

Sunday Service Notes



Service Date: October 27, 2019

Speaker: Hayden Slentz-Kesler

Speaker Notes

I was raised Unitarian Universalist. However, it wasn't until I started growing up that I began claiming the ideals of our denomination for my own. I started to take pride in our Seven Principles, especially the fourth: a free and responsible search for truth and meaning. One of my favorite parts of Unitarian Universalism is that it does not claim to have all the answers. It does not promise that you will find truth and meaning. Rather, it encourages each person to search for themselves. It acknowledges that truth and meaning are very personal concepts and should therefore not be dictated by a religious institution.

When I was a sophomore in high school, I did a research project about the history of Unitarian Universalism. Part of what I learned by doing this was some of the differences between Unitarianism and Universalism. Unitarianism was popular among upper-class intellectuals. They emphasized the internal, individual experience of spirituality. The transcendentalists, including Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, would fall into this camp. Universalism, on the

other hand, was more popular among lower-class farmers. Their faith was centered on the idea of Universal Salvation, that a loving god would not condemn anyone to hell. Love and generosity were the priorities of Universalists. One of the articles I read for my project related these two denominations to one of the songs in the teal hymnal, the Meditation on Breathing. The words to this song are “When I breathe in, I breathe in peace. When I breathe out, I breathe out love.” The first line represents Unitarianism: When I breathe in, I breathe in peace. The second line represents Universalism: When I breathe out, I breathe out love. The hymn as a whole perfectly demonstrates that Unitarian Universalism is both of these things. Both internal reflection and outward generosity. Both intellectual spirituality and love-based action. To me, the free and responsible search for truth and meaning is one of the specifically Unitarian aspects of our denomination. This principle was adopted along with the other six principles, which were finalized in 1984. The principles are important because Unitarian Universalism long struggled with establishing some common articulation of faith. In June 1983, Time Magazine wrote “How does a Unitarian begin his prayer? Answer: To whom it may concern...” The principles were developed from a variety of faith sources, including direct experience, Jewish and Christian teachings, world religions and humanism. If I had to guess, I would say that the fourth principle, a free and responsible search for truth and meaning, comes from the faith sources of direct experience and humanism.

Philip Hewett, a Unitarian minister in Vancouver, said this about authority in religion: “Within traditional Christianity, this authority is found in the Bible, or in the Church, or in the recorded sayings of the founding fathers. Unitarians find it in the reason and conscience of the

individual.” This quote ties directly into the fourth principle. What we believe is up to each of us. Our religious authority is ourselves.