

We are Unitarian Universalists – our name says a lot about our history we come from a consolidation of two denominations the Unitarians and the Universalists. This part of our history is very much part of the fabric of this community. The vote to consolidate those two denominations took place here in Syracuse in 1959.

Rev. Reamon was the pastor here at the time of that vote. He was against the consolidation instead he saw cooperation as a better model. In working on this sermon I found some wonderfully interesting things about Rev. Reamon.

He was pastor here from 1932 – 1970 – 38 years. Wow. He was an avid Universalist and counted himself as a liberal Christian – as most Universalists of that time did. He oversaw the building of this church building. And he was president of the national denomination for a short time during world war two.

I also found out that He reported making 423 parish calls – visits to parishioners in the year 1968- He would have been 73 at that time. Wow.

Universalists were a thread of the very liberal part of Christianity that believed that no human would go to hell. Hosea Ballou was one of our earliest and most famous Universalists and he believed that there was no hell at all. Universalism has changed over time as we have moved away from being almost exclusively liberal Christian denomination to being a theologically eclectic group. The dichotomy of heaven and hell just don't really speak to us anymore. For many of us the question of is there a heaven or a hell and who is in and who is out is just not a question that we really spend a lot of time thinking about.

What I hear people saying more nowadays is that there is a love in this world that is universal – it is available to all people.

But back to Rev. Reamon. He was strong Universalist. And in fact he did not support the consolidation. “In 1959 Reamon helped lead a last-ditch fight in opposition to merger, becoming co-leader of Universalists and Unitarians for Cooperation without Consolidation.” But I have to have a lot of respect for this man. When the vote took place and it was clear that consolidation would take place

“Reamon participated in a celebratory service the next morning [after the vote]. When consolidation was formally accomplished two years later, he gave the Unitarian Universalist Association his loyal support, at the same time working to keep the Universalist component of the new denomination strong.

He could set aside what he felt passionately about what he saw as best for the Universalist and the Unitarians, and participate in the celebration. He knew he was not

at the center of this faith or his faith. He knew that even though our faith affirms an individual's unique faith journey this is not a faith of an aggregate of individuals. This Unitarian Universalist faith calls us to covenant together into a community.

And he knew that Universalism has its limits. "It cannot protect you from hazard or doubt. It does not even pretend to guarantee that you will escape 'hell' in this life; nor does it offer a through ticket to 'heaven.' It will not save you from the peril of thought, nor does it offer any guarantee of peace of mind or serenity of spirit. It can help you to achieve something of your divine birthright: to grow as a child of God should grow. If the Garden of Eden allegory means anything, it means that [humanity] has been given the choice of which way [we] will go: whether [we] will live essentially as an animal, or whether, while walking the face of the earth, [we] will lift [our] eyes unto the hills of reason, beauty, goodwill, insight and compassion. The choice is largely [ours]!"

He was often thought of as a conservative – perhaps because he held onto his traditional beliefs; But he counted himself as a liberal and was proud of it. "He advised that "if you call yourself a liberal, don't waste too much time contemplating the beliefs and articles of faith which you can no longer honestly accept. Be done with them. Give thought and study to building a workable faith that will help you to overcome the tragic inevitables of life." He had long believed that "religion is not a matter of creeds, dogma, ritual and noble sentiments . . . playthings for the Sabbath. . . . It needs to be a power for good . . . finding daily expression in the lives of those who claim to be the children of God." Preceding quotes taken from <http://uudb.org/articles/ellsworthcreamon.html>

I would like to think that he would have liked the title of this sermon "Loving the Hell out of this World." In our history the Unitarians and the universalists talked a lot about hell and salvation. In fact it was Thomas Starr King who said "The Universalists believe that God is too good to damn [humanity], while the Unitarians believe that [humanity] is too good to be damned by God."

But our thinking about Universalism has shifted away from this idea that we are avoiding something- hell – and away from the idea that it is tied to an after life. And it is moving toward this idea that there is a universal love present, alive and active in this world. Even though our universalism has shifted I think Reamon might have made that shift too in his universalism

Our first principle really does call us to do justice in this world.

When we love ourselves, respect our own inherent worth and dignity when we love others and respect their inherent worth and dignity you know that love will burn within

us. It will demand to be let out, It will not be silenced, it will reach out. Love has to flow.

Love Reaches out it can do no other. Love is a force to be reckoned with. And by love I do not mean that thing that is described on Hallmark cards, or the latest chicklit book. I do not even mean that powerful force that binds family members together, or even that powerful force that binds us in this community together.

Love is the engine that drives transformation. It is not the heat of anger that transforms a person, or a community, or the world – it is the heat of love that transforms. Anger will tear relationships apart and will destroy people. So we know anger changes people but it is love that transforms.

Think about what brought you here to this community. Last weekend we had the startup event where I got to hear stories about the history of this place. People talked about what brought them here. And repeatedly it was the warmth, the community, the people who carried each other through. That is a love that transforms.

MLK on love here “Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend.”

Our UUA president, Peter Morales, talks about the simplest of community building practices in a recent UU World article (Winter 2013 11.4.13):

[he writes] As I was beginning my ministerial internship in Davis, California, I forced myself to stand outside the church door and greet people on Sunday morning. Greeting complete strangers did not come naturally, but I felt I should do it. So I screwed up my courage, smiled, and said, “Hello, I’m Peter Morales, the new intern.”

That simple practice changed my ministry. (I believe that if I had not stood there and greeted people I would not be president today. Really.)

I was overwhelmed at how people responded. They loved being greeted. (Well, duh, I can hear you saying.) I continued the practice when I became a parish minister in Colorado. Again, people responded warmly. This practice taught me much about the people attending our services. I saw clearly how new people were coming desperately seeking spiritual community. The potential of our faith was palpable—Sunday after Sunday.

he learned something about reaching out beyond himself in that simple practice of greeting folks before service.

I have to tell you that I really believe that Love reaches out and in that reaching it transforms the world. And at the same time that makes me nervous. I am not sure I am enough for that Transforming of the world thing – that is a lot of responsibility. What if I do the wrong thing – what if I block the transformation what if ...

When I think of transforming the world I tend to think of folks like Martin Luther King or Martha and Waitstill Sharp, who During World War II, saved the lives of hundreds of political dissidents, Jews, and children as their work took them across Europe. Their efforts also led to the founding of the Unitarian Service Committee, the forerunner of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee.

I think about people like that and I think – man I don't think I can do that. The big names like King, and Ghandi, the Sharps, Harvey Milk we cannot all be like that. They lead and that is so necessary but we do not all need to lead. We all need to simply reach out.

And that is the reason I chose the story for all ages that I did this morning. I thought about using the story of the Good Samaritan from the Christian scriptures but then I found this other version of it.

The man in our story this morning goes way beyond being a good guy, or a nice person. There is love bubbling up in him. It reaches out and bridges that pain of being betrayed. It reaches out beyond the human desire for fairness and instead reaches for justice.

He sees beyond the horse that is being stolen, beyond the thief that is in front of him, beyond his own reputation. He sees into the network of relationships that define his community.

When Love reaches out it transforms us and the world. When I stand out in the vestibule and greet people that changes me and them. When you drive someone from the Eastern Farm workers to an appointment that transforms them and you. When you stand in a demonstration because of your faith that changes you and transforms the world. When you chaperone a youth con and let those teens know that they are loved you transform the world.

Each one of those small acts is Love reaching out and loving the hell out of this world.

Love is the doctrine of this church, the quest of truth is its sacrament and service is its prayer.

That is where we start and when we do the love that I know we have will bubble up, it will flow out it can do no other. It will reach out, love the hell out of this world. That is where our justice work must begin.

In a world without end,
may it be so