

We as Unitarian Universalists affirm our 7th principle - Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. It is our final principle and balances our first principle valuing the inherent worth and dignity of every individual. We as UUs value both the individual and the larger network or web that the individual exists within.

We usually take the 7th principle to mean that we should be good to our mother earth, we should care for her more deeply and be a people who are part of the solution to reducing pollution and climate change. And all that is true and very, very important. In some ways it is true that as UUs Earth Day is a more important religious holiday than Christmas or Passover or Easter. But I also think that at times we forget that we humans are also part of that interdependent web. It is not us as human over and against the web of existence. "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. "

Those words written by Rev. Martin Luther King so many years ago are still

true and if something can be more true - then with the internet and the 24 hour news cycle these words are more true today. 150 years ago we would probably would have not heard about the earthquake in Nepal. And if we had it would have been weeks or months before we did hear about it. But today we get a constant feed of stories, pictures, statistics. There is so much information coming at us - it is difficult to know what is factual. It is difficult to know sometimes what the agenda is underneath the stories. 150 years ago the news of what is happening in Baltimore, in Ferguson, in other cities across this nation would have taken days or weeks -not minutes to reach us.

Our interdependent web is more tightly spun these days, our network of mutuality is more immediate. And for me it raises the question how do we respond. Do I send money to support the relief effort in Nepal and if so who do I send it to? How do I decide? What about the movement Black Lives Matters - Do I put its logo up as my Facebook profile picture, do I go to Ferguson and demonstrate, do I go to Baltimore and demonstrate do I join the march that happened in Syracuse, do I write

my government representatives, do I speak up?

The news has been hard to listen to this week. It is as confusing as it is informative.

Yet again we have heard of another black man Freddy Gray who has died while in the custody of the police. And we hear of the demonstrations that are going on in Baltimore and are spreading to other cities in America. I have remained silent from this pulpit about a lot of it. Honestly some of that is due to conflict avoidance - this is a divisive issue. Do I need to spark a controversy here at First UU? But much of the silence on my part has been from wondering if there needs to be one more voice talking about the racial inequality in this country - let alone a white voice. There are a lot of voices and a lot of noise. I have asked myself over and over again should I risk adding to the noise? What can one voice do after all?

But this week my reading led me back to Martin Luther King. We UUs like Rev. King we like to quote him. We like his call to non-violent protest. But

we also tend to cherry pick the quotations we use. We like the “I have a dream speech” We do not always dig deeper into his writings. In my reading this week I came across this quote from Rev. King:

“I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro’s great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen’s Counciler or the Klu Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to “order” than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: “I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action”; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man’s freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a “more convenient season.” Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.” Martin Luther King, Jr.

I am that white moderate. My white privilege means that my silence is not support for Martin Luther King's dream but a stumbling block. When I first read those words I realized that precisely because I have a white voice - one more voice does matter. When I as a white person am silent about racism in this country then I am part of the problem not part of the solution. A fact of my white privilege means that remaining silent is a decision to accept if not support the status quo of racial inequality in this country.

Black Lives matter is a movement we have all heard about. Some very well meaning UUs have said but white lives matter too all lives matter. And I do not disagree with this thought. Our 7th principle is saying just that - all life matters. But moving from black lives matter to all lives matter undercuts the issue in this instance. Being black in America is different than being white - I know that is an obvious point; but when someone responds to black lives matter with all lives matter they are glossing over that point. I am a white person in America there are some things I simply

don't think about too often. I do not worry about being followed by store employees who are checking on me while I am in their store. When I am stopped in my car by a police officer I do not wonder if he or she stopped me because I am black. I don't worry about the police responses to me. I don't worry about wearing a hoody. I don't have to have "that" discussion with my sons - that discussion that teaches them to be wary of the world so that they will simply survive. When someone says in a discussion on race in America but all lives matter there is a subtext there and it is race doesn't matter - but sadly it does. And that is not something we can ignore. We tend to take the passion out of Rev. King words; we tend to make him safe. He was a strong proponent of non-violence.

But ... he had these words to say in 1968

Now I wanted to say something about the fact that we have lived over these last two or three summers with agony and we have seen our cities going up in flames. And I would be the first to say that I am still committed to militant, powerful, massive, non-violence as the most potent weapon in

grappling with the problem from a direct action point of view. I'm absolutely convinced that a riot merely intensifies the fears of the white community while relieving the guilt. And I feel that we must always work with an effective, powerful weapon and method that brings about tangible results. But it is not enough for me to stand before you tonight and condemn riots. It would be morally irresponsible for me to do that without, at the same time, condemning the contingent, intolerable conditions that exist in our society. These conditions are the things that cause individuals to feel that they have no other alternative than to engage in violent rebellions to get attention. And I must say tonight that a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the plight of the negro poor has worsened over the last twelve or fifteen years. It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice and humanity.

(from "Another America")

What is really disconcerting for me is how true these words still ring out today nearly 50 years later. For sure there have been advancements in

racial equality in this country. And we need to celebrate those because that celebration will keep the movement moving forward. But 50 years later we are still dealing with voting rights, economic justice, job discrimination, lack of basic human respect because of the color of someone's skin. Maybe the reason I haven't spoken up earlier is because I am just too angry.

Riots are frightening but a riot is the language of the unheard.

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As a white person I must remember that. That does not justify all riots. But I do believe that at this moment in time the voices of the unheard are making themselves known. And I agree with Rev King that militant, powerful, massive, non-violence is the most potent weapon in grappling with the problem from a direct action point of view. Because when violence is used we, meaning the larger white community focus on the violence and not the underlying issue. And we forget that there have been moments in our American history where we have been moved along that arc of justice

moved closer to the beloved community by violence. The original Tea Party was a riot, the Jerry Rescue was a riot, the original Gay Pride Parade, Stonewall was a riot. In the moment a riot is destructive - in the arc of history it may not be so.

The underlying issue here is the same underlying issue it has always been. Racism is real, it is destructive, it has not gone away. I and you did not create it but we must, WE MUST be aware of how we continue it. We must make changes in ourselves, and in our community to bring it to an end. And I cannot change you I can only change myself.

Rev King said "I'm absolutely convinced that a riot merely intensifies the fears of the white community while relieving the guilt." There is a corollary here. If we focus on each individual reprehensible act - this particular police officer and that particular black man, this particular instance of violence – which what essentially the mainstream media does white fear is intensified and our guilt relieved. White folk are allowed if not encouraged to think or say - see it is the bad policeman - it is the bad black

man - instead of being encouraged to say – this is a systemic issue. How do I add to the inequality of this society and what can I do to make it end.

A UU colleague of mine told me about how he had talked with a chaplain who lives and works near Ferguson. My colleague asked the chaplain how he could help. And the chaplain replied do not come to Ferguson. Instead look to yourself, to your congregation to your own community. Look there and find out what can be changed. Do not let your place become the next Ferguson. Dean Williams writes “You do not need formal positional power to exercise leadership. Anyone can be a change agent, although in varying degrees and in varying ways, whether from the center or from the sidelines.” (from “Leadership for a Fractured World”) Margaret Mead said it a little differently "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

What is it I, you, we can do?

Thinking about issues of racism, of prejudice and discrimination can be

paralyzing. There is the guilt of privilege, and although real it is not an excuse. We, you, I may not be able to end racism across this land but we are able to make changes where we are. Each of us can do the hard work of looking inside ourselves and our values to see where it is that we could work on prejudging less. Each of us can use our voice to stand up to discrimination - call it out when it happens. This congregation could offer the adult learning experience "Building the World we dream About" a UU curriculum for adults that "seeks to interrupt the workings of racism and transform how people from different racial/ethnic groups understand and relate to one another." We as a community could think about and then try to enact ways that we could be a more inclusive and welcoming as a community. You did the work of becoming a welcoming community to people of different sexual orientations. Could we do the work of becoming a welcoming congregation to people of different cultures, economic status, or color? Can we be one more voice for justice?

It is a question I leave you to consider