

**“Justice, Equity, and Compassion”
The Unitarian Church of Lincoln
October 2, 2016**

“Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations points us . . . to the larger community. It gets at collective responsibility. It reminds us that treating people as human beings is not simply something we do one-on-one, but something that has systemic implications and can inform our entire cultural way of being.”

the Rev. Emily Gage

Gathering of the Community

Ring of Bell

Welcome and Announcements

Prelude: “Go on ‘A’ Street” (Take the A Train)
adapted by Michael Krumm

Stating Intent

Chalice Lighting: by G. Woods

Opening words: by G. Woods

Hymn: #162 “Gonna Lay Down My Sword and Shield”

Time for all ages

Shared Praxis: “What Is Fair”

Children’s Song: #168 “One More Step”

Deepening

Reading: “The Network of Mutuality

By the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Musical Interlude: “Justice” (C Jam Blues)

Adapted by Michael Krumm

Sermon: “Justice, Equity, and Compassion”

Offering and Offertory: “Equity” (Perdido)

Adapted by Michael Krumm

Returning to Community: the work of the people

Sharing of Joys and Sorrows
Meditation

Integration and Release

Closing Hymn: #121 “We’ll Build a Land”

Postlude: “Compassion”

(Do Nothin’ Till You Hear From Me)

adapted by Michael Krumm

Closing Words: from Mother Teresa

Stating Intent

Chalice Lighting: by G. Woods

Joining Unitarian Universalists around the world,
we kindle a chalice flame

around which our congregation gathers
to study, to serve, to celebrate life.

May our flame burn brightly
providing guidance and warmth
for our journeys through the world.

Opening words: by G. Woods

Come let us gather into our spiritual community,
sharing our search for truth and meaning,

gathering strength to do what is
right and good

for ourselves,

for this community, for our planet.

May this time we share

refresh, renew, and energize

our minds, our hearts, our spirits

that we may engage all that life offers us

with respect, responsibility, and relish for the process.

Hymn: #162 “Gonna Lay Down My Sword and Shield”

Time for all ages

Shared Praxis: “What Is Fair?”

Children’s Song: #168 “One More Step

Deepening

Reading: “The Network of Mutuality

By the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny, injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. There are some things in our social system to which all of us ought to be maladjusted. Hatred and bitterness can never cure the disease of fear, only love can do that. We must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression, and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love.

Musical Interlude: “Justice” (C Jam Blues)

Adapted by Michael Krumm

Sermon: “Justice, Equity, and Compassion”

Sometime between 750 and 687 BCE in the small village of Moresheth in the Judean foothills southwest of Jerusalem, there lived a common man named Micah who was deeply distressed by the evil and injustice he saw in the religious and political leaders of his time and place (Hmm). In his efforts to call his people back to right relationship with what is ultimate, he uttered these profound words, “. . . and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to

love kindness, and to walk humbly with your G-d?” (Micah 6:8) Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations – hardly new concepts.

Throughout our rich history as Unitarian Universalists, these values persist. The Universalists began with the understanding that a God of Love would not, could not, damn human beings to Hell for all eternity. Justice would be meted out, but with equity and compassion for the human condition. This led Universalists to become strong social activists, living their theology in powerful and significant ways. They were in the forefront of many major reform movements in the 19th century as a result of their belief in justice, tempered with equity and compassion.

Also in the 19th century, Unitarian minister Theodore Parker justified the abolition of slavery through his understanding of radical monotheism, a foreshadowing of process theology. For him, “Numerous distinctions

between(sic) men on the basis of race, class, or nation are erased, at least theoretically, since the one God is equally the Father of all.” (Dirks, John Edward, *The Critical Theology of Theodore Parker*. Westport, CN. Greenwood Press, 1948.

P. 108) In that same century, numerous Universalists, including Mary Rice Livermore and Olympia Brown, were inspired by the concept of God as love in action, not only worked to abolish slavery, but to establish child labor and welfare laws and to acquire suffrage for women.

In the 20th century, as Unitarians and Universalists, and then as Unitarian Universalists, we acted for the civil rights of African-Americans, women, and gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and trans-gendered people. James Reeb and Viola Liuzzo gave their lives trying to bring justice, equity, and compassion to African-Americans in this country. More recently, a Unitarian was shot to death while serving as an escort for a physician at an abortion clinic in Pensacola, Florida. Some of our best-

known contemporary writers, including May Sarton, Ray Bradbury, Frederick Pohl, and Kurt Vonnegut, made justice, equity, and compassion themes for short stories and books.

Many of the members of this congregation work for justice, equity and compassion, likely many more than I can cite today. BJ Wheeler has provides psychological counseling for those at the People's City Mission. Amy Miller serves as legal advisor for the Nebraska ACLU. And who knows all the community work that is done by so many of you, certainly Mark Weddleton and Melody Vaccaro are noticeable among the many. All these – and many through your history – like Charles Stephen and C.A. Sorensen – have worked for justice, equity, and compassion.

As Unitarians Universalists, we are called, not only by our Principles, but also by our history and heritage, to live our agreement to affirm and promote justice, equity, and compassion in human relations. We are called to recognize

that we are not all *equal*. This creates richness in life not to be overlooked or undervalued. Still, each of us has a rightful claim to the resources of life that are here for all of us. We are asked not to make the Orwellian mistake that “some are more equal than others,” though current politics seem to assert this at every turn.

As I thought about justice, equity, and compassion, not surprisingly, the image of a balance scale came to mind: justice as one plate on the scale, equity as the center-balance, and compassion as the other plate on the scale. It is a vivid reminder that they are each and all essential for the human enterprise.

We face a major question: How do we balance justice, equity, and compassion in a world riven with the realities of injustice, unfair distribution of resources, and where greed and hunger for power seem to overwhelm love repeatedly? Living this second principle of Unitarian Universalism asks

great things of us on many levels. We are busy people with many demands upon our time, energy, and money. How can we respond without sinking into a morass of despair? Three caveats occur to me:

1. Beware creating hierarchies of oppression.
2. Attend to the conflict between “is” and “ought.”
3. Don’t swing at every pitch, so you may have energy to enjoy the work. Let’s take a few minutes to examine these more thoroughly.

First – and foremost to my way of thinking – we need to be careful about creating hierarchies of oppression. We need to acknowledge oppression wherever we find it, to name the demon(s) without discounting them by comparisons. John Donne, among many, assures us that “Comparisons are odious.” Beyond being odious, comparisons are often simply inaccurate and reflect the investments of the person presenting them. They emphasize **inequalities**, without

acknowledging the call to equity. How can anyone say that injustices experienced by any group supercede those of any other? Certainly, this twist is one of the justifications for the continuing wars in Syria, Libya, Afghanistan – you name it. Injustices of hundreds – even thousands – of years ago are pitted against one another, rather than serving as a call to learn to live in peace and harmony. Closer to home, how can we determine whether African-Americans or Native Americans deserve more response to their problems? There is so much injustice in the world that no one need feel they do not have some call to work on at least one of them.

This is vividly brought to our awareness when we see the “99%” wondering how the “1%” can believe that their continuing to receive greater benefits from our laws and our tax money is better for everyone. “Trickle down” is simply not working for most people on this continent, because those who claim the need for laws to assist them, then send our

jobs and their money overseas (See the November 2012 issue of *Rolling Stone*).

We should not choose one group and place their concerns above those of other groups. Still – and here is the paradox, given our human limitations – each of us needs to choose one issue to address with our individual energies. Each can provide support for positive change, whether it be about stopping a pipeline, supporting death with dignity or maintaining the repeal of the death penalty, mentoring children at risk- whatever impassions you so that it becomes your particular issue.

The second caveat is to become more conscious of the conflict between “is” and “ought.” Part of this involves being able to perceive the truth of what “is.” For example, this congregation is not a small congregation with little investment in the surrounding community. What “is”?: this is a congregation of about 300 members with a lively RGL

program. You are the *largest* Unitarian Universalist Church in Nebraska, hands down. Yet, you seem to think you have no reason to expand your vision of influence beyond this building. Not a few of you have significant influence beyond these walls. Do you feel you are voicing UU values when you work outside the building? You can't change what "is" if you do not acknowledge it and offer an "ought" alternative.

Yes, you ought to be a congregation of import in Lincoln, a voice for these principles in the larger community. There is no cadre of rich people to make this happen. It will take strong investment in these UU values articulated in the Purposes and Principles to make your voice heard in this town. Certainly, the Sorensen Lecture and the Winter Lectures have influence, and your choice of "Partnering" for your Big Idea show you understand that you can escalate your influence here in Lincoln.

Because I am so passionate about UU values and the place this congregation has, and how much greater it could become, I am raising my pledge from \$350 a month to \$375 a month, well over 5% of my gross income. I want to see this church fund your next minister well, keep the staff up to fair compensation, and continue to partner effectively in Lincoln. That takes time, talent, and treasure. Will you join me in taking this seriously?

Affirming and supporting justice, equity, and compassion requires people who know how to stay and work together through conflict, rather than leaving until the smoke clears. Why do UUs leave in times of crisis? I don't know, but I sometimes wonder if they feel powerless, ineffectual in the face of difficult times – or just do not want to step up and put more time, talent, and treasure into the struggle for justice, equity and compassion. That behavior leaves a vacuum of

power that others who lack compassion are likely to choose to fill.

Conversely, we need to make certain when we think we are laboring for justice, equity, and compassion, that we are not enabling continued bad behavior on the part of each other and/or the people we are “helping.” Most of us who lived in addictive systems know that at some point, you have to stop supporting self-destructive behavior and insist that people reclaim responsibility for their own lives and their own power. Finding balance is painful and requires serious soul-searching. That is most often best done in community. You are called to accept what is and to take great care to work toward the best “ought” for one and all. People who leave need to know that similar realities will arise in every system and becoming part of a community means staying through the hard stuff to learn your own power.

So, coming to terms with the “is” does not absolve us of the “ought.” As Unitarian Universalists, we have a strong religious call to affirm and support justice, equity, and compassion. This means we cannot let things slide. Sydney Harris once observed, “For anything to get done in the world, the open mind must slam shut and action must be taken.” At some point, we need to say “enough!” and move to change a situation.

One of the best lessons I have learned is to do that with and as allies rather than as adversaries. When we engage “truth and reconciliation,” seek atonement, we need to find common ground to actually move forward. When the first Gulf War began, a reporter who interviewed me kept saying that I was against the war. I pointed out that I was focused upon *working for peace* in the Middle East, not against war. He did not seem to understand my point until I said that words are important tools for me, as they should be for him,

and that I choose them carefully. I find that pushing others builds up energies against me. It may energize me at first, but ultimately it exhausts me and builds up their strength – especially if I work alone. So, I am interested in finding those who work FOR the same things I do and focus on building relationships and efforts with them. Aikido social action!

In like fashion, I am not interested in Christian- bashing as a way to share our faith. If you wish to grow as a congregation, you may have to accept that many young people seeking spiritual community are not particularly upset by the word GOD. They do want to know what you DO with your values. Can you be equally comfortable with newcomers who do not share your religious prejudices?

There needs to be room for all, equity, under the big tent of Unitarian Universalism. Everyone, atheist to radical mystic, who shares UU Principles should be more than welcome at this “welcome table.”

The last caveat I offer with regard to the second Principle of Unitarian Universalism is that we need to use our energies wisely and with pleasure. Nothing is so sad as a zealot who cannot laugh, who has lost the basic joy of living that underpins efforts to improve life for all. One way to deal with this has been voiced in the “valuing diversity movement” as “pick your pitches.” As in baseball, you know you can’t swing at every pitch that comes along, not and enjoy the game, much less be effective at it. We need to learn where we want to put our energies. I suggest that each of you find one thing to do within your church and one thing to do within your community – and do those well, rather than running around trying to do everything. Picking what we do intentionally honors ourselves and others by allowing us to focus our energies and abilities with compassion.

As human beings, we cannot pretend that things are as they “ought” to be. Justice, equity, and compassion continue

to be demands upon our religious energies. We can, however, recognize that each cause has its validity in the scheme of things, that we need to be aware of the “is” and “ought,” and that we can enjoy the process of working with this principle if we are willing to choose our causes wisely with an eye to our own best skills and talents. Thus we truly engage compassion, as expressed by Mother Teresa:

Love cannot remain by itself – it has no meaning.
Love has to be put into action and that action is service.
Whatever form we are, able or disabled, rich or poor,
It is not how much we do, but how much love
 we put into the doing;
A lifelong sharing of love with others.

Love, compassion, the core of our Universalist faith, provides the basis for all our efforts. If we can move with the energy of love, rather than fear and hatred, we may prevail in the ongoing efforts for justice and equity in the world. We shall have to sacrifice some of our own comforts. And we will benefit greatly from the improved level of comfort and safety for all of life.

So Be It! Blessed Be!

Offering/Offertory: "Equity" (Perdido)
Adapted by Michael Krumm

Returning to Community: the work of the people
Sharing of Joys and Sorrows

Meditation/Prayer:

Spirit of Love and of Life,
within which we find the awesome responsibility of choice,
of free will and volition,
as well as the infinite beauty of possibility,
We come together as seekers,
aware that we have much to learn
about love and life,
creativity and responsibility.

We are grateful for the blessings of responsibility,
even as we chafe at its demands.

We are also thankful for this day and this community,
where we may seek together
the inspiration to bring justice, equity, and compassion
into our relations with all our world.

May our search be rewarded
as we continue within/beyond
in silence.

Thank you for your presence

Integration and Release

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