

First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany, NY

“Beloved Community”

Rev. Samuel A. Trumbore January 12, 2020

Call to Celebration

I had the great good fortune to hear the Rev. Dr. Otis Moss the third preach daily at Chautauqua this past summer. He is one of the finest preachers I have ever heard, quite an inspiration. You can be sure I was studying him very carefully for anything I could learn and bring home to you.

His sermon on July 24th titled “Repairing the Jericho Road” preaching on the Good Samaritan Biblical story knocked my socks off. He began the sermon with a poem “A Dead Man’s Dream,” by Carl Wendell Hines, Jr. He said it encapsulated the way America viewed Dr. King. Here is that poem:

*Now that he is safely dead
Let us praise him.
Build monuments to his glory. Sing Hosannas to his name.
Dead men make such convenient heroes.
For they cannot rise to challenge the images
That we might fashion from their lives.
It is easier to build monuments
Than to build a better world.
So now that he is safely dead
We, with eased consciences will Teach our children
that he was a great man
Knowing that the cause for which he Lived is still a cause
And the dream for which he died is still a dream.
A dead man’s dream.*

May our service this morning not follow this narrative that is all too familiar.

May our service remembering Dr. King’s vision of Beloved Community energize us to be bold, accept the poem’s challenge.

May our service inspire us to turn Dr. King’s dream into a reality, for our own lives, for our congregation, for Albany, for New York, for this nation and for the world.

Let our words not be empty praise but calls to action as we join together in the celebration of life.

Sermon

If you hang around UU circles, especially of UU religious professionals and attend our yearly Unitarian Universalist national General Assembly, you are going to hear the term “Beloved Community.”

It sounds like a nice friendly term for a caring community ... if you don't know its history. And more recently, it has taken on so much significance for Unitarian Universalists. That is because we are discussing adding it to our purposes and principles as the 8th principle.

The Black Lives of UU (BLUU) Organizing Collective encourages all Unitarian Universalists to advocate for the formal adoption of an 8th principle, articulating a commitment to the dismantling of white supremacy, within the stated principles of our faith.

Here is the wording of the proposed 8th principle:

“We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote: journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions.”

Where did this come from?

Paula Cole Jones, our guest speaker for our Hudson Mohawk UU Cluster service this spring on April 5th, developed an awareness of the existence of 2 different paradigms in UU circles: the UU 7 Principles and Beloved Community. After working [for the UUA] with congregations for over 15 years, she realized that a person could believe they are being a “good UU” and following the 7 Principles without thinking about or dealing with racism and other oppressions at the systemic level. Her evidence: most UU congregations are primarily European-American in membership, culture (especially music), and leadership, even when located near diverse communities. She realized that an 8th Principle was needed to correct this. She talked with Bruce Pollack-Johnson about some of the components that should be in it. Bruce put together an initial draft in 2013, and the two of them worked with a group of anti-racist activists in the former Joseph Priestly District to refine it. Bruce's congregation (the UU Church of the Restoration in Philadelphia) incorporated it into their Covenant at that time, then in May 2017 formally adopted it for themselves and recommended that the UUA adopt it.

Now that we are being asked to incorporate the concept of Beloved Community into our purposes and principles, we need to seriously consider what it is and whether we want to incorporate it into our identity as Unitarian Universalists.

Up until recently, I've understood Beloved Community as an extrapolation of the core Christian concept of the Kingdom or Realm of God. That's certainly how most Christians understand it.

The Realm of God is the restoration of the God's relationship with God's people. In the era Jesus lived, Jews suffered under imperial domination and oppression. This wasn't what they had been promised for making a covenant with God. For Jesus and his Jewish contemporaries, the Realm of God was the restoration of the Jewish nation and liberating it from foreign domination and oppression. God was going to take charge again and Jesus believed he was the agent of that restoration. Jesus wasn't the first prophet to come forward and announce this restoration. There was a long list of them. We have records of a few, most of them were executed by the empire du jour. They are mostly lost to history. What set Jesus apart from the others was the report that he came back to life after being killed. That meant he could continue to be God's agent of the restoration, now, or soon, or at some time in the future when he would return. In the meantime, the church could be the container for that restoration and propagate it into the future.

There is a whole lot more to say about the Realm of God. For our purposes, let's just say that the origin of Beloved Community begins with the Christian understanding of the most important thing we know about Jesus. He saw himself as bringing forth the Realm of God. And we are still waiting for that to happen 2000 year later.

Now, I have great love for Jesus and his ministry, but I am not a Christian. I just do not and cannot believe much of Christian theology. Yet, I can be inspired by and follow Jesus without being a Christian. For this reason, I've been lukewarm about the concept of Beloved Community. I appreciate that it was important to Jesus. And, Christianity has interpreted it in ways that I believe are quite harmful, especially the apocalyptic understanding of the second coming.

My attitude changed when Beloved Community was discussed as part of our Transforming Hearts: Transgender Inclusion in our Congregations class. One of our instructors, Alex Kapitan, who will be leading the service here February 2nd, talked about Beloved Community in a way I hadn't heard before. The class has links to supporting documents. One link went to a web page describing Beloved Community.

That link directed my attention to Dr. King's philosophy and advocacy of Beloved Community. Dr. King was thoroughly Christian in his faith, and he studied the latest theology at Crozier Divinity School in the 1950's. He read Josiah Royce who introduced him to an innovative interpretation of Beloved Community. He was influenced by and joined a group Royce helped create called the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Formed to oppose World War One, they rejected violence as a form of conflict resolution. And then he learned about Gandhi and was profoundly moved by him.

When he was drafted to lead the Montgomery Bus Boycott, he needed all these resources to come up with a non-violent strategy to win that boycott. It was in envisioning a way to fight for civil rights that the Beloved Community took shape for him.

The King Center has [a great description](#) of the philosophy of Beloved Community from which I quote:

For Dr. King, The Beloved Community was not a lofty utopian goal to be confused with the rapturous image of the Peaceable Kingdom, in which lions and lambs coexist in idyllic harmony. Rather, The Beloved Community was for him a realistic, achievable goal that could be attained by a critical mass of people committed to and trained in the philosophy and methods of nonviolence.

Dr. King's Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. In the Beloved Community, international disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power. Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict.

Dr. King's Beloved Community was not devoid of interpersonal, group or international conflict. Instead he recognized that conflict was an inevitable part of human experience. But he believed that conflicts could be resolved peacefully and adversaries could be reconciled through a mutual, determined commitment to nonviolence. No conflict, he believed, need erupt in violence. And all conflicts in The Beloved Community should end with reconciliation of adversaries cooperating in a spirit of friendship and goodwill.

King focused on three evils that stood in the way of achieving the Beloved Community. He brought them into clarity in his essay, "Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community." I will state each one then read a quote from that essay so you hear it in Dr. King's words.

The first evil is poverty. And when King spoke about poverty it included a wide area of concerns including unemployment, homelessness, hunger, malnutrition, illiteracy, infant mortality and slums. Dr. King wrote:

"There is nothing new about poverty. What is new, however, is that we now have the resources to get rid of it. The time has come for an all-out world war against poverty ... The well off and the secure have too often become indifferent and oblivious to the poverty and deprivation in their midst. Ultimately a great nation is a compassionate nation. No individual or nation can be great if it does not have a concern for 'the least of these.'"

The second evil is racism. Those of us granted race privilege in our society often have no clue how profoundly important racism is to prevent the realization of Beloved Community. This includes prejudice, apartheid, ethnic conflict, anti-Semitism, heterosexism, colonialism, homophobia, ageism, discrimination against disabled groups, just to name a few of the ways people divide into categories. Dr. King wrote

"Racism is a philosophy based on a **contempt** for life. It is the arrogant assertion that one race is the center of value and object of devotion, before which other races must kneel in

submission. It is the absurd dogma that one race is responsible for all the progress of history and alone can assure the progress of the future. Racism is total estrangement. It separates not only bodies, but minds and spirits. Inevitably it descends to inflicting spiritual and physical homicide upon the out-group.”

The last evil of the three Dr. King focused on was Militarism. This is the belief that social problems can be resolved through violence. Examples include war, imperialism, domestic violence, rape, terrorism, human trafficking, media violence, drugs, child abuse and violent crime. Dr. King wrote:

“A true revolution of values will lay hands on the world order and say of war- ‘This way of settling differences is not just.’ This way of burning human beings with napalm, of filling our nation’s homes with orphans and widows, of injecting poisonous drugs of hate into the veins of peoples normally humane, of sending men home from dark and bloody battlefields physically handicapped psychologically deranged, cannot be reconciled with wisdom, justice and love. A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.”

I hope you’re getting a sense of Dr. King’s vision of Beloved Community as much bigger than the Biblically framed idea of Kingdom of God focused on the restoration of the Jewish people. I believe is coherent with our vision of Unitarian Universalism too. Dr. King’s vision is a global vision for how we can live together in peace. That can never happen if some cannot feed themselves or clothe themselves or find shelter from the elements. That can never happen if some are devalued just because of the color of the skin or their sexual orientation or gender identification or their ability or disability. That can never happen if we are willing to harm others to seek resolution of social conflict.

Benediction

Be About the Work By [Andrea Hawkins-Kamper](#)

May we see all as it is and may it all be as we see it.
 May we be the ones to make it as it should be,
 For if not us, who? If not now, when?
 This is answering the cry of justice with the work of peace,
 This is redeeming the pain of history with the grace of wisdom,
 This is the work we are called to do, and this is the call we answer now:
 To be the barrier and the bridge,
 To be the living embodiment of our Principles,
 To be about the work of building the Beloved Community,
 To be a people of intention and a people of conscience.