

LOVE THY NEIGHBOR:
WORLD COMMUNITY & PEACE FOR ALL
(Seven Principles series)
(Version 1a)

A Sunday service led by the
Reverend Michael Walker, Interim Minister

Presented on April 2, 2017, at the
Unitarian Church of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

WELCOME

Dear friends, some who are new, some who are not, you are welcome here – one and all. We are a welcoming community which honors the inherent worth of all people, regardless of age, ethnicity, gender, orientation, socio-economic class, or other attributes that only serve to divide our society. Here, we welcome you as you are, and are glad you came to be with us today. You may have been coming here for years, even decades; or you may have been coming here for just a few weeks; or, this might even be your first time here, ever. Regardless of how long you have been here, we have one thing to say to you all: **Welcome Home!** Please take a few moments now to greet your neighbors.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Let us gather in worship today, with words of Rumi,
adapted by the Rev. Leslie Takahashi:

Come, come, whoever you are

Come with your hurts, your imperfections,

your places the feel raw and exposed.

Come, come, whoever you are

Come with your strengths that the world shudders to

hold

come with your wild imaginings of a better world,

come with your hopes that it seems no one wants to

hear.

[next page]

Wanderer, worshiper, lover of leaving

we will make a place for you,

we will build a home together.

Ours is no caravan of despair.

We walked together;

Come, yet again come.

May it ever be so and blessed be you all!

If you thought that sounded familiar, a different, musical version can be found in our grey hymnal.

JOYS AND SORROWS (Market Street)

During our time of Silent Joys and Sorrows, we acknowledge those things we hold in hearts, whether they be joyful or sad. If you wish to mark some joy or sorrow in your personal life, you're invited to come and choose a disc from the heart-basket; hold it, admire it, imagine your joy or sorrow coming to reside in this symbol.

Of course, these can mean whatever you want them to, but we picked out the colors based on the sky. Joys might be blue for clear skies or yellow for sunny skies, while the dark stones can symbolize your sorrows, as an overcast or stormy sky. If you have a joy or sorrow you wish to acknowledge, please come forward.

OFFERING

This congregation offers a liberal spiritual home to seekers from all walks of life. We are proud of the work we do in the community, the classes we offer for children and adults, for the care and concern provided by this community and its staff, and for these two beautiful campuses that have each become a spiritual home for so many.

If you are here for the first time, we invite you to let the offering basket pass you by, because you are our honored guest. And if you have made this your spiritual home, we thank you for your continuing generosity.

Every month, we also collect donations during the Offering to support a worthy cause. This month, our Share-the-Plate Recipient is _____.

If you are writing a check, please specify on the Memo line whether this is for your Pledge, an offering to UCH, or for the Share-the-Plate recipient.

Thank you, all, for your generosity. This morning's offering will now be received.

LOVE THY NEIGHBOR:
 WORLD COMMUNITY AND PEACE FOR ALL
 (Seven Principles series)
 Reverend Michael Walker

This is the latest installment in my sermon series about the Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism. Our Sixth Principle states that we *affirm and promote ... the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all*. What a tall order! My colleague, Ken Collier, refers to this as our “Superman Principle.”¹ Throughout our religious movement, UUs have long reached for the sky, so to speak – *Look! It’s a bird. It’s a plane. It’s...* – We’ve reached for the sky, another way

¹ Collier, Kenneth W. *Our Seven Principles in Story and Verse*. (Boston: Skinner House, 1997.) p. 88.

of saying that we’ve set for ourselves a lofty goal to work towards justice, peace and fair treatment for all people.

One of the teachings from our Christian heritage that we carry with us is to *love our neighbors*, to treat those around us with care and compassion, and to act as agents for this love, causing other people and institutions to also treat our neighbors with care and compassion.

This teaching may also cause one to ponder, *who is my neighbor?* Do I get to choose them? Usually, *no...* Do I need to respect them even if they block my driveway or listen to the TV at high volume? Perhaps it is a spiritual practice to let go of the little irritations our neighbors’ may cause, and find ways to love them, anyway.

A macro view of this can be found in the activists’

motto, *'Think Globally, Act Locally.'* I wonder if those who advocate *loving our neighbors* think of that motto, and that makes me wonder if it's easier to love the neighbor next to you — one you have probably known for years — than to love our figurative neighbor in a Third World country or the refugee seeking entry into our country. It has been particularly troubling to learn how families are being split up due to immigration and refugee policies. It is heartbreaking to learn of refugees fleeing for their lives, only to lose their lives on the journey towards safety.

Some in our movement consider the sixth Principle as too much of a pie-in-the-sky idea. In answer to that

charge, the Rev. Sean Parker Dennison once wrote:²

The sixth Principle seems extravagant in its hopefulness and improbable in its prospects. So much as happened since the Principles were adopted in 1961 and revised in 1985. Can we continue to say "world community"? "Peace, liberty, and justice for all"? The world is full of genocide, abuse, terror, and war. What have we gotten ourselves into?

As naive or impossible as the sixth Principle may seem, I'm not willing to give up on it. In the face of our culture's apathy and fear, I want to

² Dennison, Sean Parker, "The Goal of World Community with Peace, Liberty, and Justice for All" in *The Seven Principles in Word and Worship*, Ellen Brandenburg, ed. (Boston, Skinner House, 2007.) p.89.

imagine and help create a powerful vision of peace by peaceful means, liberty by liberatory means, justice by just means. I want us to believe — and to live as if we believe — that a world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all is possible. There is no guarantee that we will succeed, but I can assure you that we will improve ourselves and improve the world by trying.

At this point, I could easily dive right into a political speech, emphasizing my views about a close-minded, prejudiced and privileged mindset that seems to be in power in Washington, D.C. However, this is not a political rally, and what we are contemplating today is not simply a political matter. Our Seven UU Principles

are a spiritual roadmap to guide us along the windy, bumpy, and sometimes jammed-up highway of life. Politics is personal, as is spirituality. But I would say that our calling to improve the world, by improving our local communities, is an activity that has more chance of success when people work together, than if we just follow our own personal paths and hope that we make a difference.

Let's also bear in mind that our neighbors may come from further away than right next door. Immigration and refugee policies comprise a moral and spiritual issue, not just or only a political issue. It is a moral issue and loving our neighbor means we recognize this, whether or not we think it affects our personal lives. Do the fleeing refugees of war-torn places, many such

places torn-up because of what our nation did there – do they deserve respect, support, and a chance to live their lives in relative safety? When we discuss these things, can we afford to let others claim that this is merely a political issue, or must we speak out and declare that there is a religious imperative contained within the issue? One of the major stressors in our nation right now is a tension between immigration and jobs. Everyone, regardless of citizenship, has a basic human right to live somewhere in which they are free from harm, and have opportunities that allow them to provide for themselves and their families. Another stressor is a pervading fear of the *other* (if one makes a self-centered assumption that self is white and male than the category of *other* is quite broad.) This is playing out in how people of color are

treated, how Muslims and Jews are treated, how women are treated.

It seems obvious that these issues require collective work to make a difference. Alone, we are each too little to create the *change we want to see* in the world, to borrow some words from Gandhi. So, collective action is needed. This comes with organized public actions, such as the recent Women’s March on Washington, and the many churches reaching out in solidarity with mosques and synagogues. About her understanding of what it means to be a UU, Kat Liu wrote³ she had found “a faith that valued liberty for the sake of justice—individual autonomy balanced with

³ Liu, Kat, “What Will We Be and For Whom?” in *A People So Bold: Theology and Ministry for Unitarian Universalists*. John Gibb Millspaugh, ed. (Boston: Skinner House, 2010.) p. 52.

communal accountability.” I think that is crux of UUism, and what our Principles are guiding us towards: We can each search for own truth, but we work together to promote peace, freedom, and hope, building a global community – one church, one town, one state, one country at a time... Doing so, we recognize that we are all in this together. We don’t have time to play games with the environment, or refugee crises, or other issues that have a very real effect on peoples’ lives. In this together means all people – we should not have a mentality of *us versus them*, othering classes people that this person or that person may feel is different than themselves.

As I contemplate how useless the concept of *other*

really is, I pray that every person alive learns a profound truth. We are a fellowship of humanity – we are each a member, no matter where we were born, how old we are, what color we are, and so on. A leader in earth-based spirituality, Starhawk, poetically wrote:⁴

The Hopi say that we all began together, that each race went on a journey to learn its own road to power, and changed; that now is the time for us to return, to put the pieces of the puzzle back together, to make the circle whole. Through our differences, we complete each other. Together, we become a new whole.

In the recent era, science has confirmed what religion has

⁴ Starhawk, in *Sources of our Faith*, Kathleen Rolenz, ed. (Boston: Skinner House, 2012.) p. 143.

known all along: humanity did begin as one, and that different ethnic groups developed later as groups traveled away from each other and interacted with different environments around the world. As a result of natural selection, mutation and genetic drift, we now have a wealth of diversity in the human race, not to mention the rest of life on Earth.

Some people celebrate diversity; others are afraid of it! One might think that we should welcome and celebrate our brothers and sisters who come from far-flung places, but we know that their reception is oftentimes much different than we would hope. People of various ethnicities, of darker skin tones or different religions or languages, have had life experiences that I can scarcely imagine, although I do try. Starhawk's

reading called us to *make the circle whole*, while our Opening Hymn⁵ reminded us to: *Break not the circle of enabling love, where people grow, forgiven and forgiving; break not the circle, make it wider still, till it includes, embraces all the living*. This is a value that runs deeply in those who have a progressive worldview; it is a hallmark of who we are.

This is why we cannot allow the enormity of our Sixth Principle to overwhelm us. Yes, UUs and all of our allies are collectively responsible for building a better tomorrow, by creating welcoming communities everywhere we gather. We build the world community, one local community at a time. Yes, the motto is true: we must *think globally and act locally*.

⁵ SLT # 323.

I turn again to the words of the Rev. Ken Collier, about the “idea of community.” He wrote:⁶

[UUs] sometimes spend so much time and energy worrying about and praising the autonomy of the individual that we forget that individuals standing alone have about as much strength as a bunch of stones lying around on the ground. It is only when a mason picks up these stones and builds a wall that they become powerful. And that is how it is with communities. Alone, we're not much; together we have power. In fact, some people believe that the idea of an individual makes no sense except in the context of a community.

I think he speaks again of this idea he called the

⁶ Collier, *ibid.*

“Superman Principle.” When we say, *we affirm and promote world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all*, we do not assume that is up to each of us, alone, to accomplish that. No, it is together.

Let us love our neighbors, individually, but also as a community. Let our community speak with a loud, resounding voice, telling our leaders to show some compassion when dealing with those who are running for their lives; for those families, whose children are citizens, but their parents are undocumented; for those who stand up for the rights of all people; for the fellowship of humanity of which we are all members.

May it ever be so and blessed be you all!

BENEDICTION (LOV # 233)⁷

In closing, I offer these words of the renowned poet and activist of the Harlem Renaissance, Langston Hughes:

Give us a peace equal to the war

Or else our souls will be unsatisfied,

And we will wonder what we have fought for

And why the many died.

Give us a peace accepting every challenge –

The challenge of the poor, black, of all denied,

The challenge of the vast colonial world

That long has had so little justice by its side.

Give us a peace that dares us to be wise,

Give us a peace that dares us to be strong.

Give us a peace that dares us still uphold

Throughout the peace our battle against wrong.

To which I can only add:

May it ever be so and blessed be you all!

⁷ UUA. *Lifting Our Voices*, # 233.