

Our Essence and Identity as UUs

A Sermon by Reverend Lynn Thomas Strauss

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"There are two ways to live. You can live as if nothing is a miracle or you can live as if everything is a miracle."

Albert Einstein penned these words. Words that, I think, are very clarifying for UUs. My wish for Unitarian Universalists is that we might fully embrace Einstein's second way.

That we might live as if everything is a miracle.

Such a focused spiritual practice could change everything about our lives. It could change everything about living together in this religious community of UUCR.

Wouldn't it surprise the rest of the religious denominations and faith groups if we became known as the liberal religion that believes everything is a miracle.

It fits our theology you know. It attributes nothing to the supernatural. It counts only on science, nature, and humanity to prove our point. It wouldn't be hard to do. Just look around. Talk to anyone during coffee hour...ask them if they have evidence of a miracle in their lives lately? Think about what matters most to you. About how you make your choices. About why you're here today instead of in some other sanctuary.

Don't you feel that longing, that desire to experience life as an unfolding stream of ordinary and extraordinary miracles. Isn't that the meaning you're searching for?

I get so disappointed in our UU faith sometimes. We are so afraid to call a miracle a miracle. So timid about our faith, about our symbols, about religious ritual and spiritual practice.

We need more praise talk. We need more permission to celebrate life in all its glory as well as in all its tragic dimensions.

It's got nothing to do with God or no God...it's got everything to do with the miracle of life...and how we share it...and how we live together in community.

There is a humanist definition of god that defines God as that which is required for human society to exist. We might say that is a definition of God as Love. The kind of human society we envision both here at UUCR and in the world is a society whose core value is love. And isn't love a miracle?

That's what we hope for when we say..."Love is the spirit of this church." That's what our liberal religious ancestors meant when they said that God is a loving god...and all people are included in the grace, the circle of love.

We UU's have everything we need to be a great religious movement. We are just too quiet about it. We haven't learned to shout or dance or let our spirit soar. We haven't learned to let our saving message out!

We fail to emphasize and pass on religious ritual that will help our youth remember who they are.

Do we tell our children that we are proud to be Unitarian Universalists? Do we tell them why it means so much to us?

I'll bet we point out the miracles of life...but do we tell them this is what UUism is all about? The miracle of human dignity, the miracle of equality and justice for all, the miracle of the search for truth, the miracle of spiritual growth, the miracle of the right of conscience, the miracle of the web of life. Do we teach these things as expressions of our faith?

I heard a story about a boy in a UU RE program...and during the First Fifteen, Children's story... he told how his family lit a chalice at the breakfast table. He told how that chalice reminded him of the importance of his religion and helped him think of the UU principles as he started his day.

When he told the congregation about lighting his breakfast chalice...many people present...laughed...they were so uncomfortable...they actually laughed. But what if, we lit a chalice at home? Maybe some of you do. Or what if we said a blessing at meals?

I am as guilty as the next UU, in leaning toward a secular expression of my faith, rather than a sacred expression of what stands at the core of my life.

What does it mean to be a Unitarian Universalist? How do you know that you are one?

None of us has been baptized Unitarian. None of us is reminded through communion or creeds of confession that we are Universalist. So how do we know? How can we be sure?

What will remind us and our young people of who we are?

Anne Lamott, in her book, "Traveling Mercies" tells this story...about the important role church community plays in our spiritual growth.

"A small girl of around seven years old got lost one day. The little girl ran up and down the streets of the big town where she lived, but she couldn't find a single landmark. She was very frightened.

Finally, a policeman stopped to help her. He put her in the passenger seat of his car, and they drove around until she finally saw something she recognized. It was her church. She pointed it out to the policeman and told him firmly, "You can let me out now. This is my church and I can always find my way home from here."

Religious community is a powerful miracle. How do we do it? With all our inexperience, all our radical diversities, all our disappointments, all our grief and fear...how do we do it? How do we keep creating religious community. A place for healing the spirit, a place to dedicate our children. A place to bury our loved ones.

Sometimes I think we know we are UUs, by a process of elimination... because we couldn't be comfortable anywhere else. We wouldn't fit in any other religion. We wouldn't find enough meaning, or enough beauty, or enough love for our diverse, diaspora selves anywhere else.

We have all been taken in. Not by God or Jesus or the Buddha ...we have been taken in by the miracle of human community.

For our core value...though it isn't listed as one of our principles...I believe our core commitment is to always draw the circle larger. And by doing so, we get to sit next to the most amazing people. People who are in themselves miracles...and whose lives are miracle stories. All people who have, for various reasons, been taken in. People whose love and concern for you and for the world...will make you and me better people.

Our empathy and compassion quotient is high...because so many of us have experienced being on the outside...a misfit in some other faith community.

The miracle is religious community...made possible by love...human love one for another...with no requirement other than to offer our full selves-to commit our talent, our time, our treasure and our trust.

So let's practice our faith, practice our love, practice drawing that circle larger and larger ... celebrating the core that binds us in common fellowship...and strengthens us to act in the world for love and justice.

We are a small faith if one counts churches or membership. But our potential is without limit if we take our light into the world.

My colleague Reverend Bill Murry, once preached a sermon titled..."If you were arrested for being a UU, would there be evidence enough to convict you?"

The boy who lights his breakfast chalice would surely be found guilty.

We need ritual and UU spiritual practices to remind us of who we are. As a minority religion, we need ways to recognize one another and provide a beacon for those who would find their way home with us.

Let me close with Einstein's inspirational words:

"There are two ways to live. You can live as if nothing is a miracle, or you can live as if everything is."

So May It Be/Amen