

***Donkey Walk*****A Message for All Faiths Unitarian Congregation****By The Rev. CJ McGregor****Delivered on April 7, 2019**

I was asked a few months ago if I would lead a service where we could show appreciation for those in our congregation who have served us well over the past year. A time to recognize our volunteers and for us to remember that this congregation and its work is fueled by its members and friends. I responded by saying, “no” and explaining that I would like this to be our congregational culture and not a one time thing and be considered extra ordinary. Also, there is no way to neither capture all the work nor all the volunteers. There is so much offered that we don’t even know about. That conversation hadn’t left my mind and led me to our message, *Donkey Walk*, today. The most famous donkey walk is when Jesus stood outside of the city walls to Jerusalem and wept because it is said that he knew that only trouble lie ahead and knew his fate. He led his donkey through the gate and into the city where he was met by crowds laying palms on the street before him. Thus, Palm Sunday. The stepping down from your donkey or horse, walking, and the laying down of palms is a ritual of respect and honor. In fact this ritual and custom is still carried out around the world on Palm Sunday. Any person, any guest, that is to enter and be honored, thanked, or lovingly recognized would have palms laid before them. You’re probably wondering if I am going to traipse a donkey down the aisle of our sanctuary. It was a thought. But I think you’ll agree the last thing we need in this congregation is another ass.

Being devoted in love and honoring one another above ourselves is difficult to identify in today’s world. What would it be like if all were willing to lay down palms in honor instead of picking up the sword? What would it be like if we were focused on people and relationships rather than focusing on corporations, greed, oppression, and violence? At the heart of our commitment to our Unitarian Universalist tradition, and at the heart of our commitment to one another in this congregation, is being people and relationship focused. That is, the visible demonstration of valuing one another. We pledge to give honor to one another through our words and actions, and by committing to each person’s success. Acceptance, worth, dignity, compassion, justice...all plucked from our recognized eight principles. All guide us to seek holiness in one another.

We are neither encouraged nor expected to seek honor and holiness in one another in our world. We are continuously brought back to the feeling that we are required to respond to our primal fear of scarcity and survival. Discrimination against minority voters being allowed by the highest court, eventually 4 or 5 of the wealthiest individuals in our country will control our political system, a woman is considered not equal or worth as much as a man. Fear and elitism, not honor has set in. We are encouraged to dismiss, forget about, devalue the most vulnerable, the people who are struggling, who are denied equality. Sometimes we fail in our congregation to provide respect, care with our words, care with our attitudes. How do we honor and seek the holy in one another in this house when all around us dignity and compassion are easily tossed away.

Mark Twain wrote about a man who for one single day in his life was given an unusual gift. Upon meeting complete strangers that man could immediately sense all the hurts and burdens and pains and struggles and secret sorrows carried inside them. And the others knew that their secret sorrows were being revealed to him.

He learned that day that this world is a difficult place, not all that is seems sometimes. He learned that every life, regardless of outward appearance is fraught with its share of sorrow and burden, of sadness and challenge, of secret courage and hidden strength and transcendent, enduring and irrepressible love. And thereafter he looked upon all the he met with a deep respect and a new admiration for all as fellow children in need of God's love.

This little tale reminded me that compassion is something that we all are in need of and that if we just pay attention to others we will feel compassion for them, we will understand not that others need our pity, or even need us to fix them, to make things right, to do anything more than just be present and with them through the struggles, challenges, sorrows and pains that fall upon all of humankind.

Though we do not require the waving of palms, the shouts, the accolades, we do require the support and love of one another as we lead our donkey down the rough and windy road of truth, justice, and compassion. We are not a people that honor one another simply because the Bible tells us so. We believe we can save ourselves by bringing a healing to each other and to the world because it is right. Honoring one another goes beyond any golden rule, and any principle for that matter. It's a practice. Our common UU faith is covenantal, not creedal. Our faith grows from the promises we make to each other. It is about building and sustaining relationships. It is about committing to a supportive and transforming faith community.

One way to think about a UU congregation is a greater whole that emerges from the combination of all of our connections. We realize that we do not have to do this alone, and we make a mutual promise to commit to and accept each other. By promising to be together relationally, we agree to give one another mutual trust and support. It is in community, in relationship, and in mutuality that people awaken, thrive, and blossom. Acceptance affirms people as they are, and encouragement propels them to what they might become. Acceptance of others is more than mere tolerance. Acceptance is a living promise to liberate and empower each other.

In 2005, a national commission identified five promises within the UU principles, that are made by committed Unitarian Universalists.

We promise to live relationally

We promise to live ethically

We promise to live pluralistically

We promise to live evangelistically

We promise to live globally

These are deeper promises made by a faith that is outward directed to transforming the world. We are not about what we believe, but what we do. We practice love beyond belief.

My colleague, the Rev. Jeanne Harrison, describes our faith in a way that resonates with me strongly. This closely says why I am a Unitarian Universalist:

In each of us, there is a spark of the holy.

We can know god, the spirit of life, the great mystery directly.

Love is the greatest of all energies. It is a primal energy of the great mystery. It holds us reliably throughout all the days of our lives. It calls us to bring our love into the world.

We are agents for transforming the world. We bear the promise of hope.

Community matters. We don't have to do it alone.

We are an interwoven thread in the universal fabric of all that is. We do not stand alone and apart. We are a part of the whole.

Honoring one another is indeed a practice and I would like us to start that practice here and now.

I have chosen a symbol that represents the honorable donkey walk. The palm. A symbol that identifies us and sets us apart as a community committed to one another.

(distribution)

Let us step down from our donkey, prepare the palms. On this day let us thank all who have given of themselves to bless this congregation, this community, and our world.

May it be so.