

Essay Title: The World Needs Us

Audio Essay Series: Disc 1, Track 2

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Date of Release: June 23, 2005

AT OUR BEST, UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM HAS BEEN a beacon of freedom, justice and wholeness; at our best, we create religious communities that make a crucial difference in the lives of many people.

At our worst, Unitarian Universalism has been a way station for the disenchanted, the disruptive and the dyspeptic. At our worst, we create social clubs of the self-congratulatory and the self-involved that give liberal religion a bad name. What kind of religious movement will we ultimately be?

We are meant to share this faith in a way that engages those outside our movement. Because we have forgotten to fulfill our historic role, the religious world has become a much less kind and gentle place, and in fact is a place far more dangerous than our forefathers and fore mothers imagined it would be.

I believe that we Unitarian Universalists have a date with history, and that we are running late. I believe that we are uniquely positioned to ask, to answer, and to act upon the question that Jesus answered so brilliantly in what must be the best-known of all the gospel parables: The Story of the Good Samaritan.

In telling the story of the scorned, untouchable Samaritan who cares for a wounded and broken man, Jesus is speaking to me and to you, and the message is clear, and it is difficult, and it is our sacred mission as liberal religious people, if we will but accept it to share our faith with our neighbors.

Who is our neighbor? The brother who is a born-again Christian; the mother who is a member of an evangelical church; the co-worker who leaves tracts on your desk; the family who won't let your children play with their children because they are not saved; the protestor who claims that God hates faggots; the evangelist who declares women should be silent in the churches; the neighbor who invites you to prayer meeting and encourages you to leave that place you say is a church but she knows is really a cult.

Those people are our neighbors, not just the ones we like, or feel good about talking to, or have hope will one day see the light of liberal faith. We cannot create the radical change in the world that liberal religion is meant to create if we are only hanging out with one another. We cannot offer a healing alternative to the religiously injured, lying half dead on the road of life, by keeping our faith a private pleasure. We can create radical change only with radical engagement, only with the radical faith modeled in the ministries of so many faithful prophets and sages and wise people.

Continued

Page 2 / The World Needs Us

The faith we embrace as our own has never been more important than it is right now, because it has never been more at risk than it is right now. Not only our faith, but our freedom is in danger in these days. We owe it to all those we meet to speak, to act, to live, as vigorous, articulate, compelling examples of a faith that can cast out fear.

Perhaps we cannot equip the entire world with this faith we know and cherish. But there are worse ways to spend our lives than in spreading the good news of liberal religion. Our work together can hasten the arrival of what I have always imagined as the promised land: that gift of free religious community, that vision of an earth made fair, with all her people one.

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