back the non-violent training schools.

I am reminded of the Mississippi Summer Project that occurred in 1964. It was and became a key initiative in the non-violent Civil Rights movement. It was organized by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee or SNCC, NAACP, and CORE or Congress for racial equality. They along with the National Council of Churches provided for over 1200 students to go to Mississippi to organize freedom schools and to support voter registration. Three of those students were Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman and James Chaney who disappeared while out doing their work and whose murdered bodies were found 6 weeks later. But my point is not just to speak to a system that did not want to change but more importantly to talk about the "freedom schools" and the community organizing that was taught and the foundation of them was nonviolent organizing. A freedom school did many things. It taught those who were wanting to register to vote what they would need to be able to do so and importantly it taught those who came to Mississippi how to help the process so that the most number of blacks could register.

Let's be open and honest here, the majority of those who responded were kind hearted white liberals whose passion for equality needed to be tempered and realigned so they could act in ways to affect the biggest change. Who could not

get mad when they heard that of all eligible black voters in Mississippi only 6% were registered? But the point is not to call out and name the obvious but to organize to be part of the solution. So, when those who wanted to be part of freedom school and voter registration through the Mississippi Summer project - the first order of business was to teach non-violent protest, to teach how to listen to those with another point of view, to learn how to be and ally and partner with like-minded folk - to be stronger together, to maintain a spiritual religious center to be effective bridges and avenues for change, to operate out of an understanding of a culture, and at a time when many were feeling very threatened and afraid. It doesn't escape my mind that this is parallel to where we are now and so my idea of needing training in non-violent organizing and positive community organizing is something I think we need thing.

An interesting side note is that three women were at the core of the Mississippi Summer project as Field directors and trainers- Gwendolyn Zohara Simmons, Doris Adeline Derby and Ruby Nells Sales not only organized and taught at the Mississippi Summer Project but they also had to confront the sexism, and sexual harassment that was rampant within the structure, - I hope if you are interested you will do more research about these women and the project.

However, my point is that community organizing is a skill that can be learned, and community organizing involves a commitment to and with others, and community organizing to be effective requires that we, as white liberals listen to what the wishes, desires and needs of those in lesser positions of power and privilege.

For all that is our life is not just roses and lollipops but it is challenging, trying, tough situations and times too. However, Sue Phillips is correct this is what we have been practicing for. This is what Unitarian Universalism is at its best; a religion that offers responses to all that life throws at us. I pray that we continue to be the welcoming and attentive community that we say we are and that we continue to be welcoming and attentive in all our actions in and out of this sacred building. ⁱ

ⁱ Cries of the Spirit. Editor Marilyn Sewell Beacon Press
The Selma Awakening Mark Morrison Reed
Wikipedia and Black History web site