

Sermon by the Rev. Bill Phillips

Association Sunday

Nov. 7, 2010

Introduction:

Today we begin the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations. In May of 1961 the Unitarians and the Universalist completed a consolidation agreement merging the two groups into one denomination. The Unitarians had been a faith of “scholars and learned people of the aristocratic class who focused on the oneness of the godhead and denied the trinity. Universalists were “the offspring of the common people—a religion of the heart, deeply rooted in the democratic process and believers in universal salvation for all people—a blue collar faith. The new UUA declared itself to be a faith of both the head and the heart. I have a one point sermon today, I hope that you leave today full of pride that you are members and friends of UUA.

I want to share four stories, which fill me with pride that I am a Unitarian Universalists.

1.Emerson and Thoreau

In 1840 Ralph Waldo Emerson, a noted Unitarian minister, and Henry David Thoreau a Harvard graduate and recently fired English teacher became friends when Emerson invited Henry into his home to mentor his children's education. These two men very different men became intellectual colleagues. Emerson is known as the founder and leader of the Transcendentalist movement and Thoreau is known for his writings On Walden Pond and Civil Disobedience.

In the winter of 1840 while walking in the Walden Woods Henry met the local tax collector who confronted him with the fact that he was six years delinquent on his poll tax. Thoreau let the taxman know in no uncertain terms that he had no intention of paying due to his opposition to the poll tax, his opposition to the Mexican-American war, and his opposition to slavery. The tax collector had Henry arrested and placed in the local jail overnight. The next day Emerson came to the jail and asked his friend Henry, "Mr. Thoreau what are you doing in there?" Henry David Thoreau responded with his now famous quote, "The question Mr. Emerson is what are you doing out there?"

Later Thoreau formalized his statement and wrote, "Under a government which imprisons any person unjustly, the true place for a just man is also in prison." As early as 1840 our history consisted of leaders who stood for

human rights and social justice. We can be proud to call Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau UU' s.

2. Martha & Waitstill Sharp

One hundred years after Emerson and Thoreau in Feb. 1939 a couple at the Wellesley Hills Unitarian Church in Mass. began a mission to save as many refugees as possible from the Nazi war machine. Martha and Waitstill sailed to Europe on a humanitarian mission to try to do something for the men, women and children fleeing the German army. In Prague they arranged to deliver milk and food for the starving children and helped approximately 2000-3000 mainly Jewish refugees flee the Nazi. Out of this effort the Unitarian Service Committee was born, now UUSC. Also the Flaming Chalice became the symbol of safe houses for fleeing Jewish emigrants and at unification conference in 1961 was adopted as the UUA symbol. (The Van Loans are former members of UU Wellesley Church) we are proud to be connected to Martha and Waitstill Sharp as UUs.

3. James Reeb & Clark Olson

In the spring of 1965 a young UU minister from DC was visiting UU headquarters in Boston when a fax was received from Dr. MLK requesting

UU Clergy to come to Selma, Alabama to help register Black voters. Young Rev. Reeb answered the call and went to Selma along with over 500 UU's. During the march James met another UU minister Rev. Clark Olson. They were walking arm in arm with Reeb on the outside when a segregationist attacker clubbed James Reeb to death with a baseball bat. When the news broke on TV, radio and newspapers President Lyndon Johnson sent Air Force One to Montgomery to retrieve the UU minister's dead body. Four days later President Johnson met with the US Congress and presented the Voting Rights Act that would later become the law of the land. Rev. Clark Olson has twice visited our congregation with his wife Anna who brought us our first chalice lighters check from the TJD for our first purchase of land. We are proudly connected to the UUs of the Selma march.

4.Gobin Starr and Bob West:

On July 26, 1971 Beacon Press of the UUA was approached by Daniel Ellsberg requesting a publisher for over 7000 pages of Pentagon Papers from the Department of Defense' about the real history of the Vietnam War. These documents showed that President Johnson and Sec. of Defense Robert McNamara had lied to the US. Congress and the US people about the conduct of the war. Thirty-five publishers had declined to publish the "Pentagon

Papers.” Since 1854 the Unitarian Beacon Press in Boston had published sermons, essays, and books mostly by Unitarian authors and thinkers about religion and society. Gobin Starr was the director and chief editor of Beacon Press and Rev. Bob West was the current president of UUA. President Nixon called Gobin Starr and asked him as a gentleman and a citizen not to publish. Mr. Starr reminded the president of the freedom of the press and thanked him for his call. These two courageous men decided to publish 20,000 copies of the 4 volume set of pentagon papers which hit the streets on Oct. 22, 1971. They sold out in a matter of weeks.

A few days following publication J. Edgar Hoover director of the FBI issued a subpoena for all financial records of both the Beacon Press and the UUA. This was an unprecedented move for the US government. The audit took 2 ½ years to complete. Meanwhile the FBI also burglarized the office of Mr. Ellsberg’s psychiatrist searching for any dirt they could find to discredit him. By 1974 it became clear that the investigators were the same people involved in the Watergate burglary and all of them resigned from government and some went to prison. Mr. Starr and Rev. West are two UU’s who helped right a wrong, correct a national lie, and stop a war. UU’s have a proud history of human rights and social justice. The President of UUA and the Director of Beacon Press are a part of our collective history of which we can all be proud.

Conclusion:

We are a part of the Coastal Cluster of UU churches, Savannah, Statesboro, Beaufort, Low Country, Charleston, Augusta, Aiken and UUCG. We are also part of the TJD, which stretches from Virginia to Florida. Jim Key the father of Hunter Key is our TJD President and Annette Marquis is our district director. Annette has been to Brunswick for our grand opening of 1710 and also to lead us in a planning workshop. She will assist us in finding a new minister.

Nationally we are now a denomination of over 1000 congregations, 165,000 adult members and 57,000 children and youth---more than 222,000 souls. We are connected to 200 congregations in the UK, England, Scotland, and Wales; 140 churches in Romania and several congregations in Australia, New Zealand and India. Today we celebrate our connectedness to our cluster, our district, our nation and the whole world. I hope that you leave here today sharing my pride in being a member of The Unitarian Universalist of Coastal Georgia, the Coastal Cluster, The Thomas Jefferson District and the Unitarian Universalist Association of Churches. Peace to us all and to the entire world.

