

“Justice, Justice Everywhere!?”

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At the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens, GA

Centering Thoughts

But someone will say, "You have faith and I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. --James 2:18

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. --James 2:26

You must do the things you think you cannot do. --Eleanor Roosevelt

The prophetic liberal church is the church in which all members share in the common responsibility to attempt to foresee the consequences of human behavior (both individual and institutional) with the intention of making history in place of merely being pushed around by it. --James Luther Adams

Reflection

In the Athens area, UUFA is known not only for its wonderful music program but also for its justice work. For that, I thank you.

As you can see in your order of service, the title for today is “Justice, Justice Everywhere!?” a literary allusion to English poet Samuel Coleridge who penned following lines in his poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*: “Water, water, everywhere, nor any drop to drink.”

Coleridge’s observation in a declaration—a statement—that is somewhat pessimistic as the ancient mariner is afloat in the ocean bemoaning: “nor any drop to drink.” My title lacks a second part but is punctuated by both an exclamation point and by a question mark.

Why? [*Well, as a former English teacher, I can 😊, but more importantly*] it is how I feel about justice work in general and justice work at UUFA in particular: both full of excitement and questioning where do we go from here.

Me? I have not only drunk the water, but I have taken a big gulp.

Why?

What is it about justice work that resonates with me?

My initial response is usually “There but for the grace of whomever go I.”

I also take to heart the Biblical sentiment: To whom much is given, much will be required.”

Even as a child, I have always been for the underdog...literally. Many of you may remember a movie entitled *Lassie Come Home* which centers on a faithful collie undertaking an arduous journey to return to the young boy who loves her. At the end, when I am sobbing uncontrollably, owner Joe

has given up hope of ever seeing his dog again, but the weary Lassie returns and is reunited with the boy she loves.

Yes, I do have a fondness for animals, but I also have an acute sensibility for wanting life to be just—at least my sense of what is justice. Overcoming all kinds of obstacles--naturemade and manmade, Lassie's returning home to the person who loves her is my kind of justice, my kind of the world being right again on its axis.

The etymology of the word *justice* comes from Latin, having to do with the word *just* dealing with the law and what is right.

As we celebrate the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., I am reminded of his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," penned on April 16, 1963. King's letter is a response to several criticisms made by eight white local Alabama clergymen in reaction to civil rights demonstrations taking place in the area at the time. These clergymen took issue with events "directed and led in part by outsiders," urging activists to engage in local negotiations and use the courts if rights were being denied rather than to protest."

Part of King's response resoundingly resonates: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

In this letter, King continues, "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

Remind you of any of our seven principles?
Please take a look on the back cover of your order of service.

Principle number 7: "respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part."

Other of our seven principles—those statements that we as Unitarian Universalists hold as strong values and moral guides--loom large in the justice work that we are called to do:

- the first--the inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- the second--justice, equity, and compassion in human relations
- the sixth--the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all

In fact, I would assert with explanation--if I had more time--that justice and thus the expectation to work towards it animates all seven principles of our denomination.

As you know, Unitarian Universalist IS a non-creedal religion. We don't have one belief statement. As a covenantal religion, our emphasis is on action. Deeds not creeds.

UUA President Peter Morales maintains this need for action; he says, "... the ultimate expression of our spirituality is our action."

Within this particular congregation, our mission statement—what our purpose is; what we are supposed to be doing—is a clarion call for doing justice work? Will you please turn once again to the back cover of your order of service and read our mission statement with me:

The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens, Georgia, is a caring congregation of diverse peoples, ages, backgrounds, and beliefs. Our purpose is to support our members

*and to commit deeply to our shared Unitarian Universalist principles by worshiping, playing, and exploring life's meaning together, thus **promoting love and justice** in our larger community and the world.*

Right below our mission statement, you will see our vision statement—our end game, if you will, of what will happen if we are enacting our mission. Once again, as you read with me, I hope you will see that not only are we called to do justice work by the “mothership”—the UUA--but also by the very documents that we--as a congregation, as a Fellowship—have put in place.

*The vision of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens, Georgia, is to be a beacon of liberal religion and spirituality in Northeast Georgia. Guided by our Unitarian Universalist principles, our light will shine more brightly as we welcome greater diversity and search for deeper meaning. **By speaking and acting for justice** and modeling sustainable stewardship of personal and earth resources, we strive to transform our world.*

So, because I trust the our parent organization---the “mothership,” if you will—the UUA—and I believe the UUFA mission and vision and also our covenant, I do not have any options other than to be participatory in justice work. It is part of my, your, our religion and spirituality.

So what's to do?

Nothing and everything.

Do something even if doing something means purposely doing nothing. For example, I choose not to shop at a particular mega-business for what I believe are unjust labor practices. So in terms of economic justice, I urge you to put your money where your values are. In my perfect world, I am hopeful that we each engage individually in some sort of justice work.

An insert in your order of service shows that justice work is alive and well at UUFA. So as a resolution in this new calendar year, I urge you to be involved with justice work in a way in which you are not currently involved.

Start this afternoon--Attend the Exploring Racial Justice meeting. Tomorrow, the MLK Day of Service--offers numerous opportunities to get your feet wet and your hands involved with justice work.

On one side of this insert, you will see Justice Cluster activities, all held at UUFA unless noted and open to all: members, friends, and visitors.

I hold up two new Initiatives that the Justice Cluster is supporting: Exploring the Sanctuary Movement and the 100+ Days of Action.

If you don't see something listed about which you are passionate, build it and “they” will come. When I first came to UUFA, only two justice groups were in existence. The rest evolved because of the interests in certain areas by committed individuals.

If you do see something listed about which you would like more information, fill out the small card and place it in today's offering plate.

Not a joiner? No time for meeting? Not called to stand in protest? That's all right. Be supportive. Be part of the caring community to support those who **are** on the front lines. Donating money to a cause of your choosing is great. Donating money to the UUFA Cause of the Month or to UUFA is even better, thus supporting the work **we** do, for—as the saying goes—Together Everyone Achieves More—Being committed to justice work as a group is much more powerful than that of being committed to justice work solely as individuals.

American cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead purports: “Never doubt that a small **group** of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

Reverend Dr. William J. Barber II echoes this sentiment: “...This story is not about me. The most important word in the justice vocabulary is always “we.”

Hear the words of UU minister Karen G. Johnston:

Do not be alone right now. Gather together.

Gathering together grows courage: in ourselves and in others who see the numbers swelling. It is a small thing, but right now it is an important thing.

Great sources of wisdom remind us: just because you cannot stem the tide of all hate, it is still right to do the thing you can do. These things add up: your one thing & my one thing; his one thing & their one thing & her one thing. Together it becomes a BIG thing.

Do not be alone right now. Any liberation—all liberation—is collective liberation. My freedom is bound with yours and yours with mine. Inextricably.

Let us together cast our lots doing this BIG thing: bending the moral arc of the universe towards justice.

I hope you will cast your lot/I hope we will cast our lots with the justice work that is happening here at UUFA, within the Athens community. Drink the water—gulping or sipping as your taste prescribes, but let us drink together. Water, water everywhere, and many drops to drink.

May it be so.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. With which quotation do you most or least resonate?
2. What do you think of when you hear the word *justice*? What kind of justice work do you do, have you done, and or would like to do?
3. Do you agree or disagree that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere"?
4. When are you aware of a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens changing the world?