

Unitarian Universalists & Christianity in the Days of Donald Trump
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March 6, 2016
Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the Grand Valley

Opening Words:

*“First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Socialist.
Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Trade Unionist.
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.”*
Pastor Martin Neimoller

Meditation:

"The great inspiration of the Buddha's teaching is that we must each take ultimate responsibility for the quality of our lives. Given certain volitional actions, certain results will follow. When we understand that our lives are the unfolding of karmic law, that we are the heirs to our own deeds, then there grows in us a deepening sense of responsibility for how we live, the choices we make, and the actions we undertake." Jack Kornfield

Sermon:

Imagine having this conversation with your son or daughter. Would you want them to be friends with this type of person?

Son: Mom, we have a new class president.

Mom: Great! How did he get elected?

Son: Well, he started his campaign by making fun of the unpopular girls. He was making fun of one of the girls in the school by calling her a “fat pig.”

Mom: That’s horrible.

Son: Yep. A pretty girl stood up for the fat girl.

Mom: That’s good.

Son: Yes. But he told all the guys that she was just on her period and all his friends laughed.

Mom: That’s awful.

Son: Yes. The kid in the wheel chair said he didn’t think it was funny, so he called him a “loser who just sits around all day.”

Mom: That wasn't nice.

Son: No, and then he called another kid's dad a "loser" for getting injured in the Iraqi war.

Mom: Did the rest of the kids stand up and tell him to be quiet?

Son: Some of the kids laughed and started making fun of the Mexican kids. He said that was okay because the Mexican kids didn't belong here anyways. He called them drug addicts and rapists.

Mom: Did you tell the principal?

Son: Yes. The administration didn't know what to do. They said his family gives a lot of money to the school so he can say whatever he wants. Now he is the class president.

Good thing this is all theoretical, right????

Today we are talking about responsibility.

As a leader, as a minister it is my responsibility to use my voice.

It is my responsibility to speak out. You will never hear me up here telling you who to vote for.

But, it is also my responsibility as a faith leader to understand human nature; to study emotional systems; to analyze things from ethical and theological perspectives.

I believe it is the responsibility of faith leaders to be a moral voice; to be the leaders during dark and scary times. We are the people who have to see the light, to point to the light to know that there is light in the darkness.

As such, we cannot be silent.

One of my responsibilities as a UU minister is to stand within our theological grounding.

I am beginning to feel like it is our responsibility as Unitarian Universalists to reengage with our Christian heritage. I feel like it is so critical at this point in time because we have abdicated our responsibility.

We have allowed Christianity to be co-opted. We have stood by silently and let the religious right co-opt our faith, redefine it, twist it into something that is so clearly unrecognizable.

We have taken their religious language, said we didn't agree with it and walked away.

Today we are seeing what that has cost us. It has cost us our religious voice.

We are now watching while a bully is taking over the political process with a fake mask while the so called Christians are waving their palm leaves and cheering.

So, it is my responsibility to say as Unitarian Universalists “it is time.”

It is time for us to use our voices. It is time for us to get centered in our principles, stand in our truth, lock arms with other people of faith and be the firewall. NOW is the time.

If we wait very much longer it will be too late.

As Unitarian Universalists it is time for us to reclaim Jesus. It is time for us to understand our Christian heritage. It is time for us to be the moral leaders, demonstrating what a “Christian nation” should look like, because it sure doesn’t look like what we are seeing from prominent evangelical voices.

One of the first things that we must do is take the time to understand what is happening.

One of the best explanations I have come across to date is an article entitled “The Rise of American Authoritarianism” by Amanda Taub (March 1, 2016) Ms. Taub takes an in depth look at what is the underlying motivation for the rise of a political figure such as Donald Trump.

“Last September, a PhD student at the University of Massachusetts Amherst named Matthew MacWilliams realized that his dissertation research might hold the answer to not just one but all three of these mysteries.

MacWilliams studies authoritarianism — not actual dictators, but rather a psychological profile of individual voters that is characterized by a desire for order and a fear of outsiders. People who score high in authoritarianism, when they feel threatened, look for strong leaders who promise to take whatever action necessary to protect them from outsiders and prevent the changes they fear.” (Amanda Taub, the Rise of American Authoritarianism <http://www.vox.com/2016/3/1/11127424/trump-authoritarianism>)

If you think about it, this makes sense. Many of these Evangelical churches are top down. There is a dynamic leader at the top, the people are told what to believe, what to think, and how to act. It makes sense that they would feel comforted by a politician who is willing to do the same, even if that politician’s policies run counter to the faith that they pretend to espouse. Security & order must come first.

One of the reasons that in general UU’s are immune to this is because of our collective and individual instinctive desire to rebel against authoritarianism. It is in

our theological DNA.

And, I believe it is that very DNA that is needed today.

D. H. Lawrence, a famous British novelist wrote, “A person has no religion who has not slowly and painfully gathered one together, adding to it, shaping it; and ones religion is never complete and final, it seems, but must always be undergoing modification.” (A Chosen Faith p.10)

In other words, we must not take any belief for granted. We must be in relationship with our faith and our beliefs. They are never fixed. As we grow and learn our faith should expand and mature.

John Murray an early American Universalist, when countering the Calvinism of the time argued that, “no one could be excommunicated except for the ‘death of goodness in one’s own breast.’” (A Chosen Faith p. 28)

Once again, a call for us to take personal responsibility for our faith. We cannot just let somebody else give us our moral compass.

Let us look at Thomas Jefferson who said of Jesus “He lived in such a way that his life proved to be worth dying for.” (A Chosen Faith p. 6)

This is the Jesus of our Unitarian and Universalist tradition. A person living his life in a way that proved worth dying for. This is our theological heritage. This is the voice that we must find in the public market place of political and theological thought.

We can no longer remain silent.

Are we doing that? Are we living in a way that is proving to be worth dying for? Are we raising our voices? Are we standing in our truth? Are we willing to risk the comfort of our lives to stand in principle?

I must make clear that we are not doing this alone. There are many Christian leaders who are standing up and speaking out. Yesterday I spent the morning with other faith communities and a number of you to talk about power dynamics in the Valley; where we have power both as individuals and faith communities.

Yes, other Christians do see it. Christian voices are speaking out. Even Evangelical voices are beginning to speak out. But we must not let them stand alone. We must not be silent while they speak out. We must come together as people of faith as happened in the World Parliament of Religions that Rhonda, Todd, Lance & Peg talked about last week.

And so, I have written this open letter to the Evangelicals in our community.

Dear Evangelical Brothers and Sisters,

Please help me. I am confused. I am a Unitarian Universalist minister. So, I understand that often times we are on the opposite ends of the theological spectrum. I'm sure most of the time we have different opinions on abortion and gay marriage. But, I have to admit I've always felt like when it really comes the inner core of love we are on the same side.

My Unitarian Universalist heritage claims Jesus. In fact contrary to the way we are often perceived we have never rejected Jesus. We love him. We love his teachings. We model our faith after his role model. So, I have always felt connected to you. I guess I have always believed that when push comes to shove we would both have Jesus' back.

The problem is I don't feel like you have Jesus' back any more. I don't understand how you are coming out in droves to support a man who so clearly does not understand Jesus or his teachings. In fact, you support a man who appears not to recognize Jesus at all.

Dear Christian neighbors, how in the name of Jesus do you turn a blind eye to the insults?

How is it that you let the rich kid bully, charge through the school making fun of everybody in his path and pushing them out of the way while you stand along side the lockers and cheer?

Would you cheer while the captain of the football team mocks the kid with Cerebral Palsy? Would you stand by and cheer while the captain of the football team takes the "geek" and shoves him in the locker? Would you stand by and cheer when he tells all of the Mexican kids to leave because this school is only for "whites" and if they don't leave immediately you will get the rest of your team to forcibly throw them out of your school?

If you would not stand by in the name of Jesus and allow your children to behave that way how in the world do you gather in droves to support a man who is doing the same thing on the world stage?

Do you not see the danger? Do you not understand the dynamics?

I just don't understand how during this Lenten season you have forsaken Jesus and instead chosen Donald Trump as your savior. Heaven help us.

*And then a few days later, I came across this article entitled *The Trump Problem, Why this Muslim is praying for a Christian Nation*. In it, Charles Turner, a Muslim American writes:*

“With Trump’s recent victories in bastion states of Christianity, I suspect that Muslims are starting to wonder if Evangelicals are even aware of the ethical principles Jesus espoused.

While the Republican Party has always had a questionable relationship with Christianity, the current swell of support behind Donald Trump is even more confusing.

Trump seems to embody literally no inkling of Christian values. He blatantly disavowed the practice of seeking forgiveness, seems to hold no regard for the institution of marriage, and appears completely oblivious of the virtues of humility and modesty. In speaking at Liberty University, one of the largest Christian institutions in the United States, Trump was even incapable of properly reciting a verse from the Bible without giving away the fact he has never truly engaged with the faith on his own.

The reality is that Trump is closer to the living embodiment of Pharaoh than of Jesus Christ.” (<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/altmuslim/2016/03/the-trump-problem-why-this-muslim-is-praying-for-a-christian-america/>)

Let us end today with Turner’s “Christian” prayer from the heart of an American Muslim.

“So as the ‘Trump train’ continues to plow across primary states and through our great American values, I find myself offering a prayer for our country. Whereas the idea of a Christian America was used to intimidate Muslims before, let it now be a rallying cry for those who still seek a nation built upon moral foundations. Let us pray:

I pray for a nation that is welcoming and accepting of all.

I pray for a nation that opens its doors to the victims of war and oppression and does not close them in the face of fear bigotry.

I pray for a nation that extends hands and builds bridges, not a nation that constructs walls and turns away the needy

I pray for a nation that sees the good in all people. I pray for a nation that acknowledges the Good Samaritan where they are, be they the immigrant working long and hard to provide for their family or the Muslim confronting extremism head-on in their own houses of worship.

I pray for a nation that spreads messages of peace and positivity, and not for a nation that constructs narratives of lies and slanders against others of different races, nationalities, and religions.

I pray for a nation that puts virtue and morality before national interest and economic prosperity. I pray for a nation that seeks to protect the weak for the sake of good, not a nation that invades the rich for the sake of greed. I pray for a nation that delivers food rather than arms, and promotes democracy over dictatorship.

I pray for a nation that seeks to live in the virtues of Christ. If our elected officials continue to claim that our nation was built upon Judeo-Christian foundations, then I pray for a truly Christian America.

I pray this as a Muslim. I pray this as an American.
Amen.” (<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/altmuslim/2016/03/the-trump-problem-why-this-muslim-is-praying-for-a-christian-america/>)

Enough said.