

PASS ON THE LIGHT

A Sermon by Reverend Lynn Strauss

Pass on the Light – it is an imperative.

For people of faith, bringing hope and light, love and justice into the world is not an option...it is our calling.

At this time of advent and Hanukkah, at this time of long dark nights...finding, seeing, trusting, the light is always a challenge.

Church staffs and ministers know when December is here...for we are in the time of the year when troubled people call on the church, synagogue or mosque for healing help.

It seems the whole world is in trouble...there is darkness and woundedness everywhere we turn.

You know the litany of troubles in the world today...the litany of troubles in your family.

But maybe you didn't know how many turn to the church on the corner, and many turn to the nearest UU church...

It seems every other person in Mont. County has a sister who was married by a UU minister, or a Buddhist friend that told them this was a perfect fit for the...

Lots of people have heard of us and the quality of the light we pass on...

They know that here we do not judge people by what they believe.

Everyone seems to know that.

Here we accept people no matter what their race or class or sexual orientation...and they know that.

Here we don't ask if they believe in God or if they are saved.

We're not the only church that helps people in need, not by any stretch...but people who are alienated from religious traditions or have never had a church of their own...they know about our kind of light.

And so we have an imperative.

We also are called by our very tradition...by our ancestors, the radical reformists of the 16th c. who gave their lives for the principle of God as One...the transcendentalists who brought a moribund Unitarianism out into the fresh air of skepticism and the Black Caucus of the 1968 general assembly who challenged the white power structure of the Unitarian Universalists to be truly to live their values of equality, the first woman ordained in America, a Universalist...the gay and lesbian couples who have been coming to UU clergy to be married long before it was a news item.

We are called by the founders of UUCR, and by David Cole, a former minister who died recently...and who led our delegation to march in Selma Alabama during the civil rights movement...

And we are called by our youth...by our children...they call us again and again to pass on the light of our liberal faith.

My first ministry was in Knoxville, TN. In 1990, they called me, and I was the first woman minister to serve that congregation. And there were a group of girls, middle school age and they were so happy and so inspired to have a woman minister... They came to the classes I taught, they learned to lead worship, they returned often when they were in college. My youngest daughter, Taryn was in that group. And Taryn is now the DRE at All Souls Unitarian in NYC. I got a call from Taryn yesterday...one of the girls in that group died suddenly last week, we're not yet sure the cause...but all the girls, now young women,

were calling each other and making plans to attend the memorial in Knoxville...

Their church means so much to them...it was so formative in their lives, it is where they turn in crisis...it is why they are on career paths of service. In Knoxville, that congregation is one of the few liberal voices in the region...it is a light that shines brightly for inclusion, that church has a coffee house for GLBTQ youth, that church speaks out for reproductive choice and for the DREAM act...

Where is the light I speak of? Where is the healing light of love and justice. Where is the divine light of joy and compassion. Where does our faith tell us to look for the light?

Creation story from 16thc Jewish mystical tradition of Kabbalah...a creation myth told by mystic, Issac Luria...the myth of shattered vessels. You may know it.

In this story God, known as the Infinite Boundless One, Ein Sof...needed to make room for creation...and so God contracted himself/herself in order to make space for creation.

A womb-like empty space was created and into that space came a single ray of light...the primordial light, light so powerful that it shattered any container made...it was put into bigger and bigger containers...but none could hold the powerful light...as the vessels shattered sparks of divine light flew off in all directions and were trapped in the material world.

And these sparks lie in every corner of the world in every corner of our hearts waiting to be redeemed. Until the fallen sparks are restored, the world remains broken...in need of Tikkun, repair.

It is our job, to find these sharp, jagged pieces of shattered vessels and free the light within.

Free the Light Within...

How do we do that?

By seeing with new eyes...hearing with new ears...trusting with a new heart.

And telling ourselves a new story.

Some say, the purpose of religious scripture , myth and story is to replace our own stories about our lives...with a sacred story... To teach us that we are not the only narrators of our story , but there is a larger story of which we are apart and which has a divine narrator.

It's hard for UUs to give up being our own narrators. After all, we're pretty good writers, and we may have had a lot of therapy to help us in re-writes, and we have studied and read extensively...so we know a good story when we see it...but all hubris aside...

There is a larger story...a sacred story. That 's what we come to church to find, to hear, to try to understand, no matter how mysterious or miracles it might seem...no matter that we have to set aside our pens and laptops...and empty our hearts...

So the larger story can fill us...and we can take our part in restoring and healing the world.

The materials, the shards ...each with a ray of light are all around us.

And we try, we do try.

Our UU faith does not teach one method of repair and healing. We learn that there are many ways to open our hearts, to prepare room for a miracle of healing...

That is part of the gift of our faith. There is no one way. There is no one answer. There is no single source of wisdom.

So now we know where the light is...hidden all around us.

So what do we do now? We sometimes see the bits of light, but we want the whole of it, the solution to life's puzzles- we want the cure rather than the healing.

Too often we get hung up on perfectionism. In spite of our theological and philosophical inclusiveness, we want to put the world back together in perfect harmony.

We see and focus on imperfection ...in ourself and in others...and we get stuck and feel inadequate.

But think about the story of the shattered vessel...God or the Creative Source created the light...and then it was broken...it was not a perfect vase...it was not a whole single light.

And it lay all over the world...broken.

According to my religious sources, that was part of God's plan...human imperfection is intentional, it is natural...it is, in fact, a good thing. Darwin might agree, it is in the evolving, correcting ...from imperfect toward more perfect that life moves.

Because if the world and all the people in it were perfect, then we would have no need of spiritual journey's or spiritual practice or moral and ethical education...we would have no need of friends and helping hands and hearts.

The young women of the Knoxville youth group would not be coming together to support Jessica's family and to help heal each others' grief and fear.

We are not made for perfection...we are made to need each other...to help each other heal in body and in spirit.

There are many stories in the Christian Bible which tell of God hiding from his people. He turns his face aside. He hides within a burning bush, He rarely answer directly when asked who he is.

It is never easy to see God or the Divine for it is so often hidden. The power of goodness in us is so powerful, so strong, so beautiful that is hard to look at directly. Think of those moments when you see that beautiful light in someone, when you are so moved, so deeply affected..isn't there a joyful moment when know what might be possible, if only we could always see and believe in that light.

Mystics spend their whole lives in search of the Divine sparks, perhaps we all do.

There's a simple story; a wise teacher tells the student the God wants to hide...and the curious students asks "where is God hiding...is he hiding on the Earth?" And the student searches, but does not find God anywhere on Earth. Is Universal Love hiding on the moon, the student asks...but he cannot see God on the moon. Is the Great Mystery hiding on the highest mountain? And he travels up and down many mountains, but he cannot find God. Is God in church or temple or mosque? No, even there he cannot find God.

And finally the wise teacher says, you cannot find the Source of Sacred Meaning in any of these places, because the Light of Life hides in your own heart.

The divine spark of light hides in your heart.

We know that. We have always know that. It is the bottom line of Universalism, we are all good. We are all born in blessing, but in sin. All people, yes all people are redeemable, no matter what their brokenness, their imperfection, their sin.

Yet, we find this hard to believe. We resist this message of divine light, we strive for perfection rather than understanding the blessings of imperfection, we protect ourselves from the knowledge of our own divine light.

We are canny in our ways of protection, we make use of multiple defenses, rationalizations, cynicism, diversion, noise, laziness, misunderstanding...we UUs seem to be afraid of the divine sparks of creation, we're not afraid of the shards of brokenness, we are most afraid of the light.

We just can't believe it.

We can accept almost everything, except our own divinity within.

These stories are familiar, this message of the hidden light within is heard in every religious tradition. We all have a Buddha within, a lamp unto ourselves, a still small voice. Muslims seek this light in their embodied five times a day prayer. Hindus seek it in healing scents and sounds; it is the gratitude for the gift of this very blessing and the passing on of this light that is the goal of every religious and spiritual person.

We Unitarian Universalists are like every other faithful people in our search for the primordial light of goodness and mercy and justice.

And the amazing truth is that the light is everywhere around us..both hidden and in plain sight.

Darkness and light. Light in the darkness. This is our task, be not afraid, discover the light wherever it may be hiding, and pass it on...it is imperative.

Amen/Blessed Be