

Sermon – Faith in Action

February 19, 2006

I have a friend Rosemary Chinnici who is a Roman Catholic nun in the religious order of the Sisters of Loretto. She is a member of the Unitarian Universalist Trauma Response ministry board. After Hurricane Katrina we were having one of those important conversations about life and life changing events. Many of our team had gone to New Orleans, Texas and Mississippi to help and aid. We were talking about putting our faith into action, about bringing hope, compassion and love to those who were in the midst of suffering. We were talking about how many, both within our group and as was reported to them, had said that their faith in the government was seriously eroded, or how their faith in God was destroyed, or conversely how their faith in humanity was renewed. Suddenly, both Rosemary and I looked at one another and said, “You know what I don’t have faith.” And it is true I do not have faith. I don’t really have faith in what some call God, I don’t really have faith in the government or even in the future. Then Rosemary shared a learning she had come to about that well known biblical statement from 1st Corinthians Verse 13- “Now, faith hope and love abide these three but the greatest of these is love”. She said she is convinced that the world is full of those who have either an abundance of faith, and those who have an abundance of hope, or those who have an abundance of love but that it is the rare person who holds all three in abundance. Rather she said what matters is how we act with that which we have and that we bring that gift into the world. So I am a person of hope not faith. Marguerite is one of those who has faith and there are many of you here who do too, but that isn’t me, I don’t have faith. I do my acts of compassion and care, and I try to live out my values because of hope. To be sure I have love and compassion but this is not my primary motivation for acting out my Unitarian Universalist principles-hope is.

So let me talk about hope a bit. Hope is grounded in the ideal, the possible, the potential. “If hope is to serve any useful function in our lives, it must

be rooted in an understanding of the actual tendencies that move our world.”¹
wrote Richard Lichtman, a radical philosopher, therapist, humanist.

I can get into that thinking about hope. Like Pandora, who is both the created and the creator, hope allows me to enter into the stream of life and do what I can to assist, as Zygmunt Bauman, a professor of Sociology from the University of Leeds shared, in the survival and welfare of each and every member of the community.²

In my way of thinking hope does not deny despair, does not ignore pain, struggle or suffering, but embraces it and becomes touched by it and acts in a way that brings relief. Hope is with the suffering, hope moves into the catastrophe and this movement into the suffering, the pain, the struggle is how I put my love for humanity in action.

I would like to give you an example, from a person I was talking with the other day, of how hope works and is active. A young man, whom I know and greatly admire, has hope for his future in a creative venture. Through struggles and long years he has never given up this vision. He was working in a job that was okay but not his passion. Recently changes in the company came about that would lead to lay-offs. He asked his manager if he took a lay off would someone's job be salvaged. When he found out that his leaving would save someone else's job he asked to be the one to be laid off. It is because of his hope for his creative venture and his hope for the future that he was able to engage in the messiness of life, to take the risk, and the loss and hope for the fulfillment of his dreams and to sacrifice the now, with hope for later . That to me is hope/ faith in action.

The story of Pandora entering into the world of humanness has two versions. The one that most of us were brought up on and that I shared this morning, is where she was sent to bring disorder and disaster to humans by a zealous and controlling Jupiter/Zeus, who wanted to be in command of humans.

¹ The Politics of Hope , Richard Lichtman, Tikkun Vol. 19, No 6 P 59

² *To Hope is Human.* Zygmunt Bauman Tikkun Vol. 19 No. 6 p 64.

The other, older and less disparaging of female's story is about Pandora who brought herb and plant seeds to relieve disease, who brought trees, vines and fruit to sustain humans during difficult times, who brought courage, loving kindness, strength, wonder, and curiosity to sustain and tighten the bonds of community. Yet in neither story did Pandora try to ignore the reality that disease, death, destruction, devastation were also part of creation. She always held hope in the central part of her being for she knew that as long as she had curiosity coupled with hope life would not just survive but would thrive.

At an after sermon talk back a few weeks ago Maryanne Cleary articulated one of the most brilliant explanations for why we Unitarian Universalists do what we do in and for the world. I paraphrase her thoughts, our personal experiences shape our perspectives on life (theology/philosophy/world view..). Our personal connection with these experiences make us want to share them with others and when we do that the connections emanate outward. The more people you share yourself (your experiences, views etc) with the more there is an increase in the life of the community (more sharing - more caring). So outreach is an outgrowth of sharing of personal experience and insight. Maryanne may I add to your statement? For me it is hope, which allows us/ me to explore my inward being and to share with others.

Let's all talk about this important of subjects-Faith, hope and love.

Blessed be.