



Welcome and Announcements

Prelude worship associate's choice

Opening Words & Lighting of the Chalice:

#122 When strangers meet - Fulgence Ndagijamana

When strangers meet, endless possibilities emerge:
New experiences, new ways of understanding and
new ways of taking action.

When strangers meet,
each pays special attention to the other.
Each is called to serve something larger than the self.
Today, this morning, let's light the chalice:
For openness,
For willingness to grow,
For rich curiosity,
and for common purpose.

Opening Hymn: #298 Wake Now My Senses

A Time for All Ages The Five Friends in the Dark

Sharing of Joys & Sorrows

If you woke up this morning with a joy you could not wait to come to church to share or have a sorrow that is weighing on your heart, now is the time to share. Please come forward and place a stone or other object provided into the water as you speak, or the Worship Assistant can place one for you.

Unison Affirmation

May the light of this flame and the weight of our words inspire us to use our powers to heal and not to harm, to help and not to hinder, to serve the spirit of life in loving affection and trusting hope.

Meditation & Silence #161 We come together today – Marta I. Valentin

We come together today to honor
the universal community of seekers
to which we all belong.

*We gather together today
to share from our deepest place of safety
that we might nurture ourselves
by celebrating one another.*

We call into our presence this hour our ancestors
Whose love, labor and commitment
Made it possible for us to be here now.

*Let us call one another to the table of abundance
That we may feed on these fruits
that sustain us and ever ask us to grow.*

Let us open to this moment
With hearts that have no borders.

Meditation Hymn: #123 Spirit of Life

Sermon: Fifty Pounds of Flour

Hear these words from the Book of Matthew in the Christian scriptures. He told them another parable: “Heaven’s imperial rule is like leaven which a woman took and concealed in fifty pounds of flour until it was all leavened.” (Matthew 13:33, Scholar’s Version)

This parable and my message have a lot to do with my thinking about what it means for me to be a minister in our denomination and with my thinking about what it means for all of us to be ministers to each other and to the wider world.

I need you.

A message without a hearer is all potential, no action.

Leaven without flour is all potential, no action.

This morning, you have given me a chance to do one of the things I enjoy most in the world, being a preacher and a teacher. I want to thank Susan Swope for being worship assistant today and the Worship Committee for having me back to be with you again.

Most of all, I want to thank all of you. I hope my words today can result in a fruitful discussion – kind of like leaven starting dough to rise – here in this place that is sacred to us, this place where we think

about and talk about the most profound happenings in our lives and try to make some sense out of happenings in the life of our country.

We Unitarian Universalists are all about language. You know the joke about Unitarian Universalists not being such good singers because we are always looking ahead to see if we agree with the words?

Today is about words. First, I'm going to be working on unpacking the levels of meaning in the parable we just heard. Then I'm going to be telling you about some key words, important concepts of a Unitarian Universalist theologian named James Luther Adams. The key words are covenant, radical laicism and the prophethood of all believers. The parable and James Luther Adams's concepts say a lot about what we are all trying to do when we come together on a Sunday morning and what we are called later to do when we go our separate ways.

Let's start with the parable.

Jesus' parables are homey, down to earth. Who hasn't seen a person kneading bread? Who doesn't remember what it is like to knead bread?

Jesus' parables are often outlandish. That 50 pounds of flour, enough to feed 100 people, is a lot of flour. I brought 10 five-pound bags with me as a visual aid. It will go to the local food pantry

later. What's up with that 50 pounds? We'll cover that toward the end of this sermon.

Jesus' parables have layers of meaning. They're poetry. This little parable gives us a poetic image, a metaphor, of how the Divine works in the world. It's like this, Jesus says. It's like a little bit of yeast being worked by a woman into a lot of flour.

Besides the enormous quantity of flour, there are some other elements that would be even more shocking to the parable's first hearers. In the mind of the first century Jew, leaven, yeast, is unclean. Remember right before Passover, one of the things you do is clean all the leaven out of your house. It is even a children's game – the hunt for the *chametz*. All the little crumbs and pieces of bread are gathered up and burned so the house can be kosher for Passover.

And I don't think I have to remind you that, to the first century Jew, a woman can be unclean, during her menstrual period and after.

So there's one level of meaning. Jesus is saying *this* is the way the Divine works in the world, through unclean people and unclean things, a woman and leaven.

Another layer of meaning can be drawn from the process of bread making itself, a process that most of us have seen and some of us have done.

Some friends and I once had the idea of making loaves of bread as Christmas presents for everyone we knew. The muscle memory of all that kneading has stuck with me for 35 years. Kneading a batch, then waiting for it to rise. Kneading a batch, then waiting for it to rise. Kneading a batch, then waiting for it to rise. It took all afternoon and part of an evening. Making bread is working and waiting.

And those little packets of Fleischman's yeast! You put the contents of the package in water and mix it up and then mix it, hide it, in the dough. It disappears. Can't get it out again. It disappears. It is hidden. The effect of the yeast shows up later.

The power of the Divine works like *this*: subtle, slow, but it gets the job done.

It's the way an idea grows: subtle, slow, worked on by many hands. This is a different kind of power from the power of empires.

This is power from the inside out, subtle, organic.

This is a different way of getting a result, with its own timetable, which can't be forced.

I want to propose to you today that life as a congregation is like this, that this place, the Unitarian Universalists of Gettysburg, is a place

where we learn how to work and we learn how to wait. Our hopes and dreams are brought into being like bread, through our effort, but not on our schedule.

One more thing about yeast. I found out from a friend that the yeast you put in flour (or beer or wine) attracts other yeast from the air. It attracts what my friend called “good yeast and bad yeast.” Apparently, that’s why you have to keep an area where you make beer or wine so sterile, you want to control the environment. Not so with bread. With bread, the baker just puts out the proverbial welcome mat and says, “Come on down.”

We do that too, as Unitarian Universalists. Like the five friends in our story for all ages, we gather together to share our understandings. As a recent report to President Morales says, “... we are to walk together in the ways of love, inviting all who would join us in our big tent of faith.”

How we understand ourselves as Unitarian Universalists and how we talk to the wider world about our journeys of faith have gotten a lot of attention over the last few years.

You may know that Dr. William G. Sinkford, our president from 2001 – 2009 has advocated a return to religious language, a “language of

reverence.” Back in 2003, he wrote in the *UU World*, “Put a name to what calls you, and to what you find yourself called to do in response.”

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In 2005, the Commission on Appraisal of the UUA, a group of UU leaders charged with identifying issues of concern in our Association, apprehended a need to “develop and articulate a deeper understanding of who Unitarian Universalists are as a religious people and what shared commitments the UU faith calls us to affirm as well as what challenges we face at this particular time.” The Commission cautioned, “We ignore the question of how we talk about and manifest theology in our congregations at our peril.”

Dr. Sinkford and the Commission on Appraisal called for us to look more deeply and to discuss more openly our theologies, our relationships with the Divine, and the implications of those relationships.

The theology of James Luther Adams provides a way to carry on this discussion in these three phrases: covenant, radical laicism and the prophethood of all believers.

Let me tell you a little bit about his life.

James Luther Adams's life spanned the twentieth century (1901 – 1994). A turning point in his life was his visit to Europe during 1935-36. He spent most of his time in Germany, met Karl Barth, Albert Schweitzer, Martin Niemoller and others involved in church-related groups that were forming to resist the Nazi takeover of the German church. "I learned about the meaning of decision and commitment," he wrote. Adams spent the rest of his life nurturing what he called "liberalism with a backbone."

He reached back to the Hebrew Scriptures and the Puritan roots of New England religion to recover the concept of covenanting together for mutual edification and support. George Kimmich Beach, editor of Adams's writings, calls Adams, "A primary cause of the emergence of 'covenant.'"

If you open the hymnal, and look in the first few pages, after the table of contents and the preface, you will find a covenant. The parts I focus on today read, "We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote: ... The inherent worth and dignity of every person; Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations; Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations."

Acceptance and encouragement is our first job as a congregation: Acceptance and encouragement, to be the place where people can grow.

We are here to accept each other, to care about each other, to listen to each other, to challenge each other.

Remember, we need each other to be who we are and to grow into who we want to be. We are here for each other.

Rev. Kenneth Gordon Hurto of the Southern Region of the UUA put it this way:

Soul-growth is tender work, sometimes with exciting liberation but often with a rude deconstruction of our illusions. For an individual to do deep discernment, s/he has to rest in the loving hearts of a shared community of seekers. None of us ever gets the whole story, the whole picture, grasps the entire complexity. We are not just better together, we need one another. We are incomplete and insufficient alone.

But being here for each other is just the start. Soul-growth, deep discernment, the examining of our illusions, our attitudes, can, must, lead to working together to put shared values into action.

Adams wrote, “Everyone can make a contribution. If we do not participate in groups that work deliberately [to meet human needs and build human dignity], we are ourselves irresponsible; we are dominated underlings – mass people in compact with Satan.” This is his concept of “radical laicism,” a sharing of power (and responsibility) within the community in which all have a role and all equally partake of “persuasive power,” the subtle power that grows from within, the power of leaven.

One the things I love about James Luther Adams is his drawing of images from popular culture. He seemed to have liked to use books and movies for examples almost as much as I do. When he writes about radical laicism, he uses the example of that great scene from the one of the first chapters *Moby Dick*, when Father Mapple (played in the movie by an enormous Orson Welles, you’ll remember) comes out to preach. He hauls himself up a rope ladder into a pulpit shaped like the prow of a ship (I sure would like one of those), then pulls up the rope ladder after him. Adams calls that “A fine illustration of ‘freedom of the pulpit.’” But Adams then adds, “The liberty of prophesying about social or institutional evils certainly belongs to the minister. But in radical laicism the trained minister should as it were take the congregation along into the pulpit.”

Here in this covenant community, we are all equal. Here in this covenant community, we are all responsible to put a name to what calls us, and to identify what we find ourselves called to do in response.

In 1986, Adams called for all members of the Free Church to be “forthtellers and foretellers,” holding up the church and society to examination and calling for a new age.

The summation of his essay “The Prophethood of All Believers” is worth quoting at length as a celebration of his position.

The prophetic liberal church is the church in which persons think and work together to interpret the signs of the times in light of their faith, to make explicit through discussion the epochal thinking that the times demand. making history in place of merely being pushed around by it. Only through the prophetism of all believers can we together foresee doom and mend our common ways.

In this past week, in the days and weeks ahead, we are called as a community not only to encourage each other’s spiritual growth, but also to “think and work together to interpret the signs of the times in light of their faith, to make explicit through discussion the epochal thinking that the times demand.”

I need to say a few things about the “signs of the times.”

This is “bike week in Gettysburg.” Susan Swope let me know before I came up. My hotel was filled. All around – at the hotel, in town, at the restaurant I had dinner in last evening – there were people who I would not ordinarily have met – been in the same room with. We are called to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person. “Every person” means every person. Yesterday reminded me that there is more to a person than how they are dressed, or what kind of transportation they like. Yesterday reminded me that I am called, we are called, to bring the message of liberal religion to everyone who will listen – not just to people we find comfortable.

One more sign.

I have not seen our nation’s flag at half-staff for so many days in a row, for so many different tragedies. The flag at half-staff is a sign that our nation is in grief.

Part of grief is numbness and disbelief; part of grief is anger. It is part of our work in the days ahead to work past the numbness, to put aside the anger, to focus on discussion of what we as a congregation, we as a community can do to address the root causes of all these many tragedies. This is “epochal thinking,” part of cooperating with the divine in making history in place of merely being pushed around by it. All believers must contribute to get the “whole story,” together “foreseeing doom and mending our common ways.”

Oh, and what about that 50 pounds? There is a story in the first part of the eighteenth chapter of Genesis, which would have been familiar to Jesus and his hearers. Abraham and Sarah are visited by three strangers, who turn out to be angels, messengers from God. The messengers tell Abraham that he and Sarah will have a son by the following spring. Abraham is happy about this news and asks Sarah to help make some food for the strangers, bread from “three measures,” fifty pounds, of flour. (Fifty pounds it seems is a suitable quantity to celebrate a surprising gift from God.) Sarah hears this news and thinks it is hilarious.

So that’s one more level of meaning to this parable – the image of an older, worldly-wise woman laughing her head off making bread to celebrate something that, if it happens, when it happens, will be a miracle. There’s got to be amazed laughter somewhere in our life together.

I have come to think that our covenant to encourage each other’s spiritual growth and then to move to action is the mainspring of congregational life. The UUA seems to think so, too. Recently the UUA has produced some adult education materials, built around the phrases in “Spirit of Life,” to help people talk about their spiritual journeys and what happens next. We are using these materials at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Southern Maryland as the basis of

our summer worship. Each service reflects on a phrase; this Sunday's is "The Stirrings of Compassion: Caring for One Another." Participants in the service will be (are right now, actually) reflecting on the meanings of compassion for them, and how they can realize those understandings this afternoon, tomorrow, in their homes and neighborhoods and workplaces.

I hope my words today can give you the feeling of how central this kind of exchange is to the life of a church.

Now, I have some questions for you, in light of what you have heard:

- What is the heart, what energizes, the Unitarian Universalists of Gettysburg?
- How is theology talked about and manifested here? In our discussions, are we careful to listen to each other?
- What ties Sunday morning to Monday – at home, at work, in the community?
- And finally, are we having fun yet?

Let's reflect and maybe talk at our potluck

Welcome and Announcements

Offertory Please turn and greet your neighbors

Welcoming Guests & Visitors

* Hymn: #212 We Are Dancing Sarah's Circle

Closing Words & Extinguishing of the Chalice:
#70 Much of Ministry – Susan Manker-Seale

Much of ministry is a benediction
A speaking well of each other and the world
A speaking well of what we value

Honesty
Love
Forgiveness
Trust

A speaking well of our efforts
A speaking well of our dreams

This is how we celebrate life:
Through speaking well of it,
Living the benediction
And becoming a word well-spoken.

Unison Response

We extinguish this flame, but not the light of truth,
the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.
These we carry in our hearts and in our hands,
until we are together again.

Closing Ritual

"Safe Passage," Traditional Spiritual

And now our service truly begins.