

A Daily UU

February 3, 2008

February is the month I almost became a permanent and rabid Atheist. I am sure that you have had times in your life when being an Atheist seemed the most logical and realistic response to living or thinking about your life, haven't you? February is a month when a lot of bad stuff has happened in my life, loss more than I thought possible to bear- my sister and my father, a failed marriage that began in February, some past, nasty health issues and a ground hog named Punxsutawney Phil who, yesterday and more often than not doesn't want to emerge for another six weeks.

If life was this hard and February the cruelest month, then what could, should and why would I even want to know about religion, practice a religion and think about the thing called God, become a minister.

Reminds me of a poem by Rev. Francis Anderson, "he wasn't much on religion," he said. Seemed like a crutch to him; instead

He'd stand on his own... go it alone;
Because the whole thing is all in the head:
So he drank in of beauty, but couldn't share it...
And seized on truth but couldn't swear it...
Craved for love, but couldn't spare it...
All in his head, he couldn't bear it...
And only when his heart cried out,
Did he find what religion was all about. ¹

I wonder, if that is after all what religion is, a crying out for truth, justice, beauty, love, and finding a way to make it from one day to the

¹ Poetic Moments: A Retrospective Francis Anderson, Jr p31

next. I think we might be onto something about being a daily UU, about surviving too.

I hope it doesn't upset you too much that a minister, this minister who is supposed to "know" and I use that word in quotes, and your minister who is supposed to have come to terms with that which is the divine has had times and still has times of great unbelief.

I do believe however that I am a Unitarian Universalist because of times of those times of disbelief, times of spiritual crisis, times of troubles. No other religion, or philosophy, or spiritual practice makes sense to my heart, mind and soul. No other religion can provide answers for why bad things happen, but Unitarian Universalism can and does provide me with a framework and a community of like minded thinkers, believers who help me through those times.

Yesterday the paper did a report on how clergy were going to use the Super Bowl for sermon fodder for today's sermon. I am going to resist the urge to launch into Super Bowl metaphors about overcoming all odds, of teaming up so well that a winning community has been made, of striving for perfection, or of the power of the Super Bowl to take one's mind off of personal problems at least for a few hours. I am instead going to bring us back to what it is that unites our Unitarian Universalist community, our church and hopefully that which helps us live life healthily, happily and contentedly day by day; by using our principles and purposes.

Instead of taking the 7 principles line by line which I think makes them more a litany than a practical way to view them, I want us to clump some of them together. I think this gives us the rubric to becoming a daily UU.

Let's start with a goal, a mission, something to sink our teeth into. Of course it is lofty, goals should be. It is the goal of forming, building

and maintaining a world community where peace, liberty and justice are the key values. If peace, not necessarily meaning the absence of conflict, but rather meaning the successful resolution of conflict- through speaking lovingly, caring deeply enough to not move out of relationship, of sometimes finding a middle way, and sometimes by letting other's opinions, passions and perspectives be in the forefront, even though we might have a different view, if peace can be a goal then justice and liberty will follow.

Not liberty to do what ever one wants but liberty to think widely and wildly. Not like the young woman who was stopped at an airline gate because her pants were flashing red and yellow lights and security thought these to be confusing to other passengers and crew, she then filed a civil rights suit that her right to free expression had been hampered. Now I have nothing against flashy flashing pants but what I suspect was inherent in the security guards stopping her is the concept of respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. Wearing flashing pants that interfere with safety is not expressing liberty it is imposing one's self interest on others. Being a daily UU requires that we ask ourselves questions like - when I want to do a certain act, will it be to the betterment of my life, the betterment of my family, church, society at large. Questions like- if I were to act in a way that could bring peace and justice to the areas that I have control over what could I do? Questions like- if we are part of an interdependent web how do I chose to live my life so that it enhances these interconnections with all beings.

So being a daily UU doesn't require having a specific belief system in some God-like figure, it doesn't require that we pledge a certain creed or profess a certain faith statement but it is none the less a lot of work, mentally and physically and spiritually. It requires self awareness, being

conscious of others around us, a willingness to make a commitment and a motivation to leave the world a bit better than we found it.

Of course we have as a cornerstone the first principle stated as to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person. Yet if I were to re-write the principles I would not put this principle in the first place. Of course it is important to honor and recognize all people, each person is sacred, each life is sacred in its own right. Instead I think I would put this principle after, the second and third principles which state: Justice, equity and compassion, in human relations and acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations, through a free and responsible search for truth and meaning.

The truth is that no matter what trials, troubles, joys and delights life has brought me those experiences I have felt most deeply have been because I was in relationships with others. In relationships with others when justice, equity and compassion were not shown and blessedly at times when these were. My spiritual growth came about because I was willing to be in relationship, willing to search for meaning, willing to hear truths, willing to know that joined with others in a worshipping congregation that it is okay to express deep doubts, faltering belief, or that sense of overwhelming and tremendous awe and mystery of the transcendent spirit. Interestingly enough, the times that I was ready to claim that I was an atheist were listened to by my home congregation, by my childhood minister, by those who cared for me and who said no matter what you believe or don't believe we are here for you. The inspiration that I got came through the willingness of those who cared for me and the larger world they stood up to injustice, they confronted hate, they confronted evil and taught me that the power of loving my

neighbor as myself was really all that is required. Oh and they added you probably won't feel like an Atheist every day and that's okay.

So a daily UU means that I accept myself as I am, striving to be better day by day. It means that I exercise my mind, my spirit and find purpose and meaning in living. It means too that I use my conscience and that I develop a sense of right and wrong that I can also hold others accountable for, this is played out in the use of the democratic process within our congregation and in society at large. I will vote on Super Tuesday, I will vote during the election, I will inform myself about the local, national politicians and I will express my opinions based on my daily use of our UU principles.

So I want to tell you that right now and today I am not an Atheist, probably more a humanist theist. By this I mean that I think that humans are wonderful and the most fascinating creatures on this earth and I think that some force, some essence is within, around and beside us to sustain, inspire and deepen our understanding of life.

What do you think/feel/know? I am always available to hear you.
Blessed be