

**May Love Be The Spirit
Of This Fellowship
a sermon by
The Rev. Bryan Jessup
Sunday October 6, 2013**

Chalice Lighting – From Barbara Wells

O Spinner, Weaver of Our Lives – Your loom is love. May we who are gathered here be empowered by that love to weave new patterns of Truth and Justice into a web of life that is strong, beautiful and everlasting.

Spoken Reflection – These words of reflection were inspired by Christian/Hindu Mystic, Edward Hays who says:

How often we find ourselves in prisons of our own making. How often we are bound up by our own resentment or by the social pressure to look good and measure up.

We are also pressed by our need to be right and oppressed by heartless criticism of ourselves and others.

When we are not mulling over past injuries and errors – we often worried about future disasters.

No wonder we long for freedom and peace.

And the good news is that we can truly move ourselves in that direction. One step at a time, we can move.

By noticing the unhealthy urges of our Egos. By refusing to act on those urges. By calming ourselves through meditation, prayer and song - By shaping ourselves through deeds of courage and loving-kindness – we can transform our own inner condition and the world.

And as we practice walking our own, brave path to spiritual health – as the song says – We'll find a place for freedom. We'll find a place for peace and love. We'll find a way. We'll find a way. We'll find a way to rise above.

So may we walk our path this day and every day. And so in truth may we be able to say "Blessed Be!" and AMEN

Reading – From Kenneth Patton

Let us worship with our eyes and ears and fingertips. Let us love the world through our minds and hearts and bodies.

We feed our eyes upon the mystery and revelation we find in the faces of our brothers and sisters. We seek to know the wistfulness of the very young and the very old. We seek to know the wistfulness. We seek to know the wistfulness of people in all times of life.

So we seek to understand the shyness behind arrogance – the fear behind pride – the tenderness behind clumsy strength and the anguish behind cruelty.

All life flows out of and into a great common life. We only need to open our eyes to see our companions. So let us worship not by bowing down and closing our eyes and stopping our ears. Let us worship by opening all the windows of our being. Let us stretch our spirits fully to make room for the wonder within us and around us.

Life comes with singing and laughter, with tears and anger, with loneliness and a desire to confide in other travelers.

Life comes in a rising wave too great to be held by one of us alone – and it is a never ending source of wonder for those of us who have fallen in love with it.

So let us learn to love. Let us learn to love ourselves and one another as ourselves. Let us learn to fall in love with life.

Sermon

Today I am going to begin thinking with you about some of the good work you Humboldt UUs have already done in terms of defining who you are as a Fellowship and what you are about.

I am beginning this exploration by taking a look at your Aspiration which says: “May love be the spirit of this Fellowship.”

Sounds sweet, doesn't it? Sounds like friends walking in the sunshine communicating without a hitch.

But we know it's not that simple, don't we. In order for the Aspiration of this Fellowship to become a reality, you and I have to dedicate our lives to growing and deepening in our ability to truly be “Love Bearers” in everything we do – all of our lives.

The Buddha says: "Hatred does not end with hatred at any time. Hatred only ends with love." He also says: "No one saves us but ourselves. No one can and no one may. We ourselves must walk the path."

So when we say "May love be the spirit of this Fellowship" we have called ourselves to do a lot of work. And there are three things I want to say about that work:

First – It is a leap of faith to decide that love is worthwhile.

Second – We come from a long line of people who have made the leap – and we and our kids need to know about our heritage.

And Third – We Unitarian Universalists as a whole, and we Humboldt UUs as a part of that whole – have done a great deal of work to articulate what being a love bearer involves.

So first – the leap of faith.

Are you aware that many people in this country and many Unitarian Universalists even do not understand that Unitarian Universalism is a faith?

Well – it's true. Because we are non-creedal, because we do not have a particular dogma about God or Revealed Scripture or Life After Death...many people think we are not a faith.

In May of 2004, Carole Keeton Strayhorn, the Comptroller of the State of Texas, ruled that Unitarian Universalism is not a "religion" because it does not have a stated system of belief. She then stripped the Red River Unitarian Universalist Church in Denison, Texas, of its tax-exempt status. A little later she reversed her decision but it was hard for her to understand why. She equated religion and faith with creeds.

We Unitarian Universalists might make the same mistake until we open ourselves to the understanding that faith can also mean belief in and faithfulness to a set of deep values.

When we understand faith as adherence to a set of values, we can begin to understand that we UUs take a huge leap of faith when we decide embodying our values is going to be worthwhile. As Kate Wolf says: *We give ourselves to love – since love is what we're after. We open up our hearts to the tears and laughter and we give ourselves to love. We give ourselves to love.*

But we cannot prove scientifically that love is worthwhile. We just decide that is where we are going to place our energy and our faith.

Our forebear – Ralph Waldo Emerson said – *Give all to love. Obey your heart. Friends, Kindred, Estate, Good Fame, Credit and the Muse...Nothing refuse! It is a brave master – so let it have scope.*

So we do.

Speaking of forebears – The Second thing I want to say today is that we are part of a wonderful and venerable tribe of love and justice bearers from all over the world.

I've already quoted the Buddha today. We Unitarian Universalists embrace him not because we think he articulates the only path to wholeness – but because he exemplifies our values and he offers one very useful path to wholeness.

Historically, of course, Unitarian Universalism grew out of the Christian tradition which grew out of a mingling the Jewish and Pagan traditions of the Eastern Mediterranean region 2000 years ago.

The Teacher Jesus is part of our tribe. And his revolutionary point about Judaism, in line with all the great Jewish Prophets before him – was that the heart of Judaism was about embodying love – and the rest (as Hillel said) was commentary.

St. Paul (who unfortunately is even more susceptible to misinterpretation than Jesus himself) took Jesus' revolution one step further. He said – *If embodying love is truly the central issue of faith – then Gentiles who follow the religious form of Mythraism can be followers of Jesus too – if they behave as love bearers.*

And there you go....Christianity – which is mixed with Judaism but is decidedly not Judaism – was born! And about 1800 years later Unitarianism and Universalism (as we know them today) were born.

Of course our lineage is more complicated than that and during all the centuries between Jesus and William Ellery Channing – there was small U unitarian thought – and small U universalist thought.

But the point is that we come from a long line love and justice bearers who treasure wisdom that says: *Though I speak with the tongue of men or of angels, if I have not love – I am nothing!*

And we can be very inspired to be in our direct line of forebears as well as our indirect line.

In the direct line of UU Forebears – we have names like Clara Barton and Susan B. Anthony. In that direct line we have names like Charles Darwin and Isaac Newton.

As love and justice bearers – we Unitarian Universalist draw from many sources – And...we come from somewhere ourselves.

My Third Point today is that not only do we Give Ourselves to Love and not only are we Part of a Long Line of Love and Justice Bearers – but also, in recent times, we UUs have done considerable work to articulate what our values require of us and to develop resources to help ourselves and others as we do.

One example of our resources, of course, is our list of Unitarian Universalist Principles.

We intend to be love and justice bearers – we say. Therefore we affirm and promote:

- 1 The inherent worth and dignity of every person.
- 2 Justice Equity and Compassion in all our affairs.
- 3 The acceptance of one another and the encouragement of spiritual growth in our congregations.

We intend to be love and justice bearers – so we affirm and promote:

- 4 A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
- 5 The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process in our congregations and in society at large
- 6 The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all.
- 7 And respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

LOVE – is a mighty big word just like GOD is. So when we or anyone else says “love,” we have to ask – “What do you mean?” And as an Association, we Unitarian Universalists have responded by saying...*For us LOVE means embodying our Principles.*

You folks here at the Humboldt Fellowship, though, have taken embodying love a step further. You have said: *For us, it involves working for Consensus.*

I invite you to look at the insert in your Order of Service. On one side is the song “I Am Willing.” That is really important. Willingness is really important.

On the other side – are your own Humboldt UU words about the Consensus process to which you have committed yourselves.

Consensus means that we work very hard to include everyone.

It means that we bring our own most mature, most developed selves to the conversation so – whether or not we actually “prefer” a given response – we let go and support the community as a whole **if** the decision was reached fairly and openly **and** it seems to be about the best the community can do at a given time – we will support the decision and the community so the community can move ahead.

Might it be helpful – we might ask – to send these rules of consensus to the United States Congress at this time. Might there be enough grown ups there to implement this process?

We can’t kid ourselves. Being love bearers and practicing Consensus is no easy thing. It calls us to be open and willing when we might not feel like being open and willing. It calls us to find a place of freedom from our own fear and control issues and from our need to always be right.

The pathway to love and Consensus – does not begin when the congregational meeting or the session of congress is gaveled to order.

It begins – every moment of our lives when we (follow along here now...)

LISTEN to one another and pay attention to one another’s needs.

It begins every moment of our lives when we

TRULY ENCOURAGE one another to speak from our hearts.

It requires – THAT WE SHARE INFORMATION – and follow clear and open Processes.

It requires that we sit with the tension of our diversity and NOT jump to responses or agreements too quickly.

And though – when action is ultimately called for we sometimes vote – Consensus requires that we do not go to voting too easily – That we truly

understand that in our differences there is strength. – That we work for win-win responses that can be supported because they meet a great number of needs - -

And – Again - That we not get rigidly affixed to our own positions and views and, instead, remain open and willing.

Wow. What a great resource you Humboldt UU folks have created for assisting yourselves and others to truly work at being love bearers.

And how important it is that you and I call ourselves to use this resource – NOT just in times of congregational or other meetings – but every day of our lives.

“May love be the spirit of this Fellowship!”

I love that Aspiration.

It represents a leap of faith that I hope to make again and again in my life.

It puts me and you in a long line of wonderful human spirits with which I am so proud to associate.

And our work together to define what we mean by love – both as an Association and as a local branch of the Association – makes me happy

It is not an easy path we have chosen – but with the work we have done and will do – we’ll find a way for peace and love – and we’ll find a way to rise above.

Closing Words- From Frederick Gillis

And now may the which overcomes all our differences – which heals all our wounds – which puts to flight all our fears – which reconciles all of us who are separated – be in and among us now and forevermore. And as we go from this place – may we go in peace.