

**“The Other U: Universalism”**  
**The Unitarian Church of Lincoln**  
**March 13, 2016**

“The difference between Universalists and Unitarians is that  
Universalists believe that God is too good to damn men, and  
Unitarians believe that Man is too good to be damned.”

the Rev. Thomas Starr King

***Gathering of the Community***

**Ringing of Bell**

**Welcome and Announcements: Board Host**

**Prelude:** Simple Gifts arr. Aaron Copland

Dean Haist, trumpet

Nancy Vogt, piano

***Stating Intent***

**Chalice Lighting:** by G. Woods

read by KK Munson

**Opening words:** “Let Us Worship”

by Kenneth L. Patton

read by Gretchen Woods

**Hymn:** #87 “Nearer, My God, to Thee”

***Time for all ages***

**Story:** “Muddy Children” by Janeen K. Grohsmeyer

**Children’s Song:** #168 “One More Step”

***Deepening***

**Reading:** “A Testimonial on Universalism”

by KK Munson

**Musical Interlude:**

**Sermon:** “The Other U: Universalism”

**Offering and Offertory:** “Largo” from Concerto in Eb

by J. B. G. Neruda, edited by David Hickman

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

***Integration and Release***

**Closing Hymn:** #126 “Come, Thou Fount”

**Closing Words:** “Stand By This Faith”

By Olympia Brown

**Postlude:** “Allegro” from Suite No. 2 of  
Trumpet Voluntaries by John Stanley  
edited by Edward H. Tarr

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***Stating Intent***

**Chalice Lighting:** by G. Woods

read by KK Munson

We, as Unitarian Universalists,  
agree to be guided by the light of Unitarianism  
and the warmth of Universalist love.

In that spirit, we kindle the flame of our  
spiritual gathering in the chalice  
of our community.

May it burn brightly and warm us  
as we pursue our search for truth and meaning,  
justice and love.

**Opening words:** “Let Us Worship”

by Kenneth L. Patton

read by Gretchen Woods

Let us worship with our eyes and ears and fingertips;  
Let us love the world through heart and mind and body.

We feed our eyes upon the mystery and revelation  
in the faces of our brothers and sisters.

We seek to know the wistfulness of the very young  
and the very old, the wistfulness of people in all times  
of life.

We seek to understand the shyness behind arrogance,  
the fear behind pride, the tenderness behind clumsy  
strength, the anguish behind cruelty.

All life flows into a great common life, if we will only open  
our eyes to our companions.

Let us worship with opening of all the windows of our  
beings, with the full outstretching of our spirits.

Life comes with singing and laughing, with tears and  
confiding, with a rising wave too great to be held in the  
mind and heart and body, to those who have fallen in  
love with life.

Let us worship and let us learn to love.

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***Deepening***

**Reading:** “A Testimonial on Universalism”

By KK Munson

**Musical Interlude:**

**Sermon:** “The Other U: Universalism”

After I first came to the Unitarian Church of Lincoln last  
June to meet and greet the leadership of this church, I made  
it a point to read Margaret R. Seymour’s book, *The First 100*

*Years . . . 1898 – 1998: the Unitarian Church of Lincoln, Nebraska.* I was fascinated that the Unitarian Church here absorbed the remains of a Universalist church that had been vital for 28 years (1870 – 1898), but found itself financially unable to serve the debt from building a new \$20,000 red sandstone building on the site their former “small white frame building” on the northwest corner of 12<sup>th</sup> and H streets. (Seymour, p.1.) The All Souls Unitarian Church came into being on May 27, 1898, after the Universalist Church dissolved on May 20, 1898.

Strangely, when I then asked you to tell me your story in September of 2015, only Kathy Disney spoke about the history of the Universalist Church here in Lincoln, and a number of you expressed disbelief that there are any Universalists here now. When I asked at that event if any among you were Universalist, quite a few hands shot up among the gathered body, indicating that they identified as

Universalists. Clearly, you do not know your own identity as a congregation, nor what it means to be a Universalist; hence, this sermon. I am hoping to expand your consciousness about possibilities as members within the Unitarian Universalist Association.

With that in mind I offer a very brief history of Universalism, an overview of the theological perspective through time, and a suggestion for reassessment of who you are now – in ten minutes. Wish me luck!

While Unitarianism arose around 325 ACE in the early Christian church as an argument for ethical, rather than creedal, emphasis in the church, as Professor David Bumbaugh asserts in his book, *Unitarian Universalism: a narrative history*:

. . . the writings of the early church fathers – especially Clement and Origen of Alexandria – expressed the conviction that in the fullness of time all of creation would be restored to harmony with God. This Universalism, the doctrine of

ultimate salvation for all, presents a compelling mystic vision, but it is a weak foundation upon which to construct a militant, disciplined, missionary-minded religious movement. If, in the end, all are to be restored to harmony with God, it becomes less urgent that all on earth accept the same doctrines, practice the same liturgy, obey the same priestly decrees. In the end, Universalism would be damned as heresy, and even Origen would be denounced as a heretic. (Bumbaugh, pp 9-10.)

So, if you want to be doctrinal, rigid liturgically, committed to proselytizing, and to follow priestly decrees, best not be a Universalist.

Once voiced, however, Universalism, like Unitarianism (also a heresy), kept cropping up through the ensuing centuries among free-thinkers all over Europe, as Jan Hus, the Anabaptists, German and Polish Brethren all stood by Universalism. Universalists came to North America through the 17<sup>th</sup> and ensuing centuries. Dr. George de Benneville and Dr. Benjamin Rush were Universalists who preached in Pennsylvania and signed the Declaration of Independence.

John Murray spread Universalism up and down the eastern seaboard before settling in Gloucester, Massachusetts and contributing to the development of separation of church and state.

Through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Universalists were social activists, contributing to the creation of public schools (Horace Mann), the Red Cross (Clara Barton), and working for women's education and suffrage and freedom for the southern slaves (Mary A. Livermore) and against capital punishment. In 1935, the new Superintendent of the Universalists asserted that all would be welcome to Universalism as a world religion: . . . "theist and humanist, Unitarian and Trinitarian, colored and color-less. A circumscribed Universalism is unthinkable." Strong words for that era, which put the lie to the notion that Universalists remained Christian long after Unitarians. Kenneth L. Patton and the Humiliati (Many of whom I am fortunate to have

known) kept broadening the perspective of Universalism through the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Revelation was definitely NOT sealed for Universalists.

So what do Universalists hold dear? Before merger with the American Unitarian Association, Universalists were gentler and more humble about their perspectives, which might or might not include Jesus as a central teaching figure, but certainly continued to maintain that religion needed to be un-circumscribed and open to all human religious experience that made sense. Their emphasis on Love and God as verb: i.e. action in the world, has been as steady rock through time.

Right now Universalists are as invested as any Unitarian in the Unitarian Universalists Purposes and Principles, especially those adopted after the process from 1981 – 1985, which continue to be the center of our faith.

You will hear a lot more from me about these Purposes and Principles, especially the affirmations, in the fall of 2016.

So, I would echo KK Munson's clarion call to reclaim Universalism as part of your heritage and disavow the prejudice that was injected into this denomination by Unitarians who despised the humble loving attitudes of Universalists and their "tissue-thin theology," to quote one of your former ministers, the Rev. Dr. Peter Raible. Topher Hansen told us during the "story-telling" you offered to me, that the reason adding the word "Universalist" to the church name failed in 1990 was that it cost too much money to change the formal papers of incorporation.

I firmly believe that naming is important. And I wonder who you really are right now. Do you experience a loving force moving in and through your lives, calling you to honor and care for your planet and fellow life forms? Do you think that all human beings should have fair opportunities to use

their gifts and talents in this world with the support of their religious home? Do you believe that harmony among people and openness to different cultures is a positive stance with which to live your life? Who are you as a faith community, and how do you want to be known in this city of Lincoln, NE?

Your name conveys your answers to those questions. What do you want your name to be? Is it worth a few hundred dollars to name yourselves in consonance with the larger faith movement of which you are agreed-upon members? The choice is up to you. I invite you to consider all your options.

With respect, responsibility, and relish for the process.

So Be It! Blessed Be!

**Offering and Offertory:** “Largo” from Concerto in Eb  
by J. B. G. Neruda, edited by David Hickman

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

## **Meditation**

### ***Integration and Release***

**Closing Hymn:** #126 “Come, Thou Fount”

**Closing Words:** “Stand By This Faith”

By Olympia Brown

Stand by this faith. Work for it and sacrifice for it.

There is nothing in all the world so important as to be  
loyal to this faith which has placed before us the  
loftiest ideals,

Which has comforted us in sorrow, strengthened us  
for noble duty, and made the world beautiful.

Do not demand immediate results but rejoice that we  
are worthy to be entrusted with this great  
message,

That you are strong enough to work for a great true  
principle without counting the cost.

Go on finding ever new applications of these truths and  
new enjoyments in their contemplation, always  
trusting in the one God which ever lives and loves.

**Postlude:** “Allegro” from Suite No. 2 of  
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