

We, the People (of faith) - Thomas Clayton
Sunday, March 18, 2018

Chalice Lighting

Dorothy James will light our chalice this morning. Our Chalice is lit in memory of Judge Issac McNatt and in honor of Gladys McNatt. As steadfast Unitarian Universalists and valiant advocates of justice for all, the light Issac and Gladys have contributed to us and to the world is embodied in the glow of the flame before us.

Reading for March 25

First, from James Luther Adams, the most influential [theologian](#) among American [Unitarian Universalists](#) in the 20th century

Let me put it autobiographically and say that in Nazi Germany I soon came to the question, "What is it in my preaching and my political action that would stop this?" . . . It is a liberal attitude to say that we keep ourselves informed and read the best papers on these matters, and perhaps join a voluntary association now and then. But to be involved with other people so that it costs and so that one exposes the evils of society requires something like conversion, something more than an attitude. It requires a sense that there's something wrong and I must be different from the way I have been.

Second, from an essay by [CHRISTOPHER WALTON](#), the editor of UU World

When asked what he would do if the world were about to end, Adams replied, "I would go out and plant a tree."

Message

Thank you for allowing me to be here this morning. I want to assure you that Phoenix and I did not collude on the contents of our messages. [Ed. Phoenix Putney and I shared the time in the pulpit.]

Unitarian Universalists stand on the shoulders of Justice Giants.

And they left some work for us to do.

For the past year Becky Floyd, Rick Tolley, Kay Bishop, Marilyn Clayton, and I have been regular attendees at a gathering of people from many faith traditions at noon on Tuesdays in the Governmental Plaza in downtown Greensboro. Sponsored by the Kellogg Foundation and the Beloved Community Center, it is called Healing Greensboro. We stand in a circle feeling the presence of others who wish to heal themselves and the city by sharing our thoughts, praying, laughing and sometimes singing. The most important part of our fifteen minutes together, the part that binds us together, is four minutes of

silence. I ask you to join me in the experience of four minutes of meditative silence between the sound of the chimes.

Four minutes of meditation

A few years ago a United Church of Christ minister who was speaking at All Souls Church in Washington, D. C. said, “It is good, sometimes, even for Unitarians, to hear some preaching in church.”

I will say, even for Unitarian Universalists, sometimes it is good to hear some silence in church. There is a power in silence. We usually think of power as active, forceful, and if not loud at least vocally expressed. Where do the vocalizations and activity come from if not the silence of our thoughts, our hearts, our emotions? Where does “something like conversion, something more than an attitude,” where does “a sense that there's something wrong and I must be different from the way I have been” come from if not the deepest silence within us? Now, I understand that some will say that it comes from an external divinity, by grace, luck, or predestination. I say, if you accept an external source, that acceptance comes from a deeper silence. The power to recognize wrong and change oneself rests with the self.

In my own unique journey through this thing we call life, I’m just a little boy in a great big world. Even as I approach sixty eight years, I’m just a little boy in a great big world. My inner power to try to bend the arc of history toward justice feels inadequate to the task, it has to be bolstered and strengthened by my family, by history’s heroes and sheroes, by friends, by the inspiring people on our Justice action Team, and by many justice seekers who have passed through these doors. I’m empowered by this vibrant, exciting, excruciatingly frustrating faith tradition we call Unitarian Universalism, and magnification of my inner power comes from you, the congregation of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Greensboro.

It is ironic that I am here speaking to you today. I’m a confirmed, dyed in the wool intuitive, feeling, perceiving introvert according to Myers and Briggs. I have trouble getting a comfortable word in edgewise with more than four people. You might ask, “Why are you here”? I have many times since I accepted this role this morning. The Wikipedia INFP page has an answer:

INFPs seek an external life that keeps these deeply held ethics. Loyal to the people and causes important to them, they spot opportunities to implement their ideals. They are curious to understand those around them, and are accepting and flexible unless someone or something threatens their principles.

I’m here because my principles are threatened. I submit to you, the congregation of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Greensboro, with my strongest conviction, that every one of the seven principles, the principles we value so highly, the ones we teach our children, the ones we are covenanted to affirm and promote, everyone of them is threatened. And even more frightening to me, I submit that all the sources on which we base our faith are threatened.

At times like this we often hear exhortations to speak truth to power. There's that power word again. The problem I have with that is those with the power know the truth. That is why they have power!! What I believe we need to do is speak our truth to the powerless, listen to their truth, and work for a new truth to emerge. A truth in line with our principles and with the sources that inspire them.

What kind of tree, as a metaphor, can we help plant? I suggest that we, as a congregation, can help plant a tree with the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for a Moral Revival. You may or may not have heard of this movement. I would guess that most of you have heard of the North Carolina Moral Monday Movement, led by Reverend William Barber and the NC NAACP. This is the simple way I explain the Poor People's Campaign, it is Moral Mondays for the whole country.

According to co-director Reverend Liz Theoharis, thirty two state coordinating committees, "have built fusion coalitions between people of different faiths, issues, and races. They've been created by local people, are chaired by poor men and women, and include youth, faith leaders, and representatives of the diversity that exists in that particular state. No matter how supportive or friendly they seem, there are no elected officials or candidates for public office on the coordinating committees. This is a movement led by moral leaders and people impacted by poverty," a ground-up effort not about left and right but about right and wrong. It is wrong that poor people are the most impacted by racism, voter suppression, inadequate health care, environmental devastation, militarism, gerrymandering, immigration, and greed. Over 2,000 verses in the Bible talk about treating the poor with respect and compassion.

Poverty is a difficult issue. It makes people uncomfortable, most of us don't want to acknowledge it, see it, hear about it, and, as if it was a disease, we don't want to catch it. The false narrative is that if the poor were not so lazy and irresponsible, if they tried harder and worked longer, they could achieve the good life in America. We desperately need a new narrative.

The plan for the Poor People's Campaign is to have Forty Days of intensive organizing, witnessing, and direct action from Mother's Day, May 13, to Summer Solstice, June 21, in the thirty two states already organized. This phase will culminate in a large mobilization on Washington, D. C. in late June. It is not intended to end there, but to continue as a movement to bring poverty out of the shadows and into the national narrative and eventually remove the systemic causes of poverty.

On December 7, 2017 the Unitarian Universalist Association's President, Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray, shared the UUA's endorsement of the Poor Peoples Campaign at the ceremony to launch the campaign on the fiftieth anniversary of the launch of the Dr. King's Poor People's Campaign. In case you are wondering, yes, the 1968 General assembly of the seven year old UUA passed a General Resolution in support of the original Poor People's Campaign.

The recently formed Unitarian Universalist Justice Ministry of North Carolina, which you will hear about from Reverend John Saxon next week, is affiliated with the Poor People's Campaign. By the way, please plan to attend Reverend Saxon's workshop on this important statewide UU organization.

Our Justice Action Team Endorsed the Poor People's Campaign two weeks ago, and we will be keeping you informed of local, online, statewide and national developments.

Like the call for help from a Birmingham jail, a call has been made that needs an answer.

I ask you now, if we were facing the end of the world, or the end of life as we know it, if the structures of civil society as we have know them were being dismantled, as preposterous and impossible as that sounds in this greatest of democracies, this shining beacon on a hill, if all this we hold dear is being threatened, what would we, the Unitarian Universalist Church of Greensboro, do?

We can keep ourselves informed and read the best papers, or Tweets, or Facebook posts on these matters, and perhaps join a voluntary association now and then, or we can sense that there's something wrong and we must be different from the way we have been. We can go out and plant a tree.