

“On Being Human, Religiously”©
Mattatuck Unitarian Universalist Society, Woodbury, CT
The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd, Minister
April 11, 2010

“We depend upon a transforming reality that breaks through encrusted forms of life and thought to create new forms. We put our faith in a creative reality that is re-creative. Revelation is continuous.”

~James Luther Adams

PRELUDE¹

(In the spirit of peace, we invite you into silence and quiet reflection while we listen to the prelude.)

CALL TO GATHER

Come, Come Whoever You Are, #188

MINISTER:

“Come, come, whoever you are;
Man, woman, parent, child
Whatever your religious journey,
Whatever your skin color,
Whatever your abilities,
Whomever you love-
You are welcome here this morning.
You are welcome at our table.
You are welcome in this religious home.”

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Good Morning! Welcome to the Mattatuck Unitarian Universalist Society, affectionately known as MUUS. I am The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd, and it is my great pleasure and privilege to serve this wonderful congregation. We welcome all of you.

- Later in the service newcomers will have an opportunity to introduce themselves and we hope that you will do so. It is optional, but we would like to give you a proper welcome.
- To parents – children are always welcome to stay in the service, or join the other children in our religious education classes.
- Since our Sunday services offer a variety of worship experiences, including ordained clergy as well as brilliant lay speakers, we encourage you to come back often.

- If you are a newcomer, and haven't signed our guest book in the entryway, please do so before you leave so that we may send you a newsletter listing our activities. Newcomers may look for people with gold nametags. These are members of the Membership Committee, and they will be happy to answer any questions you may have. If you have been attending our services for a while and would like to join the society please see me or a member of the Membership Committee.
- Our time together continues after the service with coffee, tea, and conversation after the service, and we invite you to join us. If you are a member, or even a long time visitor, please sign up to brew coffee and to bring and serve simple but wholesome snacks on the sign up sheet at the back table.
- So, too, the flowers this morning are given by Kate MacKinney. Please consider making an offering of flowers for this sanctuary for various Sundays throughout the year, in honor of a special event or in memory of a loved one. You can sign up at the back table. Many hands and hearts make light work.
- So that we may maintain our spiritual space, please place your cell phone in a meditative state of being.
- Important parts of our community life are the invitations we give to one another for activities beyond our morning's service. Please note the announcements in your order of service. I have these additional announcements:
- Invite Mike Ingber up. Today, we begin an experiment to explore new possibilities for bringing music into our Sunday Services. We do this, in part, because it is time for us to welcome Charlie Batchelder, who has been our Music Director, into the pews to sit and participate in the service as a member. Charlie, we thank you for all the wonderful music you have directed and shared with us for the last year or so. Thank you, Charlie.
- As we explore the possibilities for finding a new Music Director, a Music Task Force has formed to help bring in a variety of different types of music initially on the Sundays I am preaching. (Invite Mike Ingber to comment and to introduce Lisa Cyr (musician).)
- If there are any other MUUS related announcements, we ask that you line up to my left to share them now and please use the microphone.”

End with Ed Edelson's skit for Stewardship.

“Here end this morning's announcements.”

And, now: I invite everyone to relax your body, come into this space of community, faith and love. Take the next few moments to focus on your breathing. Breathe deeply. Relax. We welcome you into this place made more sacred by your presence.

SOUNDING OF BELL

*** CHALICE LIGHTING & OPENING WORDS**

No. 418

Come into the circle of love and justice.

Come into the community of mercy, holiness, and health.

Come and you shall know peace and joy.

Adapted from Israel Zangwill

*** HYMN #297 "The Star of Truth"**

*** COVENANT** (in unison)

Love is the spirit of this society.

Dwelling together in peace,

Seeking truth,

Helping one another,

Serving human needs,

Honoring the Earth and all that is,

This is our covenant.

OFFERTORY 429 (adapted)

"As we take our collection, we invite first time visitors to let the basket pass them by, you are our guests today."

For this place of peace, and silence that heals our spirits, we give thanks.

For this place of memory and history that warms our souls, we rejoice.

For this place of prophecy and its vision that changes our hearts,

We offer our life's treasure so that others, too, may know these gifts.

SHARING JOYS AND SORROWS**

"If you are visiting for the first time, or have come back after a long time, or if you are still getting to know us, we would love it if you would introduce yourself to us. It is purely optional, but we'd like to give you a proper welcome. Please raise your hand so we can bring you a microphone."

PAUSE

Let the congregation say, "Welcome!"

As we begin the sharing of our joys and sorrows, please remember to tell us your name before sharing.

And, now, if you woke this morning with a sorrow so heavy that you need the help of this community to carry it; or if, in the spirit of thankfulness, you woke with gratitude in your heart that simply must be shared, now is the time for you to speak.

"Please wait for the microphone so that all will be able to hear."

Sorrows & Joys

For the joys and sorrows that have been spoken, and the myriad of experiences, thoughts, joys, and concerns which remain in the silent sanctuaries of our hearts. All of these joys and concerns weave us together in the fabric of community. **Amen.**

SINGING THE CHILDREN ON THEIR WAY

*As you go may joy surround you, as you go, go in peace;
know our love is with you always, as you go, as you go.*

PRAYER AND MEDITATION

In Words

Prayer . . .

INSERT SORROWS & JOYS

I close with these words written by W. E. B. Du Bois (Reading #494):

The prayer of our souls is a petition for persistence, not for the one good deed, or single thought, but deed on deed, and thought on thought, until day calling unto day shall make a life worth living.

May it be so.

In Silence

In Song—Spirit of Life, #123

SERMON “On Being Human, Religiously”

Rev. Jeanne Lloyd

Many of you know that as part of my training to become a minister, I served as a District Intern for the Clara Barton District of Unitarian Universalist Congregations. Part of my internship required that I preach (as in learn how to preach) in a variety of the 64 different congregations that we have in the District. Stepping into an unfamiliar pulpit and preaching to unfamiliar congregations over and over again, was a bit nerve wracking but ultimately taught me how to land on my feet in a variety of different circumstances. I got used to asking the worship host, before I arrived, some basic questions. Such as: “Do you use the ‘G’ word?”

In one congregation, the answer that came back was, “No, I’m an atheist!” I have learned to not assume what that means, and find very often that others do not know what the word means, either. So, I usually ask what they mean by the word, “atheist,” and usually the answer they give is this: “I don’t believe in a man who has a long white beard, floating up in the sky, pulling our strings to make things happen.”

And, to that description, I can say, “Neither do I.”

I think it is interesting how the word “the” is at the heart of the word, “atheist” and even “theology”. The word “the” is such a little word, usually used as an article to describe something else. It looks to the other word, holds up the other word, announces another word, but in and of itself, the word “the” is not the object of focus. This word comes to us from around 950 CE.¹

The word, “theist” on the other hand comes to us from around 1670, meaning the belief in one God as creator of the universe, and rooted in the Greek word, “Thea”, “a feminine proper name for the word “Goddess.”²

The word, “atheist,” on the other hand, means “a person who denies or disbelieves the existence of a supreme being or beings.”³ Note the emphasis there on the word “being,” as opposed to process.

James Luther Adams, about whom I am speaking today, describes “God” as **a place** instead of a person, “experienced at those points where our **creative energies** are evoked and our lives are given **impetus** and direction.”⁴

¹ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/the>, March 14, 2009

² <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Thea>, March 14, 2009

³ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/atheist>, March 14, 2009

The root of the word "religion" is usually traced to the Latin *re-ligare*, meaning to reconnect. The word "humanism" is usually understood to mean a philosophy that places responsibility on humans to reason for themselves and use that reason for moral impact on this world. Combine the two and we get **religious humanism**, where we are called to care for one another, using reason and compassion, by reconnecting or **staying** in relationship with each other. Thus, I say, ours is a relational theology. Our theology is grounded in the practice forming fair and compassionate relationships with one another. This practice **can** encompass nearly every other type of theology that exists.

Adams was someone who measured the meanings of words very carefully, and who refused to be bound by the narrow definitions given to words by others. He "was born in Ritzville, Washington, in 1901, the son of an itinerant Baptist minister and farmer . . ." ⁵ [When his father became ill, he worked to support his parents and two sisters. He entered the University of Minnesota in 1920 where he met Reverend John Dietrich, well established as a humanist minister of the Unitarian Society. Though he considered a career in law, he decided to pursue the calling of ministry, and entered Harvard Divinity School. Upon graduation, he served two Unitarian congregations, in Salem and Wellesley Hills, Massachusetts. Just prior to his appointment to Meadville Theological School to teach religious social ethics, he traveled extensively in Germany when his thinking was profoundly affected by the rise of Nazism.] ⁶

As he struggled with naming the relevance of liberal religious thought to the context of World War II and its aftermath, he explored and analyzed the meaning of liberal religion for Unitarianism and thereby laid the foundation for what we now commonly understand to be a relational theology that , in his words, calls for "self-discipline to act as the engine of an enlarged humanity." ⁷

Truth is, I could spend an entire year preaching on the ways that our Unitarian Universalist faith is grounded in the religious tenets that Adams and his colleagues formulated.

⁴ Editor, George Kimmich Beach. *JLA, The Essential James Luther Adams*. (Boston: Skinner House Books, 1998), 3.

⁵ Editor, George Kimmich Beach. *JLA, The Essential James Luther Adams*. (Boston: Skinner House Books, 1998), 5.

⁶ Editor, George Kimmich Beach. *JLA, The Essential James Luther Adams*. (Boston: Skinner House Books, 1998), 5-8.

⁷ Editor, George Kimmich Beach. *JLA, The Essential James Luther Adams*. (Boston: Skinner House Books, 1998), 2.

But, I will start by focusing on five principles described by James Luther Adams as the Five Smooth Stones.

Stone #1

Revelation and truth are not closed, but constantly revealed.

Adams says that “meaning has not been finally captured. Nothing is complete, and thus nothing is exempt from criticism. Liberalism itself, as an actuality, is patient of this limitation. At best, our symbols of communication are only referents and do not capsule reality. Events of word, deed, and nature are not sealed. They point always beyond themselves . . . “

“The ground for this first tenet is the human dependence for **being and freedom** upon a **creative power and upon processes not ultimately of our making** . . . [For Adams, and many others who call themselves religious humanists] “God (or [substitute] that in which you may have faith) is the inescapable, commanding reality that sustains and transforms all meaningful existence.”

What is that inescapable, commanding reality that sustains and transforms all meaningful existence for you? Is a being that is beyond us, is it Love, is it art, is it nature, or something else . . . ? What sustains and transforms you?

PAUSE

Whatever it is, he says, “It is inescapable, for no one can live without somehow coming to terms with it. It is commanding, for it provides the structure or the **process** through which existence is maintained and by which any meaningful achievement is realized . . . It is transforming, for it breaks through any given achievement, it invades any mind or heart open to it, luring it on to richer or more relevant achievement; it is a self-surpassing reality. [It] is the reality that works upon us and through us and in accord with which we can discern truth, beauty or goodness. It is that reality which works in nature, history, and thought and under certain conditions creates human good in human community . . . This reality that is dependable and in which we may place our confidence is, then, **not** humanity. Nor is it a mere projection of human wishes. It is a working reality that every person is destined to live with. In this sense, we are . . . not free to work without the sustaining, commanding reality. We are free only to obstruct it or to conform to the conditions it demands for growth. This reality is, then, no human contrivance; it is a reality without which no human good can be realized and without which growth . . . is impossible . . . The liberal’s faith, therefore, is a faith in [that which gives our lives] **being and freedom**. Dignity derives from the fact that we participate in the **being and freedom** of this reality . . . We depend upon a transforming reality that

breaks through encrusted forms of life and thought to create new forms. We put our faith in a creative reality that is re-creative. Revelation is continuous.”⁸

Stone #2

All relations between persons ought ideally to rest on mutual, free consent [persuasion] and not coercion.

“This second principle, like the others can be stated in religious terms in various ways . . . the method of **free inquiry** is the necessary condition for the fullest apprehension of either truth or justice, and also for the preservation of human dignity . . . Now it should be clear that if some people wish infallible guidance in religion, they are not going to find it in liberal religion . . . Instead, the liberal seeks in the words of prophets, in the deeds of saintly men and women, and in the growing knowledge of nature and human nature provided by science[,] meanings that evoke the free loyalty and conviction of people exposed to them in open [discussion].”⁹

Stone #3

Affirmation of the moral obligation to direct one's effort toward the establishment of a just and loving community.

Herein, Adams claims that the prophet becomes the indispensable guide to liberalism. He says, “A faith that is **not** the sister of justice is bound to bring us to grief. It thwarts creation . . . it robs us of our birthright of freedom . . . it robs the community of the spiritual riches latent in its members . . . [But, a] faith in the freedom that creates the just community is the faith of the Hebrew Bible prophets[, where] they [rejected] the idea that the meaning of life is to be achieved either by exclusive devotion to ritual **or** by devotion to blood and soil **or** by self-serving piety. The ‘holy’ thing in life is the participation in those **processes that give body and form to universal justice** . . . [The prophet,] Jesus deepened and [expanded on] that idea when he proclaimed that [the kingdom of heaven is here and now.] [In this moment is] sustaining, commanding, transforming . . . love, a love that fulfills and goes beyond justice, a love that cares for the fullest personal good of all. This love is not something that is ultimately created by us or that is even at our disposal. It seizes and transforms life, bringing us into a new kind of community that provides new channels for love and new structures of justice. . . It is not only a principle by which life may be guided; it is also a power that transforms life. It is a power we may trust to heal the wounds of the common life and to engender

⁸ Editor, Max L. Stackhouse. *James Luther Adams – On Being Human Religiously*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 14.

⁹ Editor, Max L. Stackhouse. *James Luther Adams – On Being Human Religiously*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 14-15.

sharing in community . . . It is the power that leads to integrity of personal life, to the struggle for justice in social-institutional life, and to a creative tension between [that integrity of the personal life and the struggle for justice at the congregational/institutional level].”¹⁰

Stone #4

Denial of the immaculate conception of virtue and affirmation of the necessity of social incarnation. Good must be consciously given form and power within history.

What he is saying here, is that “good” does not exist by itself, solely for itself. Good is something we make together. It is something we must incarnate through our actions and deeds.

“The faith of a congregation or of a nation is an *adequate* faith *only when* it inspires and enables people to give of their time and energy to shape the various institutions – social, economic and political – of the common life . . . The creation of justice in community requires the **organization** of power. Through the organization of power, liberated persons tie into history; otherwise they [will be mere footnotes to] history. **Injustice** in community is a form of power, an abuse of power, and **justice** is an exercise of just and lawful **institutional** power . . . ”¹¹

He says, “The kind of freedom that expresses itself only within the family and within the narrow confines of one’s daily work is not the faith of liberals . . . At best it creates and expresses cloistered virtues of loyalty, honesty and diligence. This kind of faith can be oblivious of the injustices of the domestic, economic, and political orders; [indeed] it can be a form of assistance to the powers of evil in public life and consequently also in the private life.”¹²

Stone #5

The resources (divine and human) that are available for achievement of meaningful change justify an attitude of ultimate (but not necessarily immediate) optimism. There is hope in the ultimate abundance of the Universe.

¹⁰ Editor, Max L. Stackhouse. *James Luther Adams – On Being Human Religiously*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 15-17.

¹¹ Editor, Max L. Stackhouse. *James Luther Adams – On Being Human Religiously*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 17-18.

¹² Editor, Max L. Stackhouse. *James Luther Adams – On Being Human Religiously*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 17-18.

As he struggled to give a liberal theological perspective to the outcomes of WWII, he concluded, “Each generation [is called upon anew to] win insight into the ambiguous nature of human existence and must give new relevance to moral and spiritual values. A realistic appraisal of our behavior, personal and institutional, and a life of continuing humility and renewal are demanded, for there are ever-present forces in us working for perversion and destruction . . . History is a struggle in dead earnest between justice and injustice, looking towards the ultimate victory in the promise and the fulfillment [of that transforming, sustaining source of creativity within each of us.]”¹³

PAUSE

When David faced Goliath, he picked up 5 Smooth Stones to face his foe. What is Adams doing here, when he gives us these 5 Smooth Stones? Who is our adversary? What is at stake?

He birthed these principles into being in context to the events leading up to, including, and coming out of World War II. He crafted them as a statement of what liberal religion aspires to, is called to, and the responsibility it holds for addressing humanity’s capacity to destroy others and itself. He offers them as foundation stones by which to guide us as a people trying to living religiously in a difficult world. He helps us recall that (1) revelation is not sealed, the creative force of life keeps making itself known to us; (2) persuasion and mutual consent is the ideal mode of being with one another; (3) “the ‘holy’ thing in life is the **participation in those processes** that give body and form to universal justice”¹⁴; (4) goodness can only exist when it is backed up by communities claiming their institutional power; (5) we are continuously beckoned by that sustaining reality which calls us to health, beauty & wholeness to live our lives religiously, believing that by our hands transformation and justice is not only possible, but our responsibility to make happen.

May it be so.

PERSONAL REFLECTION (congregation)

(In these moments we share a common responsibility to offer safe space for those reflecting on today's topic. We therefore encourage speakers to make "I" statements--speaking only for oneself--and to avoid language that is argumentative or critical of other viewpoints.)

¹³ Editor, Max L. Stackhouse. **James Luther Adams – On Being Human Religiously**. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 19-20.

¹⁴ Editor, Max L. Stackhouse. **James Luther Adams – On Being Human Religiously**. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 17-18.

What is that inescapable, commanding reality that sustains and transforms all meaningful existence for you? Is a being that is beyond us, is it Love, is it art, is it nature, or something else . . . ? What sustains and transforms you?

*** HYMN #289 *"Creative Love, Our Thanks We Give"***

*** EXTINGUISHING OF THE CHALICE**

"Please join hands for the extinguishing of the chalice."

"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 until we are together again. Let the congregation say AMEN."

Minister: The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd, M.Div., M.A.

Director of Religious Education: Denise Pedane

Musician: Lisa Cyr