

I am not going to tell you how to vote. For two reasons really. First it would be against the law of separation of church and state and except for speed limits I am a pretty law abiding citizen. And two I suspect that I would be preaching to choir so to say. But if anything the past week of news around the presidential election has shown us how broken the system is and how much it is in need of healing. So although I will not be telling you who to vote for I do want to talk about some of the moral issues that we are dealing with and how to begin to move from brokenness to wholeness.

I believe, as you heard in the story this morning that you cannot help in the healing of others or of the world until you work on your own healing. Last Sunday's sermon, by Bethany our intern, and the Sunday before that by me focused on how the individual can heal. That is not the only kind of healing there is because clearly we know that brokenness does not exist only on an individual level.

Communities get broken and hopefully healed but it is not static there is not one breaking and then one healing. Hopefully we make progress but progress is not an inoculation against future breaks.

So I cannot really talk about healing without talking about brokenness and that is not something we do very well. And by we I mean UUs in particular although really we humans are not so good about recognizing the brokenness in our midst. But we UUs - so many of us were not raised in this faith so many of us are come inners. Many of us have found refuge here after being beat up and abused by other churches, other faiths.

Sometimes I hear one of us saying things like - Oh Catholics - well you know those priests are really sick - referring to the systemic protection of priests who are pedophiles, or comments about Evangelical ministers who are caught womanizing. Often those remarks are said in a way that implies that we are better less broken more whole.

It might surprise you to find out that our denomination has its own history of sexual abuse by clergy.

I bring this up here now not because I want to inflict more pain, or badmouth Unitarian Universalists - this is a faith I love. But I think that it is a good case study in how healing can happen on a systemic level.

Let me at least give you a short, very abbreviated version of the history. Each year in June the evening before General Assembly begins the UUMA hosts the Berry Street essay lecture. It is intended to be for professional religious leaders ministers and DREs primarily. It has been going on a very long time. Deborah Lance Pope gave the historical and systemic context for what happened in UU congregations and in our Association in her Berry Street essay of 2011. There she outlined some of what happened - the intersection of the free love movement of the 60s and 70s - the sexism alive and kicking among ministers and congregations - our natural predilection to think that we are somehow better than others and do not need to follow the rules so closely all came together. It's not that ministers did not have affairs with congregants before that time The Plot idea for The Scarlett letter must have come from somewhere. But in our history there were ministers who joined in the swinging parties, or who had multiple affairs with congregants, and yes some who abused children and it seemed to be more apparent in this time of our history.

The UUA did not hit the media like the Catholic Church did, but that does not mean that we are without our brokenness. Our response has not always been good. Congregants who had been abused by ministers when they reported that to the UUA 20 years ago, 10 years ago were often not given the support that they needed, they often were counseled to keep it quiet. Congregations often just wanted to fire their ministers and move on and not talk about it. And so offending ministers were able to relocate

This year Rev. Gail Seavey gave the lecture and it was entitled "If our secrets define us" <https://uuma.site-ym.com/BlankCustom.asp?page=BSE2016>

Rev. Seavey's intent, at least one of them, was to open the curtain that hides the system's secrets. She asked, "If our secrets define us...?", then the only thing to do is tell the stories and she did tell some of the stories.

It is painful to hear these stories to know that people real people; real congregations have been hurts so deeply by ministers - people they put their trust in. And it was painful to listen to. There were chaplains available in the room to talk to folks who were upset, who had been triggered, who

needed someone to hold their pain. So why talk about stuff that is so painful why open old wounds?

To quote Rev. Seavey "We have seen the damage of chaos, teetered on the point of balance and leaned in towards Shalom. We have looked upon the Powers at the tipping point – **and we lived**. The powers are many. I have seen the powers of love, violence, prestige, community, sex, charisma, intelligence, terror, creativity, healing, secrets and death. I have seen how those powers interact and overlap. I have seen how we mix up one power for another, thinking that sex is prestige, or that terror is love. I have seen smart people, good people, fail to understand the impact of sexual misconduct, how pervasive and systemic it is, not just among us but also throughout our culture. For years the system at the UUA and in many of our congregations has been to protect the privileged instead of the vulnerable.

So why talk about stuff that is so painful why open old wounds? Because those wounds have not healed well and need to be attended to.

And there is always a responder to the Berry Street lecture. Rev. David Pyle was the responder - you may remember him as the person who led the startup event when I first started here. One of the things he said was:

The response I believe we all need to make to the prophetic message that our dear colleague has brought to us today is to accept that it is not my ministry, or your ministry, or their ministry... it is our ministry. Our shared ministry to this faith tradition we so lovingly and awkwardly call Unitarian Universalism. We have to change our culture so that it is expected that I am accountable to you for my practice of ministry and you are accountable to me for your practice of ministry, because it is a shared ministry. A shared ministry that is bound to grow larger than just those who are fellowshiped. We have to build the relationships that require us to call each other in, and sometimes call each other out... because this ministry, this faith tradition, and the nature of the human relationship to the divine and sacred depends on us walking in this practice of ministry together."

It is difficult to have the secrets uncovered. It is painful and scary. There is such a thing as functional denial - it is what gets you through the time

between the biopsy and the results. But when functional denial turns into rigid secrecy well that changes things. Then there can be a great fear that if the truth is outed all will fall apart.

As a denomination we are working on healing from our secrets - sometimes it 1 step forward and 3 back sometimes its 3 forward and one back sometimes we are running in circles. But as I look at the arc of our history we are making progress - we are healing. We now have ethical guidelines for ministers about whether a minister can be in an emotional or sexual relationship with a congregation member - let me give you the abbreviated version no nope nada no nyet, no never no.

We have a system in place where if you were to call the UUA to lodge a complaint against a clergy person you would have an advocate. We require our ministerial students to take a class on sexual boundaries and ethics. We now regularly talk as professionals about appropriate use of power and inappropriate use of power. We are not hiding this under the rug and our response is not always perfect. But we are responding and we are making progress.

I sit on the MFC, Ministerial Fellowship Committee - the committee of the UUA that authorizes ministers, and I sit on its Executive Committee - that part of the MFC that hears the cases of ministers who might lose their fellowship because of conduct unbecoming. And we take this seriously. Rev. Marie Fortune - a pioneer in clergy sexual violence, will lead our next continuing education session. We know this is a complicated issue and we know that the only way to heal is shine the light on the wound, debride it, and help to create a holding environment where the healing can take place within the context of healthy relationship

So why have I just spent about 1600 words talking about this part of our history? Because this has been a rougher than normal week in the presidential race. Each day we seem to be hitting new lows and what are we supposed to do with this - how are we supposed to heal - can't we just stop talking about all of this? Aren't we at risk of tearing this country apart?

***Tom Jacobs in Putting Trump Into Historical Perspective*** wrote this:

"This is one of the most discouraging elements of this election. Obama's election felt like a pivot in American history; it seemed to indicate a pretty remarkable advancement in racial attitudes. Now the demons have been let out. Perhaps the lesson in this is the demons are always there; they've just been suppressed or covered over. Now they're being stirred up again.

But as much as it is about race, it's about gender. I'm just back from giving a talk in Alabama; it was the bumper stickers that referenced gender that were so upsetting. 'Trump that [and the word rhymes with ditch.]' These were plastered on vehicles driven by aging white men. They perceive their power and authority is slipping, not just to 'elites' and minorities, but also to women.

You'd like to dismiss some of this as the last gasp of a generation, and a constituency, being left behind. Certainly I'm surrounded by young people, both liberal and conservative, who embrace an inclusive global reality. You'd like to think that truly is the future, and perhaps it is. But this election has made me more skeptical." <https://psmag.com/putting-trump-into-historical-perspective-cb3330c86f21#.eu9ehnxbf>

And maybe just maybe there is a lesson in that. In this time coming up to the election the 24-hour news cycle is churning out even more so called news. More and more it feels to me like our system is breaking. But maybe just maybe what is really happening is that the secret of its brokenness is being made known is breaking out. The system is broken

So how do we heal from here - lets take a lesson from our own history -

First lets believe women when they disclose abuse, assault, and rape

Second let us be part of the safe holding space. On an individual level that means listening with love to those who have been harmed and not trying to fix them. It may also mean reaching out to any of your more conservative friends and saying "This must be really hard for you - it is hard to see those in charge fall so hard." And not what I usually hear us say.

Third we need to be more proactive in creating relationships.

Yesterday the Washington Post posted an article about Derek Black, a

young adult who at one point was the rising star of youth in the White Supremacist movement. He and his father had a daily radio show and David Duke is his godfather. This man is connected to the movement. The article details how Derek went to college. He at first did not disclose his connections to the White Supremacist movement. But eventually He was outed on a student online message board and he was pretty isolated. Most of the students shunned him but one posted this to the online forum "Ostracizing Derek won't accomplish anything. We have a chance to be real activists and actually affect one of the leaders of white supremacy in America. This is not an exaggeration. It would be a victory for civil rights. Who's clever enough to think of something we can do to change this guy's mind?" And one of the students, Matthew Stevenson, came up with a brilliant plan - he invited Derek over for Shabbat dinner. The only orthodox Jew on Campus invited one of the young leaders of the White Supremacy over for dinner. It's either a joke or a movie plot. Derek went and even though some students refused to attend the dinner Derek kept coming back. Matthew reached out and risked - a lot. Over time Derek created relationship with these folks at dinner they had conversations, he learned some things about history in college and eventually he denounced his connection to the movement - which also meant a break with his family.

We need to find a way to heal the divide not because it is the nice thing to do but because it is the right thing to do. I don't think placards debates or arguments are going to heal this country. Building relationships will. We have a chance to be real activists and actually affect history.

The Black Lives Matter movement and this Presidential race have uncovered the racism and sexism that runs deep in our country that we would like to ignore. It is demoralizing. Because really I thought we had come further than that but there is hope.

The secrets out. That is a good thing. Now we can begin the steps to healing.

In a world without end may this be so,

Interested in reading more?

"Whence We Come and How, and Whither"

Deborah J. Pope-Lance

191<sup>st</sup> Berry Street Essay

Delivered at the Ministerial Conference, June 22, 2011, Charlotte, NC

<http://www.uuma.org/mpage/BSE2011>

"If Our Secrets Define Us"

Gail Seavey, The First Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashville

Berry Street Essay, 2016

Delivered at the Ministerial Conference, June 22, 2016

Columbus, OH

<http://www.uuma.org/mpage/BSE2016>

Response to "If Our Secret Lives Define Us," by Gail Seavey

Rev. David Pyle, 22 June 2016, Columbus, OH

<http://www.uuma.org/BlankCustom.asp?page=BSE2016response>

An article from The Washington Post: Even if Trump loses big, the anger will remain.

<http://wapo.st/2dC3uUR>

An article from The Washington Post: The white flight of Derek Black

<http://wapo.st/2dF28ZR>