

Check in and reflections

- Have been thinking about the nature of our congregations and whether they are like families. If they are like families, they can exclude people who try to come in.
- Have been thinking that people get really upset with words. We need to remain in dialogue with each other instead of getting upset over words. We need to remain calm. I am wondering about how we can foster a calm response to each other.
- I was reminded of the brief discussion we had last time about the relationship between the Humanists and Christians. I was concerned about the appearance of the Humanist position as being totally anti-Christian when I saw the list of articles to be discussed in the e-blast with no comment. I was especially concerned about what guests looking at the e-blast (and order of service) might think. I raised my concern with the head of the Humanists, and we agreed that all the church communications should have a statement about the diversity of opinions held within the church.

Question 1: The question about good and evil – about the nature of human beings – leads to questions about how much we have inherited from Unitarianism and how much from Universalism. As Thandeka suggests (p. 77); Are we children of Channing, believing that the essence of a human being is an independent, disembodied mind, and an autonomous self in charge of one's own destiny? Or are we children of Ballou, believing that the essence of a human being is inter-relational, and that our feeling of self has real effect on the state of our mind? How much meaningful tension exists within the congregation between the Channing in us and the Ballou?

- This is the question of our time –what is the nature of human nature. Who is responsible for climate change, for example. Does the Channing position build individualism? Our congregation is neither on the side of Channing nor Ballou.
- Agree that this is the question of our time. I am aligned with what I think is the Humanist position on this, that we are logical thinkers following reason. A person probably needs a strain of both logical reasoning as well as emotions to be whole.
- We (Humanists) accept the emotional aspect of humans. We are not just steeped in logic and reason. Humanists look at the whole human being, and emotion is part of that. We acknowledge that the Cosmos exists, that natural laws exist, but we don't know them all. This is probably a typical Humanist view at First U.
- I lean toward our feeling of self having an effect on the state of our mind. Unitarian Universalists are not the only ones raising these questions. Different generations may view this differently.
- I am in favor of the Ballou position. What we know and experience depends on our culture. I disagree that an individual person can comprehend the world.
- I see this played out in the discussion in "The Coddling of the American Mind" where a correlation is drawn between the mental health of teens, especially girls, and the adoption of social media over in person social relations. Mental health issues started to increase markedly

in 2013 when many youth possessed cell phones and facebook opened to them, setting in motion a spiral of social alienation.

- The alienation needs a dose of Channing individualism to prevent people being swept along by social media. The Channing model allows for a certain independence of thinking. We need to join the two models. We also need to figure out how to bring younger people into the discourse. Herd mentality overwhelms the sense of self.
- Hadn't thought about herd mentality in these terms before. It seems to be increasing.
- I have been the victim of increasing herd mentality, both in the church and in the denomination. You were cancelled. Independent thinking was discouraged.
- I saw herd mentality in the large number of ministers who signed the condemnation of Todd Eckloff without reading his book. What DRUUMM and BLUU have been suggesting have not been critically examined; there seems to be a presumption that blacks don't have the ability to think. People are not saying anything because they are afraid of the consequences.
- Is there a difference in going along because you actually are convinced something is true (herd mentality) and going along because you are afraid for your job?
- There is a difference, and we won't know why people are going along with something until we talk with them about it.
- Some people are never fearful and always speak what they believe. Others are cautious. Among the cautious there are some who will consider what they have done and summon the courage to start acting as they believe. My hope is in that group. And we need to help each other find that courage. Here is where "Ballou" takes over.
- When we have a clear theology, then Channing puts us in control of our destiny. It allows us to have faith that what we are doing is right. It allows us to speak up courageously even in intimidating circumstances.
- It's not a choice. People who think they are operating independently are actually operating in a context they were exposed to somewhere else.
- Both Channing and Ballou come out of a long theological history. Today we have few who think about either. We need to search for a synergy between the two.
- In terms of current day politics, how do we determine historical truth about what is happening in the real world? When people get carried away by a crowd, they are being motivated by something, but it is not a search for truth.
- UU theology didn't get off the ground after the merger before it was sabotaged by the Black Power movement when it was only seven years old. By the time we were starting to work our way out of that, we were hit by BLUU. How do we solve the great theological dilemma – how do we know what we know???? UUs are striving to discuss the nature of the truth that can be known, but the process is obscured by identity politics. We need to clear away the debris to discover how to move forward.
- It was decided at the time of merger not to put theology forward. How do we know that truth is there if we don't know what it is?
- There are laws in the universe. Are there metaphysical laws as well? Are scientific facts part of or beyond human laws? Science has been delimited by natural theology, whose purpose was to find out about God.
- Most of us test ideas with our personal ideas.
- Is this where faith comes in?

Question 2: JLA writes (p. 48): “The free person does not live by an unexamined faith. To do so is to worship an idol whittled out and made into a fetish. . . . An unexamined faith is not worth having, for it can be true only by accident. A faith worth having is a faith worth discussing and testing. . . . The faith of the free, if it is to escape the tyranny of the arbitrary, must be available to all, retestable by all (and not merely by an elite), valid for all. It is something that is intelligible and justifiable.” How have we examined our faith at First U?

- My faith is in Humanism. We have progressed as a species because of humanism, because of our attempts to take care of each other. There is enough information for me to have faith in humanism – based on my experience and reading.
- I examined my Catholic faith, found it wanting, and rejected it. I became disconcerted reading this when I realized I had not replaced with anything I could examine.
- I went away from Christianity a couple of times. In a dream I concluded that God was dead, and I replaced it with social humanism. I joined a communist party and discovered the leaders were not what they claimed to be. I reexamined that party and discovered they did not understand what they were talking about. So, I lost my God, and I lost my party. I decided I would revisit God, but in a broader sense; a god that is an aspect of matter itself, grounded in the nature of matter, leading to the God “trope” – a natural force which we conceive of as a father-figure. This is what I call Marxist-Leninist Historical Theism, and Unitarian Universalism is a part of it.
- I am not sure what my faith is. We don’t have a common faith at First U. It would be useful to figure out how to examine the question of faith. I am reality-based and keep testing my faith with experience, facts, reading. We do not engage in any of this at church.
- This discussion has caused me to think about what faith is – the expectation of future validity of a viewpoint on the way the world is – that people would respond to positively. This would be based on the perception of truth. People can become aligned around a certain belief.
- After you rejected your Catholic faith you developed a secular faith, because we all have faith in something. At First U we didn’t have faith in each other, the ministers, or the leadership.

Closing words from JLA (p. 47):

“Even the less credulous faith that acknowledges human fallibility also requires a faith in humanity. This faith may be a more modest one than that of orthodox belief in infallibility, but it holds that a more reliable object of faith can be found if people are free to learn from each other by mutual criticism, free to discard old error, free to discover new insight, free to judge, free to test. The free person’s faith is not merely a faith in oneself: It is a faith in the capacity of sincere persons to find freely together that which is worthy of confidence....”

Next meeting in three weeks – October 13.

