

SHARE THE LOVE SUNDAY: Thou Shalt Love

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River of Grass Unitarian Universalist Congregation

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If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

So begins the first letter of the Corinthians chapter 13 of the Christian scriptures.

And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

If I give away all my possessions, and if I sacrifice my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; It does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

From the Hindu Yajur Veda and the Bhagavad Gita we hear:

*The one who loves all intensely
begins perceiving in all living beings
a part of himself.
He becomes a lover of all,
a part and parcel of the Universal Joy.
He flows with the stream of happiness,
and is enriched by each soul. (Veda)*

*When a person responds to the joys and sorrows of others as if they were his own,
he has attained the highest state of spiritual union. (Gita)*

The Holy Qu'ran teaches:

Be kind to parents, and near kindred, and to orphans, and to the needy, and to the neighbour who is near, and to the neighbour who is a stranger, and to the friend at your side, and to the wayfarer.

*By Him in whose hand is my soul, no servant believes
until he loves for his neighbour what he loves for himself.*

Now let us listen to the Hebrew book of Leviticus chapter 19:

And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying:

Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them: Ye shall be holy; even as I am holy.

Ye shall not steal; neither shall ye deal falsely, nor lie one to another.

Thou shalt not oppress thy neighbour, nor withhold the wages of the hired servant.

Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling-block before the blind.

*Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment; neither for the poor nor the mighty ...
neither shalt thou stand idly by the blood of thy neighbour:*

Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart.

*Thou shalt not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge, but thou shalt love thy
neighbour as thyself.*

And then ...

There's nothing you can do that can't be done.

Nothing you can sing that can't be sung.

Nothing you can make that can't be made.

Nothing you can save that can't be saved.

Nothing you can know that isn't known.

Nothing you can see that isn't shown.

Nothing you can do but you can learn to be you in time.

It's easy.

All you need is love.

So say John Lennon and Paul McCartney

Lest you think I'm being flip, let me assure you otherwise. For since the beginning of all known human culture, both sacred scriptures and secular philosophy have tried to teach us time and time again, the true nature of love. From the Christian scripture insisting nothing we can do or think or say matters if we are not filled with love. To the Beatle's suggesting that all we need to do and be who we are in the world ... is love. It's easy!!

No -- it's not.

Today is *Share the Love Sunday* all across our Unitarian Universalist Movement. It's a culmination of a project called "30 Days of Love" launched by the Standing on the Side of Love campaign of our Unitarian Universalist Association. For the past 30 days, UU individuals and congregations around the world have joined in thought and in deed to explore, expound upon and exalt love in its truest nature. To re-imagine Valentine's day – to reclaim the day our culture has given over to chocolate and flowers as a day more about justice than romance. Now, chocolate and flowers are good things that have their place, but what if we made Valentine's day more about putting the power of love to work to stop oppression?

What if we looked at love not as something we *desire*, but something we *do*.

Let's look for a moment at the Hebrew scripture we cited earlier. As one version of what we've come to know as the Ten Commandments, Leviticus chapter 19 reads, "thou shalt *not* steal, thou shalt *not* lie, thou shalt *not* oppress, or curse, or judge or hate or take vengeance nor bear grudges. Thou shalt not, not, *not*.

And then thou SHALT love thy neighbor as thyself.

You. SHALL. love.

That's. A. Commandment.

Not an option, not a desire, not a dream, not a quest ... a commandment.

The 30 Days of Love project took on some subjects that we readily champion ... and some we find more difficult to get our heads around ... our hands around ... our hearts around.

The injustices of racism, classism, heterosexism are some we tend to fight on a daily basis. And then, there is able-ism, about which we seem to be somewhat behind. February 6 of the 30 Days of Love project focused on this, saying:

Radical love and inclusion means that we find ways to engage all people, regardless of physical, cognitive, sensory, or psychological ability. Physical access, in the forms of large print hymnals, assistive listening devices, wheelchair ramps, and accessible bathrooms is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to becoming fully inclusive congregations.

We are asked to consider the inadvertent barriers we put up.

I learned a lot about this in co-facilitating a workshop on this issue with our UUA organization called EqUUAL Access – that's spelled *E.q.UU.a.l* Access – at last

summer's General Assembly -- learned how much generally "able" folks just don't realize how our differently-abled neighbors get locked out or left out of our communities.

Voter suppression and reproductive restriction are injustices we frequently rail about. But then there's the New Jim Crow of legal structures bent primarily against young men of color, which we are just coming to realize, for as the author Michelle Alexander's book, "The New Jim Crow" delineates:

Once you're labeled a felon, the old forms of discrimination – employment discrimination, housing discrimination, denial of the right to vote, denial of educational opportunity, denial of food stamps and other public benefits, and exclusion from jury service – are suddenly legal.

It's not just about the injustice of mass incarceration, but of how we can offer a more radical love by engaging with formerly incarcerated persons. From my past work in women's prisons, I can attest first hand that the vast majority -- about 80% -- of those women do not belong in prison, but in education and rehabilitation programs, especially those focused on domestic violence and childhood abuse.

Then there are the worker justice issues in our own backyard, from considering where is the most ethical place buy my groceries weighed against the unethical treatment of the farm workers just up the road in Immokolee, to daring to see the plight of kitchen workers, which we will be studying together here at River of Grass on April 6 with the Unitarian Universalist Association's common read, 'Behind the Kitchen Door' by Saru Jayaraman.

And then there's the matter of how we engage with others on issues such as ethical eating. Remember the boycott of Chick-Fil-A a couple years ago, because its corporation regularly contributed to the most divisive anti-gay groups? In the midst of that, family members of mine shut down any conversation about it, saying, "Look, when I'm hungry and I need a cheap meal, I just don't care about politics!"

There's nowhere to go with that.

Except to once again focus on *taking responsibility for my own behavior* in the world.

I imagine that all we've talked about so far this morning can feel overwhelming. And I'll admit that the 30 Days of Love project itself sometimes did. "*What!?!?*" I felt like saying, "Another day of another way to stand up in love and face the cruelties of our broken world! Another day the Universe asks me to try harder, give more, listen deeper, reach farther in and with love?! Another day I can't just roll out of my bunk and go about my business because the dawn of Rightness and Righteousness this world so desperately seeks *through my own life* is still waiting for my most loving self to WAKE UP!"

Which brings us full circle back to this notion of love as *responsibility*. A *commandment*. Not just a nice idea, or an opportunity for the commerce of flowers and candy. But a

foundational principle for the ways we work and walk and teach and talk in this world together -- and the truest meaning of religious community.

Remember that the word “religion, ” means “re-connect”? Well, what is religious community about but re-connecting – with our truest selves, with one another and with the great Mystery of Life we so long to understand? And what is love but the longing for connection? Especially for those whose ears and eyes and hearts are inclined to hear and see and feel the need for true love, radical love, soul-saving love in this world. And isn't that the saving message of Unitarian Universalism – radical love? That every person matters – inside and outside of these walls.

And what do we come *here* for -- to *this* Beloved Community -- if not for that *connection*?!

And to breathe ... together ... for a moment ... in the headlong rush of our lives.

UU composer Sarah Dan Jones has given us a wonderful way to breathe ... and love... together:

[sung, repeat as feels right]

When I breathe in, I breathe in peace,
When I breathe out, I breathe out love ...

The River of Grass Service and Social Justice Committee participated in the 30 Days of Love Project of intentional action toward ending bigotry and oppression. Here's what they did, and what it meant to them.

- They made personal commitments to reflect on the postings of the 30 Days of Love reflections

- They engaged and encouraged use of small-group discussions prompted by the project curricula, including the Couple's Enrichment Group, and the Men's Group.
- Committee members created artwork and wrote poems and reflections on the power of love to end oppression. You've seen some of those creations in this morning's powerpoint.

- Ginger Parrish facilitated a 30 Days of Love art project with our youth and presented the materials in a beautiful way in our foyer, including both familiar social justice stories and encouraging our young people to also develop their own ideas.

- Last Sunday here, the SSJC presenting a Courageous Love Award to Chris Polzer for his dedication to serving the marginalized communities in Broward County.

Committee was how amazed and inspired they have been that the congregation picked up project activities readily and without much push. Amazed and inspired ... but not surprised, given this congregation's historic and hopeful dedication to sharing love and creating justice in our community.

Thou. Shalt. love.

Not just an ideal, a conviction or a concept, a passion or principle, however beautiful, mysterious and magical it might sometimes be.

You. Shall. love.

A commandment. A duty. A responsibility.

When Martin Luther King, Jr. addressed our Unitarian Universalist General Assembly in 1966, he said:

I have not despaired of the future...I know that there are still difficult days ahead. And they are days of glorious opportunity.

There are difficult days ahead ... **and** they are days of glorious opportunity.

As persons, as Unitarian Universalists, and as members of this Beloved Community let us rise to these difficult days of glorious opportunity – ever standing on the side of love.

Amen, Amein, Aho, Ashé, Namasté, Blessed Be ... and May It Be So!

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