

This month I am going to be considering the second of our Unitarian Universalist principles. It is – “We covenant to affirm and promote Justice equity and compassion in human relations.” And again I want to remind us that these principles are part of the covenant we make as Unitarian Universalists they are not a creed. As I used say to children when I led children’s worship – these principles are like promises that we make to ourselves and to each other, promises about how we want to behave.” We would say the second principle this way “Let us show compassion and be fair” And although that is stated in a language that a child can understand it is true. A covenant is a kind of promise a sacred promise and part of the sacred promise we make each other is that because of the inherent worth and dignity of each and every person – our first principle – we then seek justice equity and compassion in human relations.

I recognize that it is a difficult thing for me to stand up here and talk about justice and fairness. By happenstance and things that I did not fully control I - we are part of the upper tier of this globe. Even the poorest among us in the United States have more than so many, many people in this world. When I was in Haiti one of the things that struck me was how little garbage there was. Partially that is due to a culture where folks clean up after themselves but much of that was due to the fact that folks did not have enough stuff to produce garbage. Plastic bags were not tossed aside as useless they were saved and used over and over again and so it went for many of the things that we think of as disposable.

In his book “The Haves and the Have Nots”, Branko Milanovic crunches the numbers of global income. He converts these numbers into international

dollars in order to be able to compare the spending power of people in different countries in a meaningful way. And he is able to show that “the typical person in the bottom 5 percent of the American income distribution is still richer than *68 percent* of the world’s inhabitants.”

http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/01/31/the-haves-and-the-have-nots/?_r=0

This in no way makes it easy to be poor in America. When you cannot get your child to a doctor or you have to choose between groceries and prescriptions or at the end of the month there are no choices for what to cook because there is no more food in the cupboard and you already went to the food pantry and they only let you come once a month that is hard. That. Is. hard.

All I am saying here is that I am aware that I am talking about justice from a position of relative global privilege. There is a saying that the have-nots pray for justice and the haves pray for mercy. And so I ask you to listen to what I am saying with a merciful ear.

It is easy enough to talk to children about how our principles are promises and we seek justice and equity – it is much harder to live it. Each and every day we are faced with choices that involve fairness and justice.

How can you or I help to create justice equity or compassion in human relations? In our interactions with each other how do we do that?

The biggest piece of everyday power you or I have is how each of us chooses to spend our money. If you have spendable income - what is leftover after all the necessities are paid for - do you save it? Do you donate it, do you buy what do you buy? Is what you buy local? Does your purchase support the Syracuse economy? I don't have the answer for you. A preachers job is pretty sweet I get to ask the big questions – I don't have to answer them. In fact we UUs encourage ourselves to seek our own answers.

But how do you spend your money?

How do you use spend time?

How do you use spend kindness?

What would it look like if we tried here at First to be more just what would it look like if we took that step beyond fairness. Last Sunday Rev Kiyimba was here and we split our plate with him and raised 437.00 for his work in Uganda. How wonderful is that one Sunday 437.00 dollars! But what would it look like if we asked not only what can we do for others outside this place but what can we do for ourselves? We collect food for the food pantry which is great. But we don't always talk about the fact that we have some members who make their budgets stretch by using food pantries themselves. Is there a way we could have our collection of food also be a support to our own members? What would it be like to have shelf stable

food, or frozen casseroles available for folks. How could we arrange for this in a way that was compassionate and respectful? Justice does not always happen out there in the other part of the world. It starts in our own hearts first.

I have spent a good portion of my life raising children. The cry “That’s not fair!” is said often by small children. And having participated in settling three estates in the past three years I can assure you adults also cry “That’s not Fair”. Like our scrupulous twins in this morning’s story children often see fairness as everything being equal. I have dealt with that in different ways at different times. When the issue is fairly dividing something like the last piece of pie I have tried letting one child do the cutting of the pie and the second child deciding which piece of pie they will get. That method shares the power of disbursement. It is hard for either one of them to cry That’s not fair.

When some of my children were little and we would play board games they were sometimes prone to “bending the rules” When I would catch them cheating I would sometimes say “Oh you’re using the cheaty rules I’m going to use cheaty rules too!” To which they would predictably cried That’s not fair. And I would get to say but it is you used your cheaty rules I get to use my cheaty rules. It was a way of helping to teach them that a fair set of rules is one that is mutually agreed upon.

Sometimes two of my children would play a board game where the rules were understood and agreed upon but one child would get better rolls or just play better and would clearly be winning by a large margin. Often the losing child would cry, “That’s not fair!” and stomp off. Sometimes I could be patient enough to intervene and say it is fair you both are following the rules you agreed upon. You don’t like how the game is going and that is different lets talk about that. Fair is not always fun.

And I think this is where we start to consider what is the difference between fairness and justice. We tend to think of fairness and justice as being synonyms meaning about the same thing.

I would say that fairness is about following the rules. But rules and laws can be unjust in that power is not shared, there is not compassion, and there are inequities that are soul crushing.

Forbes magazine in April of this year released data compiled about CEOs salaries:

“stating that American CEOs in 2013 earned ... an eye-popping 331 times the average worker’s [salary].

... the multiple more than doubles when compared to minimum wage workers; the average CEO in 2013 out-earned this group 774 times over.

[\(http://www.forbes.com/sites/kathryndill/2014/04/15/report-ceos-earn-331-times-as-much-as-average-workers-774-times-as-much-as-minimum-wage-earners/](http://www.forbes.com/sites/kathryndill/2014/04/15/report-ceos-earn-331-times-as-much-as-average-workers-774-times-as-much-as-minimum-wage-earners/)

It is my personal opinion that it is fair for a CEO to earn more than folks who carry less responsibility for the company but there is something wildly unjust about a CEO earning 774 times what a minimum wage worker earns. I do not believe that CEOs carry 774 times more responsibility. The average salary for CEOs in 2013 was 11.7 million dollars or 5,625/hour if they were to work a 40-hour week. It is hard for me to find either the fairness or the justice in that number.

And yet right now I find myself a bit in the position of the child who is losing and wants to stomp off shouting that’s not fair. In fact those are the laws and rules that exist right now governing CEOs salaries – so if one definition of fairness is playing by the rules then that CEOs salary would appear to be fair.

I still maintain it is not just. There is little compassion in a compensation structure that overvalues the CEO and undervalues the minimum wage worker.

When it comes to human relations we need something larger than fairness, we need justice, we need compassion.

Often the golden rule is quoted when folks talk of justice. And it is amazing how many of the world religions have a golden rule of their own for instance

“Christian: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Hindu: Do not do to others, which would cause you pain if done to you.

Buddhist: Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.

Jewish: What you yourself hate, do to no person.

Wiccan – The Rede – If it harm none, do what you will”

<https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/grace/session4/sessionplan/handouts/115218.shtml>

There is reciprocity in these moral systems. How do I figure out how to take care of you? Well, I think about what I might need or want and then do that to or for you.

The golden rule is a good place to start but golden rules have existed for a very long time and as a folk wisdom they came to be at a time when cultures were more likely to be homogeneous and not as connected cross culturally as they are now. What if you are really different than me how well does the golden rule work then.

We live in a world now where there is easy access to other peoples, cultures, traditions and values. We do not all have the same kind of work. We do not live the same kind of life as our parents or grandparents did. And our children and grandchildren will have lives that we cannot even imagine. I don’t think the golden rule works as well as it used to.

I have heard something that folks refer to as the platinum rule: Treat others the way they want to be treated. This one is a harder one because I cannot simply start from myself and what is good for me

Early in my husband’s and my relationship we hosted his family for Thanksgiving. I got to cook turkey dinner for about 17 people or something. I pulled out my recipes did my preparations. I had only ever eaten crumb stuffing. I had a lovely recipe for it. I made it. Turns out my new in-laws were cube-stuffing folks. Evidently there’s a big divide in this world Who knew? I thought I will make them my favorite and then they will know how much I care about them. I might have shown my caring a bit better by asking what was their family custom – what worked best for them.

In that long list of the Golden Rules I would like to add

Unitarian Universalism: Treat others, as they want to be treated.

Really if you put the golden rule and our second principle together I think that is what you get. Fairness with compassion, justice with mercy.

In a World without end May this be so