

## “3 Dimensional Faith”

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UCC at The Villages  
February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014  
5<sup>th</sup> Sun. after Epiphany  
*Racial Justice Sunday*

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 2:1-12

Matthew 5:13-20

[*Jesus said,*]

*"Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets;*

*I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them.'*      *Matt. 5:17[RSV]*

Let us pray... O God,

Help us to worship you in Spirit and in truth.

May our faith be reflected in how we live our lives.

Amen

At the last Come & Consider class,

the question came up about whether or not someone

from a different religious tradition could be received as a full member.

For example, could a practicing Jew, join our church?

Or a Hindu? Would Mahatma Gandhi be welcome to join our church?

Unitarians do not accept the doctrine of the Trinity

yet they have their origins with the Reformed Church –

which is one of the four traditions

that merged to become the United Church of Christ.

The UCC on the other hand has its roots

in the Protestant mainline tradition which baptizes members

‘in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit’.

According to our By-Laws,

baptism is required for membership in our church.

Does that contradict what we say every Sunday morning in our greeting:

‘No matter who you are where you are on life’s journey,

you are welcome here’?

I welcome your thoughts on this.

In fact, we have a new item on our church website under the tab for ‘More’  
called ‘Reflections’.

This will be our blogsite where ideas can be expressed for discussion.

So, what does it mean to be a Christian?

What does it mean to be a Christian here at UCC at The Villages?

When we try to answer such questions for ourselves, our faith becomes more than  
conformity to literal interpretations; and when we try to live it,

our faith takes on a third dimension, a depth characterized by love.

Willard, p.2

Conservative fundamentalists insist that it is by Christ alone  
that we obtain salvation into eternal life and  
that this implies conformity to specific beliefs, behaviors, and politics.

As an 'open & affirming' congregation, we are among those churches  
with a 'progressive' voice in the Villages-area –  
which can place us in sharp contrast with other Christian churches.

We as the individuals that make up this congregation,  
are by no means all of the same opinion about faith and practice –  
some are more conservative, some more traditional,  
some are more liberal, or religious, or spiritual.

Yet, The Villages itself is relatively diverse in comparison with  
the wider community of the tri-county area –  
so, we as a congregation are a welcome alternative  
for those who are not comfortable with a conservative conformity.

We are not at odds with these other Christian congregations,  
in that any of you is free to believe as you do and still worship together.  
Rather we are in keeping with the spirit of today's Gospel lesson  
which is Jesus' introduction to the Sermon on the Mount when he said,  
*"Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets;  
I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them."* Matt. 5:17[RSV]

Over the years, I have been excited to share with you in my sermons,  
those insights I have discovered along the way of my personal journey  
and what I believe the Gospel message is about.

I do this to challenge you so that you will do the same.

It would be lovely if we all agreed and were all on the same frequency,  
or the same sheet of music.

My hope is that we would work together in a common spirit, a common goal,  
and a common approach to get to that Beloved Community that is possible.

Here are some examples of what have been significant breakthroughs for me:

The prophetic benediction by Pastor John Robinson to the Pilgrims  
as they set off for the New World, is especially meaningful to me,  
when he said there is 'yet more light to break forth from God's holy Word'.

This words have been part of the inspiration for our denomination's  
bold statement that 'God is still speaking'.

This reference also serves as an invitation to use inclusive language and reinterpret  
our scripture and traditional hymns.

Willard, p.3

Phyllis Tribble's article, "Eve and Adam", has demonstrated to me that profound teachings are yet to be discovered in our Bible, especially, to advocate for women and any marginalized minority.

Rene Girard's theories about scapegoats and sanctified violence has been very helpful in explaining to me why the Son of God was so shamefully treated and crucified on a cross. He has also helped me see how original sin may not have been so much about stealing an apple as it was about Adam saying, "She did it!" This also supports the idea that the Beatitudes describes an alternative path about the 'victim' transformed as 'hero'.

Paul Tillich's writings, "The Courage to Be" and "You Are Accepted", as well as Walter Wink's "Homosexuality and The Bible", support the commitment to be 'open & affirming' of those who 'come out of the closet' to be themselves, is what it means to be 'born again' as an example for us all.

Leo Tolstoy, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr. were all influenced by Jesus' Sermon on The Mount to see nonviolent, noncooperation as the way to God's Kingdom of Heaven, a 'beloved community' that is possible, 'on Earth as it is in Heaven'.

Whether you agree with what I am saying or not, these topics are a starting point for you to ask the question of yourself:  
"What does it mean to be a 'Christian'?"  
"What does it mean to be a 'Christian' in the United Church of Christ?"

There were more than 100 UCC congregations just a few years ago and now there are only 95.  
Many of these churches are traditional and many are not ONA;  
But it stands to reason that if all the UCC congregations embraced being ONA as a message that makes us unique – and which the world is moving toward anyway, then we stand a chance for growth and not just survival.  
If we can hold out long enough, we will see other churches follow our example.

*For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Matt. 5:20*  
Jesus is telling us that we must exceed the literal interpretations of traditionalists, if we are to attain that Beloved Community that is possible.

Willard, p.4

Christ rose from the dead to show us that there is more to this life than we know  
and that life, that Beloved Community is described  
in “The Sermon on the Mount”.

We have to see it in new ways in order to apply it for our time,  
by using inclusive language, progressive ideas, with a goal not only of  
individual salvation, but social transformation as well.

Jesus told his listeners on a mountaintop long ago that  
they were like salt and light and that their faith cannot be  
the 2-dimensional conformity of the Pharisees  
if it is to be felt and seen.

Traditionalists would see the questioning of time-held beliefs as being  
an erosion of core values.

They would be right if such changes were not rooted in an authentic and  
passionate resolve to speak one’s truth, and at the same time,  
responsibly reflect upon the origins of those traditions.

We see examples of anarchy and contempt for tradition  
by thoughtless and careless people in emotional pain.

We must take their pain seriously,  
as well as our own individual needs to speak our truth.

The tradition then, serves as a guide  
and not as an end in of itself.

The Pharisees were two-dimensional in their faith.  
They simplified pleasing God to living lives of conformity  
to what was written in the Bible.

Jesus challenges us to live lives of abundance,  
to be true to ourselves, to pick up the pages of the law, set it to music,  
and dance with it, bring it alive, challenge giants, walk on the water,  
feed the hungry, cast out evil spirits, heal others and ourselves – with love.

Tradition is not wrong, it’s just not enough.  
Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well that someday  
people would worship in spirit and in truth.

That has been his challenge to his followers ever since –  
to live a 3-dimensional faith.

Amen

*Our lesson today is from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 2:1-12*

*in which the Apostle Paul speaks about the balancing act of talking about mature faith and conventional wisdom...*

[2:1] Friends, when I came and told you the mystery that God had shared with us, I didn't use big words or try to sound wise.

[2] In fact, while I was with you, I made up my mind to speak only about Jesus Christ, who had been nailed to a cross.

[3] At first, I was weak and trembling with fear.

[4] When I talked with you or preached, I didn't try to prove anything by sounding wise. I simply let God's Spirit show his power.

[5] That way you would have faith because of God's power and not because of human wisdom.

[6] We do use wisdom when speaking to people who are mature in their faith. But it isn't the wisdom of this world or of its rulers, who will soon disappear.

[7] We speak of God's hidden and mysterious wisdom that God decided to use for our glory long before the world began.

[8] The rulers of this world didn't know anything about this wisdom. If they had known about it, they would not have nailed the glorious Lord to a cross.

[9] But it is just as the Scriptures say, "What God has planned for people who love him is more than eyes have seen or ears have heard. It has never even entered our minds!"

[10] God's Spirit has shown you everything. His Spirit finds out everything, even what is deep in the mind of God.

[11] You are the only one who knows what is in your own mind, and God's Spirit is the only one who knows what is in God's mind.

[12] But God has given us his Spirit. That's why we don't think the same way that the people of this world think. That's also why we can recognize the blessings that God has given us.

Matthew 5:13-20

[13] "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men.

[14] "You are the light of the world.

A city set on a hill cannot be hid.

[15] Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.

[16] Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

[17] "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them.

[18] For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

[19] Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so,

shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven;

but he who does them and teaches them

shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

[20] For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees,

you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Inspired by Matthew 5:13-20

YOU ALL ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH,  
BUT WHEN SEASONING BECOMES TASTELESS,  
WITH WHAT SHALL IT BE MADE SAVORY AGAIN?  
WHY, IT IS GOOD FOR NOTHING, YET EVEN THEN  
IT CAN BE THROWN OUT ON SLIPPERY WALKWAYS.

YOU ALL ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD;  
A CITY BUILT ON A HILL CANNOT BE HIDDEN.  
NO ONE LIGHTS A LAMP AND PLACES IT UNDER A BASKET,  
BUT ON A LAMPSTAND, SHINING FORTH  
TO ALL THOSE IN THE HOUSE.

IN THIS WAY,  
YOUR LIGHT MUST SHINE FORTH IN THE SIGHT OF ALL HUMANITY  
THAT THEY MAY SEE YOUR GOOD WORKS AND PRAISE  
FOR YOUR BELOVED GUARDIAN WHO IS IN THE HEAVENS.

DO NOT ASSUME THAT I CAME TO UNDERMINE  
THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS.  
I DID NOT COME TO UNDERMINE THEM,  
BUT TO AFFIRM THEM.  
I AM TELLING YOU THE TRUTH, NEITHER HEAVEN & EARTH  
NOR THE LEAST STROKE OF ANY LETTER OF THE LAW  
WILL PASS AWAY BEFORE EVERYTHING  
THAT IS SUPPOSED TO HAPPEN, DOES.

THEREFORE,  
WHOEVER MAKES A HABIT OF BREAKING THE LAW OF LOVE –  
THE LAW OF LOVING-KINDNESS  
AND CONVINCES OTHERS TO DO THE SAME,  
WILL HAVE LITTLE TO DO WITH  
THE BELOVED COMMUNITY OF HEAVEN.  
BUT WHOEVER PRACTICES AS WELL AS PREACHES  
THE LAW OF LOVING-KINDNESS WILL BE CONSIDERED  
A GIANT IN THAT BELOVED COMMUNITY OF HEAVEN.

FOR I TELL YOU THAT UNLESS YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS  
EXCEEDS THE LITERAL INTERPRETATIONS OF  
THE PHARISEES AND OTHER RELIGIOUS EXPERTS,  
YOU WILL NOT EVEN ENTER  
THE BELOVED COMMUNITY OF HEAVEN.