



# Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens

The Reverend Alison Wilbur Eskildsen, Parish Minister  
The Reverend Don Randall, Community Minister

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## “Becoming Comfortable with Discomfort”

© by Dr. David Jarrett

A sermon delivered on July 31, 2016

At the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens, GA

### Centering Thoughts

*For the timid, change is frightening; for the comfortable, change is threatening;  
but for the confident, change is opportunity.* Nido Qubein

*There are risks and costs to action. But they are far less than  
the long range risks of comfortable inaction.* John F. Kennedy

*Your biggest risk isn't failing, it's getting too comfortable. Every day, we're writing a few more  
words of a story. I wanted my story to be an adventure and that's made all the difference.*

Drew Houston

### Sermon

It has been said that the goal of religion is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. This morning, my goal is to try to motivate you all to move a bit out of your own comfort zones in order to make this world a better place. Kirby Smart the new UGA football coach has been quoted as telling his players that if they want to become champions, they must “learn to be comfortable with being uncomfortable.” In other words to push themselves beyond the point they are comfortable being in order to improve themselves.

I believe that UUs wish to be ethical, moral and upstanding people who strive to live up to our seven principles and improve the world we live in. There is no championship to be won by doing this; there aren't even national rankings for ethical behavior. We work towards peace, justice and equality simply because we know it is right to do so. I believe that one reason many of us come here on Sundays is to help motivate ourselves to become the people we desire to be. Therefore today I am going to try to help direct our energies in some helpful directions.

It might help if I clarify what that direction is. The Roman Catholic Pope Francis has asked “Who am I to judge?” so I surely will not attempt to judge any of you. I am suggesting that you evaluate yourselves on a kind of “goodness scale.” The scale is based on the idea of evaluating how much you care about yourself and your comfort and what impact you have on other people. Everyone

can assign themselves a point on the scale. It is a continuum and you might have better days than others. Of course you might be better at doing some things than others. As I said, only you should be the judge of that. Let me highlight a few points on the scale for reference.

At the bottom end are truly evil people who actively create pain for others. These might include criminals or dictators. Surely no one here would fit that category. On the other end are those who selflessly devote their lives to the wellbeing and safety of others with little or no concern for their own comfort. You might call them saints or heroes. I have known a few people like that. Achieving that level of goodness might be too much to ask of oneself but some folks really do act that way.

Back at the bottom, only slightly better than the evil ones, are selfish people. They don't go out of their way to cause others pain, but they don't make any effort to help others either. They put their own needs far ahead of those of other people and really don't raise a hand to help others unless they feel they have to. We all know individuals like that. You can't say they are bad people but those are the ones I try to avoid having much to do with if I can.

Most of us fall somewhere in the middle of the scale. We are what I would like to call "Comfortable" folks. We do care for others and are willing to help them out so long as it doesn't make us feel too uncomfortable doing so. Maybe we do a little in the community. We donate to charity and this Fellowship but not so much that we have to give up any of our own lifestyle. We recycle and watch our gas mileage but haven't made any major changes in our consumption habits. We verbalize support for good causes and vote each year but perhaps we could do more. I ask you: How much of your own comfort are you will to give up to support your own principles?

If you are already doing a lot, then I salute you. You have moved up from being a comfortable person to being a really good person. Still you might look again and decide that there is a little more you could do. I know I could. I will never be a hero or a saint but I would like to aim for the "good" category if I can.

If we wish to be good people then we need to be willing to sacrifice a bit of our comfort. Are there things you spend your money on that you could do without to contribute more to those in need or even to this Fellowship? There is a capital campaign coming up. How much are you going to pledge to expand our vision? You know that if we do dig just a little deeper into our pockets than we might originally feel comfortable with we will make our religious home a lot more like our best visions of it. Whew...asking for that doesn't make me feel too comfortable. I guess that is the idea...

In addition to money this place can use your energies and talent. Get involved, volunteer, pull weeds, help cook or serve for Our Daily Bread, join a committee, help prepare coffee. There is so much that this place needs. I will confess that when I look at my full calendar of time commitments I can start to feel a bit stressed but when I actually spend time and energy around here it gives me a pretty good feeling. So maybe contemplating doing more might be uncomfortable but doing it might be fun.

What about the environment? Can you reduce your carbon footprint a bit more? Can you stand to be a bit warmer in your house in the summer and cooler in the winter? Have you considered carpooling or even bicycling to get around? Do you think about sustainability and environmental impact of what you purchase and consume? That takes a bit of effort doesn't it?

Animal product production takes a lot of energy and produces a lot of greenhouse gas. Perhaps you are not ready to give up meat all the time, but trying a couple of vegetarian meals a week or cutting meat portion size down and increasing vegetable intake can make a huge impact on the environment.

How about politics? We do care if candidates who support our values are elected. In addition to voting and contributing to your choice of candidates you might join a voter registration drive or volunteer to make phone calls for the people you want to see elected. For those who are running for office, your time is even more valuable than your money. Do a little work for the party of your choice if you want to make a difference. At least if you try to get the right people in office you have more right to complain about what happens in government. Between elections, writing letters, attending demonstrations, going to government meetings has actually made a real difference in government decision making, Try doing that and at the very least you will get to meet some very interesting people who share your values.

One of the most uncomfortable things one might try to do is to reach across ethnic and racial lines to try to make this community more racially just and cohesive. We have asked you all to read and discuss the book "Waking Up White." We have had movie showings and discussion groups. There are more speaker meetings, discussions and even a "World Café" happening to help raise our awareness of these issues. We all can benefit from greater understanding of these problems.

We have talked about supporting the Black Lives Matter Movement to stress the need to end institutional racism and stop the killing of innocent citizens by law enforcement. Fenwick Broyard recently pointed out that what we need to do, is show our neighbors, both black and white, that their lives matter to us now while they are alive, not just appreciating them after they are killed. How can we do this? We can make an effort to meet and talk to those who are different from ourselves. That's not as hard to do as you may think. Here are some suggestions on how to do this. Because words are important, what I wish to say is quote: "People who have a different racial or ethnic background than yourself" but to save time I am just going to say the word "black." Please feel free to translate the term as you see fit. Here are some suggestions:

- Try attending a Sunday service at a black church. It's a very different experience. Many of us did that 2 Sundays ago at Hill Chapel. Stay after the service and talk to people. In the past even when my wife and I were the only white faces in the congregation at a black church, I always have felt welcome. All of us who were there at Hill Chapel felt close to all who were there with us.
- There will be another Interfaith Prayer Service at East Friendship Baptist Church (480 Arch Street, Athens) on Thursday, August 4, 2016, at 6:30 pm sponsored by the NAACP

to bring together our community in response to the violence against police and black lives across the country. Speakers include UUFA's Rev. Alison Eskildsen and other local faith leaders. All are encouraged to attend.

- Another event is the “Black Market” to support Local Black and Minority businesses in the area. This will be at The Max Canada on Washington Street this Saturday, August 6 at noon.
- In addition to these events you should consider who you hire to perform repairs and do services in your home. I have been very satisfied with the black painters, appliance repairmen and plumbers I have used. Be sure to spend a moment talking to them as well as just doing business. We even use a black-owned trash collection service that does an excellent job.
- Consider using black physicians or dentists or lawyers. Meet new people.
- If there is a cafeteria where you work, don't always sit with the people you know. The tendency is for people of the same race to always sit together. Try meeting, eating with and talking with some new people.
- If you and your co-workers go out after work make sure you include black co-workers. You might ask their suggestions of where to go to make sure they will be comfortable in the location.
- Go to a blues, jazz or hip hop performances that cater mostly to black people. The Segar Jazz affair one Sunday a month at the Foundry attracts mostly a black audience (always dressed to the nines) and always is a great performance of music you can't hear elsewhere. Go, listen and chat with folks between songs.
- Live in a mixed neighborhood and walk around in it and talk to people you meet.
- If your children are in the public schools there is a good chance that they have made black friends. Get to know the parents of your children's friends. Invite them over for a barbeque.
- Make sure your children are involved in integrated after-school events and summer camps. Volunteer at some of these to meet other parents.
- Invite black acquaintances over to dinner.
- Join racially mixed groups and organizations. Get involved with the community.
- Patronize black-owned businesses and restaurants.
- Talk to people you meet in line at the supermarket and stores. Sit with and talk to black people at concerts and sporting events.
- Volunteer to work with the Economic Justice Coalition to go to register people to vote and don't just sit at the library; get out into the community. Meet people and register some of them as voters.
- Try taking the bus and talk to people you meet on the bus.

Does the thought of doing those things make you uncomfortable? That should be even more reason to try it. We need to change official policies and change hiring patterns and the way we apply our laws to different groups, but we can make real progress on a one to one basis getting to know one another more as people.

No one has to do any of things I suggest today unless you feel you should. I surely do not live up to all the standards I would like to. What I really am suggesting is that you look at yourselves and what you do and decide if you are willing to be a bit less comfortable in order to make the change you believe is needed in this world. First, do a little self-examination and then decide what if anything you need to do better. Then try to make a little change and then perhaps a little more. I expect you might find that the sense of pride and satisfaction you will get will feel even better than the comfort you are giving up.

In any case have a great rest of the week.

### **Questions for Reflection & Discussion**

1. Are there things that you feel you should do but do not because it makes you uncomfortable?
2. Was there a time in your life that you felt really uncomfortable until you made some changes?
3. Looking back, was there ever a time when you felt too comfortable and it held you back from growing?
4. What areas of your life now do you feel you could improve on?