

You know how groups of animals have names. There is a kaleidoscope of butterflies, a mess of iguanas, Magpies and alligators gather as congregations - perhaps that is why we are a society. Some folks awhile back suggested that a group of UUs should be called a cacophony of UUS.

We Unitarian Universalists we believe a variety of things - some of us believe in God some don't, some believe in many Gods. Some think we are a church some think we are a society some see the value in trees and rocks and the sacred there and others of us find the sacred in art or groups of people. We are an eclectic group. These differing opinions can sometimes seem like a cacophony.

Some of us love cacophony and add to the noise by singing our own song. Sometimes we avoid adding to the cacophony by not making a noise. We often don't talk about God. For some of us that is because the idea of God is fraught with trauma and negativity from our past, for some of us it is because we are not sure what we think about God, or how to say it, for some of us it is because no matter what our own faith is we want to trend lightly and not ruffle feathers or hurt someone else, and for some of us we are just private people we would no more talk about God than we would talk about our sex lives or our politics

It's a cacophony isn't it?

But in that it is not all noise and confusion and horribleness. Every once in awhile I get into a conversation with someone about how they don't believe in God. And every once in a while it is fitting for me to ask "tell me about the God that you do not believe in." And sometimes the person I am talking with will say I don't believe in some God who sits up in the sky or the big beyond, I don't believe in some old guy in the sky, I don't believe in some God who rewards some and punishes others.

And I say I don't believe in that God either.

So, I ask, for the moment let us agree that we do not need to agree about whether God exists, let us agree that we do not have to agree on what God is like. And I think as soon as I say that my human mind and perhaps yours too goes one of two places - first you might be arguing with me in your head even though I just asked that for the moment we agree to disagree, we humans love to define and parse and argue, second you

might already be beginning to describe God with some kind of words and it is that very beginning of describing that starts to put something in an either or place, infinite or limited, mother or father, male or female. Of course it is also possible that this whole discourse has not grabbed you and you are making your Sunday Grocery list in your head

But here is an advantage that we UUs have. Because we do not talk much about God we also do not gender God much. We don't limit God much

When I am in a worship service of some of our liberal Christian siblings I find myself sometimes jarred by the language I find there, even when there is an attempt to make the language about God gender inclusive. Even when the pronouns are inclusive there might still be language of hierarchy king, and kingdom, Lord Mother father. We as UUs may at times struggle to talk about God but when we do in general we talk about God in ways that are non-gendered and less hierarchical it may sound like a cacophony to some but to others it may seem more musical than that. Sometimes I say God is love, and sometimes-even folks who are uncertain about God can say well if there is a God then yeah God would be love, and the people who don't believe in God can say I don't believe you are right but love is good. Here is why the statement God is love moves me - it is as statement that stands on its own - it is not part of a some kind of couplet of opposite. If I were to say God is male then for many of us the concept of female is in there. But love is just love.

We live in a world that groups, divides, judges and bifurcates. Some of that was once of great advantage to us. Knowing which animals are safe to eat, which plants are safe to eat that was especially important when we lived close to the earth. But we humans divide everything, right vs. wrong left vs. right up/down, boy/girl, good/bad. In our culture we tend to see these kinds of bifurcations, as either/ors you are either right or you are wrong with a firm dividing line in between.

Now you may not believe in God, or you may be unsure or the God that you believe in is different yet from anything I have talked about this morning. That is OK I don't need you to agree or disagree you have heard and that is enough. But what I would like you to consider is how breaking out of the confines of a binary opens up ones ability to consider possibilities.

We are living in a world that is becoming more divided and the division is becoming more rigid, fear driven and hate filled.

And we did something different - our little congregation just over 100 members, we did something different yesterday.

We just had this amazing conference Building Beloved Community Beyond the Binary. I'm not sure of the final number but to me it looked like there were close to 140 people in this building. And why did we host this conference you ask - well last year Paul Barfoot said to me you know in February our theme is identity wouldn't it be great if we could do a day long meeting or conference or something on transgender identity. I said that sounds good. We gathered a group from among us who were interested in working on this. We talked about whom we knew and could invite. Pastor Sunshine over at May Memorial said I know Kate Bornstein, who is a well known trans activist let me see if I can help make a connection for you. And so she was able to be our keynote speaker. We had workshops and panels inviting friends and others in the community to come speak.

Because we have this cacophony of beliefs we have a community that can open itself to a wide variety of people we don't demand that each person who walks through those doors is either male or female. It doesn't interest us much - honestly we are way more interested in whether or not you can help out with coffee after service. Which is a funny way of saying we are way more interested in what you do and where your heart is.

Maybe it sounds like a cacophony to others but to me it sounds like harmony. A harmony of UUs.

For you who are disappointed I did not preach a political sermon, one that moves us to justice work, one that bends the arc of the universe just a little bit more toward justice, consider what moving beyond binary thinking could do to justice work, to fairness to freedom, to immigration and education to all the places that need our attention so desperately.

Two things stuck with me that our keynote Kate Bornstein said in her keynote presentation yesterday

The problem with binary too many answers not enough questions

And are we not situated so well as UUs to do this beyond the binary conversation about God – we are full of questions

And she said

The nature of the binary is a battlefield one side against the other – if we can talk about God in a non-binary way perhaps we can avoid the old argument we have as UUs humanist vs theist.

So what would I say about God beyond the binary

I believe in God  
I don't know exactly what this means  
I used to know  
When I was young I knew so much more  
Or at least was so much firmer in my knowledge  
God was all that was beginning middle and end

And now  
Now  
Now I don't know  
I want to say  
God is  
God just is  
And leave the mystery be  
I want to say  
That what God is  
Is not as important  
As how we are  
I can spend my time attempting to define the infinite  
But really aren't there better things to do with my time  
Your time  
Isn't it ever more interesting to ponder?  
How to make God real  
How to make love real

But since I am the one preaching up here let me make the effort here. I would posit that if God exists then God is, if not infinite, at least a whole lot more immense than I am. Perhaps God is the combined life force of all the

universe; perhaps God is being created by all that is. As the universe moves and changes and grows perhaps God grows out of that. We know the more complex always grows out of the less complex.

And we know that dividing things into groups makes it easier for us to understand them but does not necessarily make them more true. Did you ever in a science class put something on a slide to look at under the microscope? By doing that you came to understand something about that cell or organism but at the same time the organism was no more - it was simply a flattened something on the slide.

So I don't want God to be more understandable I want God to be more true. As I say that do you notice that the conversation has moved from a binary either or conversation. And as I say this do you notice how understandable and true are not two polarities of a continuum. The God I want to be more true exists somewhere beyond the workings of my limited but not small mind - exists somewhere beyond the limited but not smallness of your minds. The trueness of God is that God is more than male or female more than right or wrong more than saved or damned, more than in or out, more than citizen or alien, more than privileged or marginalized, more than either or.

The trueness of the God I believe in is that God longs for each one of us to be our best selves. The God I believe in longs for each animal, each plant, each rock, each atom, to be its best self. The God I believe in is not limited by the human mind so dependent on quickly deciding either or, friend or foe, safe or not safe. The God I believe in exists beyond the binary ever luring me and you and this amazing universe on into a life where there is more love, less division, greater creativity, more inclusion. When God is beyond the binary so can we be beyond the binary. That is a sacred place of inclusion a place I want to be.

In a world without end I know this to be true.

