

I is for Intentionality

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By Glenn King

A is for amount.

Typically, the first sermon of canvass season is known as “The sermon on the amount”. I trust that those who attended last night’s canvass kickoff dinner would find such a sermon redundant. So I will pass on this, ...sort of.

Nevertheless, A is for amount.

B is for beloved community.

Martin Luther King popularized the phrase, the beloved community, as a more inclusive way of speaking about the Commonwealth or Kingdom of God about which Jesus preached. I see it as a symbol of a vision of human sisterhood and brotherhood transcending every difference of race, class, creed, ability, disability, or sexual orientation.

Now I know that for some, Jesus, Kingdom of God, Kingdom of heaven carry baggage. Some imagine this as a bright place in the sky with pearly gates; a place you go when you die. But Jesus himself dispels that vision. Reading from Luke Chapter 17

And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.

The kingdom of God is within you. Now the word translated as “within” in that statement can also be translated as “among”. I love that ambiguity. the kingdom of God is within or among you. To me it is not ambiguous at all.

Not only is the kingdom of god or the beloved community within you, it is among you. It is within you because each and every one of you carries

the spark of the divine. It will display in different ways, and different voices. But it is there.

So if the spark of the divine is in everyone, are we not called to recognize that spark not only in ourselves, but in everyone? That is how the “within you” becomes the “among you”. That is how community becomes beloved community. You not only seek to nurture that of god within you, but that of god among you.

To exercise beloved community, after the service, find someone and tell them what you appreciate about them. Look particularly for that person standing off to the side, to whom no one is talking. Or look for someone who you may have unintentionally hurt lately. They might need your help in finding god within them.

It is my belief that we as a Unitarian Universalist church are called to model a beloved community. We are uniquely positioned to do that. We have no creedal expectations. Where there is danger in our faith is when love of self overpowers love of community.

I'll end this section with a Sufi saying that I always use at weddings. “You think that because you know one that you also know two because one and one make two. But you must also know and.”

B is for beloved community.

C is for covenant.

I've got to tell you that I did not get covenant until I went to Div School. But I hope that long after I am gone you will be examining and learning about covenant. A covenant is a sacred promise made in public before the people and the divine.

Covenant has played an important role in Unitarian Universalism and deserves deep study. The original town churches in Massachusetts were covenantal congregations. The church covenants were not so much

doctrinal statements, but statements about how the members of the church agreed or covenanted to live together.

One would join the church by “owning” the covenant and one was bound by that promise until one requested to be removed. “Signing the book” the term we use to mean joining was actually signing one’s name to the covenant and promising to live by its precepts.

As assorted religious revivals swung through, Christian doctrinal statements were added to covenants. This church’s 1743 covenant was written in the middle of a great revival ...and it shows. There is a clear mixture of belief and pure covenant or how we will be together.

The second covenant of this church got very much into belief. Today’s covenant or purpose statement, I would not call a covenant at all. It is a statement of who we believe ourselves to be. It is not a statement of how we promise to live together.

You are not alone; Many churches have no covenant at all. I found one of the best readings about covenant in the recent Commission on Appraisal report “Engaging our theological diversity”

“Mutual promises flow from a shared covenant and draw Unitarian Universalists closer to our unifying core than individual claims can manage. Unitarian Universalism summons us to “pledge our troth” to one another, forging our individual religious journeys together. Promises must be risked openly and publicly, unlike beliefs, which can be held in the privacy of one’s own soul. Promises are fulfilled only in communal life. Promises require companions and signal institutional allegiance. Promises remind us that we are connected and beholden to sisters and brothers in our chosen faith. We are spiritual kin, bound together in the interdependent web. Promises support partnerships through fair and foul weather. Promises foster and sustain beloved communities.

C is for covenant

D is for “Don’t know”

One of the marvelous things about a non-creedal faith is that we can say confidently “I don’t Know.” I do not know if there is an afterlife. I do not know the nature of god. I can sense that there is a divine power, but I do not know for certain that there is a god. Even those things of which I am certain today, I don’t know if I will hold them true ten years from now. I do know that we are ever changing, growing and evolving. So comfort with uncertainty can be a useful attribute.

D is for “Don’t know”

E is for enigma

I’ll let you figure that one out.

E is for enigma

F is for faith

Unitarian Universalism has been described as a chosen faith. Most modern UUs, like me, were raised in another tradition. Uncomfortable in the doctrine or tradition of our birth faith Unitarian Universalism at its best fulfills Jesus’ call. “Come unto me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

F is for our chosen Faith

G is for the G word.

Spirit of life, You of many names, Divine spirit, Holy One, Spirit of Love. Good grief, can we just say it?

G is for God

H is for Hope

Life is a tightrope walk between hope and fear. May we all keep me from falling on the side of fear.

H is for Hope

I is for Intentionality.

Finally we get to the title of the sermon. And in a way, that is what I've been talking about all along. Intentionality, for me, means being aware of how any action can affect the broader community for good or ill. Intentional living is not easy and can involve sacrifice. I certainly haven't perfected it.

But if our principles mean anything, then they must be held close to the heart and lived and perfected daily. One of the things I do for fun is translate old statements with outmoded concepts into a more modern idiom. I've been working on the 1743 covenant and here is what it said originally:

“Declaring our hearty belief of the Christian religion comprised in the Holy Scriptures, we firmly resolve that (studying and meditating in the word of God, both day and night) we will thereunto habitually conform our lives.”

What would it be like for us as a congregation to say:

“Declaring our hearty adherence to the principles of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, we firmly resolve that (studying and meditating in that word, both day and night) we will thereunto habitually conform our lives.”

That is intentionality. Our world has grown increasingly complex and interconnected. It can be difficult to find all the connections and to live intentionally. How we spend our money can be an aspect of intentionality. If I buy clothing made in sweatshops where workers are ill paid and ill-treated, am I living by our UU principles? I don't believe that I am.

Economic intentionality is difficult and I am far from perfecting it. One small thing that I do is try to buy local. This works well, particularly for impulse buys. Nothing squelches an impulse buy for me quicker than to see that the product is made in China. Bowing to our seventh principle, affirming the interdependent web, I have no idea what the environmental costs are in making and shipping a Chinese product. Bowing to our second

principle, affirming justice in human relations, I have no idea under what conditions that product was made. Back that impulse buy goes, no matter how cute.

One area where I could do better on our principles is coffee. Now I know that there are non-coffee drinkers here, so please just take this as an example. Some days, on my way to Leominster, I'll stop by a drive up shop to get a cup of coffee. I don't know how the coffee is grown or where or how the growers are compensated. But it is convenient.

But what would it be like if I got up earlier, and brewed my own fair trade coffee, knowing that the labor used in production is a bit more fairly compensated? That would take sacrifice; that would take intentionality. But there are rewards.

This cup of fair trade coffee cost me about \$0.40. The cup of drive up coffee cost about \$2.00. Now what could I do with that extra \$1.60 that would affirm and promote the principles that I hold dear? I wonder? Well, keeping \$0.60 for myself, I could...

(walk to offering plate and put money in).

Think of what that could mean 365 days a year. You could be better off. The coffee growers could be better off. And the church could be better off.

So, A is for Amount

And I is for intentionality

Is you?