

This whole year I have been preaching from our seven principles. I have tried to take a different principle each month and use it as the focus of my sermons. Mostly I have received positive feedback. There were moments when I was sure you all would sigh and say no not another principle.

But here we are at the end of the year. So today I would like to come full circle and talk about the principles as a complete set, or like a fabric where all the threads have been woven together. Each thread has its own color its own texture but the beauty and strength is in the blending of many threads together.

Meg Barnhouse a Unitarian Universalist minister, writer and musician. In one of her songs she describes Unitarian Universalists this way:

We got us a feast for the spirit
A feast for the mind

We speak the truth

We walk in love

We remember to be kind.

She wrote those words for a specific congregation, but I think that they can describe Unitarian Universalists at their best.

These words have grabbed me because I think that those words: we speak the truth we walk in love we remember to be kind is the best summary of our seven principles that I have yet heard.

Our principles are not a creed, ours is not a creedal faith or community. One ministerial colleague described a creed as something that is at the end of the conversation.¹ I would add to that that a creed gives one an answer.

¹ Message: 3

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We don't do that. We don't give people the answer, we as Unitarian Universalists tend to give ourselves the questions or allow space for the question to develop. A pretty standard to reaction to Unitarian Universalists is, "Well what do you believe, or so you can believe anything, or so you don't have to believe in anything you can believe in nothing? That one really gets me going. In the words of Rumi "Ours is not caravan of despair." Ours is a faith of something not of nothing of hope not of despair

I have always found that an interesting reaction to Unitarian Universalists. After all we are not the only non-creedal religious group around. For example, most people would not think of Judaism as a creedal religion. And technically even Southern Baptists are not a creedal religion. And yet I will bet you that Jews

Subject: [UUMA-Chat] Principles 'n' Creeds 'n' Stuff

To: Confidential discussions among UU Ministers Association members

and Southern Baptists rarely get asked, “So you can believe whatever you want right?”

I don't think that it is our principles that lead folk to believe that we can do or believe whatever we want. In part I wonder if it is our struggle with getting our beliefs into a concise format. If you ask an orthodox Jew what he or she believes you might get the answer I believe in the Torah. If you ask a Southern Baptist you would probably get the answer I believe in Christ.

If you were not familiar with the words Torah or Christ you might not know what they meant but you would probably get that there was an item easily named at the center of that person's faith.

Ask a Unitarian Universalist what they believe and you are as likely to get a diatribe, a sermon, or a sputter. Next Sunday our Coming of Age youth will be giving the credos – their belief statements –

here. I was fortunate to be able to help them type them up. We have some great young folk among us. I am proud of them for writing down their beliefs – and there is a variety of beliefs among these youth and some of them are quite clear that they are not yet sure what they believe. And we have this wonderful faith community that affirms their ability and freedom to openly say I am not sure.

You may be a person who has come to a decision about what you believe, or you may be sure that you are not sure. Somehow for us UUs who are seekers that question “What do I believe” is still pretty important to us and it is a difficult question to answer.

It is difficult to answer because in some ways it is the wrong question. Because honestly I don't care what you believe. I don't mean that I don't care, or I don't mean I don't care about you. And I am interested intensely interested in beliefs, mine yours ours. I

would love to sit down with each of you and have that discussion what do I you we believe. I like to think that we have this cacophony of beliefs here. A chorus of disparate beliefs that somehow come together in a harmony that none of us can really direct. But ultimately I don't care. You may believe what you want or need to.

But I do care deeply about what we do, what I do, what you do, what we do as a covenantal community.

And that is where our principles are, this is the question: And for me it a much of a harder question. So as Unitarian Universalists what is it we do? That is the question that I would love to have someone ask me. Nor what do you believe but what do you do.

When I get up in the morning as a UU what do I do, when I am sending my kids off to school what do I do, when I am confused, what is it I do? For me this is a harder question to answer.

My answer is we speak the truth, walk in love, remember to be kind, all three at once. Like juggling you have to keep all balls up in the air at once. Not easy. Next time you are at a committee meeting and you are really frustrated with someone, or the process, stop and try to speak the truth, while walking in love and remembering to be kind; because that is our covenant. Next time you read a headline that makes you angry try to speak the truth, while walking in love and remembering to be kind.

We are a covenantal people, and our covenant our promise is described by our principles.

As a faith I think that we are always on the brink of breaking into an aggregate of individuals. Somehow I never worry that we will meld into some kind of indistinguishable blob of community. We *are* a gathering of personalities. Which makes our covenant, our

principles, that much more important.

When I used to lead the children's chapel and I would lead the children in saying the seven principles. This is a somewhat risky practice. We want them to learn the principles and so we have the children repeat them. But when you say something each week you risk having those words come to function like a creed. So each week I was careful to introduce them with words something like this. We are Unitarian Universalists and this is our community. At the center of our community are 7 principles or promises that help us understand how we might be act. We make these promises to ourselves and each other so that we can be better people and our community our group here can be better group.

And then children read the principles one by one and the group repeats them..

Let us value others and ourselves.

Let us show compassion and be fair.

Let us learn with and accept each other.

Let us share questions to find what is true.

Let us have a voice and work for the common good.

Let us make choices that make the world more fair and peaceful.

Let us respect the web of life that makes us one. (Sheila Schuh)

I like this version because the wording isn't focused on thinking it is focused on doing: valuing, showing, learning, sharing, working, making choices, respecting.

Ultimately I think that what we do makes more of a difference than what we believe. Not that the two are unconnected. When what we do and what we believe are in line with each other that is a powerful place to be. In my life I have met a few people like this, and they are memorable, they have integrity, humility, grace and power.

So what might it look like when our principles are lived out in action not simply in words

Recently Ireland as a country voted in marriage equality. I saw young and old, a rainbow of color, male and female gathered together in hope that the moral arc of the universe was bending toward justice.. And on many faces I saw a joy born out of years of pain, invisibility, violence and despair,. Tears of joy flowed last night for so many people, tears that could not flow before.

In the early Unitarian church in Transylvania Francis Dávid said, “We

need not think alike to love alike. We need not all be the same to love alike, or to work together, or even to be in community. Isn't this what part of the American ideal is? Isn't this what part of our covenant as Unitarian Universalists is?

And so now I think it is time to breathe, to hope, and even perhaps to smile.

Here is my prayer for us:

We speak the truth

We walk in love

We remember to be kind.