

Thought for Contemplation:

"Science investigates religion interprets,
Science gives (us)... knowledge which is power
Religion gives (us)... wisdom which is control." - Martin Luther King, Jr.

**Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church
February 3, 2019**

INGATHERING CHIMES

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHALICE LIGHTING Maisie and Leo Robinson

Chalice of Wonder

Call us to be curious

Chalice of Fire

Call us to care

Chalice of Warmth

Call us to love in word and deed.

Anita Farber-Robertson

CALL TO WORSHIP Responsive We Gather in Reverence #439

HYMN *Spirit of Truth, of Life, of Power* #403

CHILDREN'S TIME Bob Moseley

Song (seated) Go Now in Peace #413

(Children are invited to go now for a brief introduction to their program.)

MUSIC FOR REFLECTION

JOYS AND SORROWS

MEDITATION AND PRAYER

READING: *The Clergy Letter-from Unitarian Universalist Clergy- An Open Letter Concerning Religion and Science*

As Unitarian Universalists, we draw from many sources, including "Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life," and

"Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit." While most Unitarian Universalists believe that many sacred scriptures convey timeless truths about humans and our relationship to the sacred, we stand in solidarity with our Christian and Jewish brothers and sisters who do not read the Bible literally, as they would a science textbook. We believe that religious truth is of a different order from scientific truth. Its purpose is not to convey scientific information but to transform hearts.

Fundamentalists of various traditions, who perceive the science of evolution to conflict with their personal religious beliefs, are seeking to influence public school boards to authorize the teaching of creationism. We see this as a breach in the separation of church and state. Those who believe in a literal interpretation of the Biblical account of creation are free to teach their perspective in their homes, religious institutions and parochial schools. To teach it in the public schools would be to assert a particular religious perspective in an environment which is supposed to be free of such indoctrination.

We the undersigned, Unitarian Universalist clergy, believe that the timeless truths of the Bible and other scriptures may comfortably coexist with the discoveries of modern science. We believe that the theory of evolution is a foundational scientific truth, one that has stood up to rigorous scrutiny and upon which much of human knowledge and achievement rests. To reject this truth or to treat it as "one theory among others" is to deliberately embrace scientific ignorance and transmit such ignorance to our children. We urge school board members to

preserve the integrity of the science curriculum by affirming the teaching of the theory of evolution as a core component of human knowledge. We ask that science remain science and that religion remain religion, two very different, but complementary, forms of truth.

591 Unitarian Universalist ministers have signed this letter which was written in four forms, reflecting four religious traditions: Christian, Jewish, Unitarian Universalist, and Buddhist. The combined total of clergy signatories to these letters is sixteen thousand, three hundred and eighty-one.

ANTHEM *We Dare to Question*

OFFERING

SERMON

Fake Science and True Believers

The Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson

I have a friend who considers himself a humanist. Always has and probably always will. When we were talking the other day, he said, “I don’t believe in grace, but I know it happens.”

I felt a deep respect for him when he said that. The humility of it. The acknowledgement of limited knowledge and understanding. He doesn’t have to know it all, explain everything away, or deny those things that he cannot understand. Still, he is committed to putting his trust in those concepts which have been able to bear the test of time and science. He is a humanist.

It is in notable contrast to another friend of mine who when hearing about such things has quipped “I will see it when I believe it.” Sounds cute, and in his case, I believe it is true. But that is a very narrow window through which to let the world in, only seeing what you already believe. Granted, such a stance might mean that he will never see a

leprechaun or a wood nymph, which would be okay, maybe even a good thing. But it also could mean that if he were a scientist in a laboratory, he might have missed the discovery that particles could also be waves, because in the physical world he knows, that makes no sense. It makes no sense today either, and yet, it is true that particles can be waves. Sadly, it is also true that if grace happens in his life, he will not allow himself to know it, and will miss basking in the good feeling that comes from having been blessed for no reason at all.

We are regularly challenged to discern the truth of things, a whole range of things, from the stories our children bring home (we who are older remember the “the dog ate my homework” routine, and as one who taught in seminary, I know the “the printer ate my paper” routine.), to discerning the truth of claims made by advertisers regarding what will make our teeth whiter, our bodies more healthy, our lives happier. Sometimes we believe those things, even when we suspect they aren’t really true, because we want to. In my heart of hearts, I may know that that car, or that phone or that pair of running shoes is not going to make me happier. But it is an easier fix than changing my life or my attitude or my way of relating to the people that matter to me, so I am willing to engage in the self-deception and make that purchase, or at least consider it seriously, hoping to purchase happiness.

We are awash in fake claims and news, not only in our country, but in our world. It is an epidemic, people trying to manipulate us for their own gain. And we facilitate it to the extent that we prefer to live in environments in which our predispositions are affirmed; we like to be in the company of people with whom we agree; we like hearing or seeing news that confirms our world view, and we don’t like seeing that which contradicts it. So probably, a part of us likes getting only news and information that was vetted for its agreement with our general

positions. It is comforting when our email inbox calls out examples in the world that confirm our position, when our newsfeed tells us of events that promote our causes, when our Facebook page gets messages about things that matter to us. We are confirmed, even if, horror of horrors, even if we are wrong.

We may wag our heads in almost humorous, disrespectful disbelief at that fellow who went shooting in a pizza shop in Pennsylvania because he believed the newsfeed he'd gotten that said that Hilary Clinton was operating a child pornography ring out of the pizza shop. "How could he be so gullible," we may smugly ask ourselves, unaware of all the distorted or untrue messages we may have received and believed- or the true ones we discounted because they challenged our beliefs or prejudices.

As Unitarian Universalists, we affirm the free and responsible search for truth and meaning. I love that those are paired together. It is a search that includes both science and religion...the truth of science and the meanings those truths hold, which are religious. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. put it so clearly:

"Science investigates religion interprets."

We are committed to both, and to the healthy interaction between them, as each learns from the other. In that interaction, as King noted:

"Science gives (us)... knowledge which is power
Religion gives (us)... wisdom which is control."

They are both important- the power that knowledge gives us, can be terrifyingly dangerous if uncoupled from the moral compass religion, and its wisdom, provides.

Rabbi Rachel Jackson puts it this way:

“Scientific laws tell us what happens (such as mass divided by volume is density) and theories tell us how and when something happens. (And,) There are moments, rare ones, which do cause us to reevaluate everything we know.”¹

Albert Einstein wrote about such times in the book he published in 1919, in which he essentially says: “No amount of experimentation can ever prove me right; a single experiment can prove me wrong.”² I like the humility, and the acceptance of the truth of that, as painful as such moments may sometimes be for any of us, probably painful for Einstein as well.

So, if science investigates how things work, and religion interprets, mining the discoveries for meaning, and placing them within a context and a moral compass, what happens when the two distinctions get blurred, and start to run together? We end up with fake facts and a faulty compass, which is serious, especially in these days when we are modifying genetic codes in plants and animals and even humans.

We know the saying, if the only tool you have is a hammer, then everything looks to you like a nail. To aid us in figuring out how best to live, and how to rigorously pursue knowledge, we need to have the right tools at hand. The tools of science are for exploring the physical world, and the tools of religion are for creating the meanings and constraints that properly hold and direct them.

Again, I turn to Rabbi Jackson who answers the question, can we hold both a covenantal view, as well as a scientific one, with a ‘yes’ and a caveat.

¹¹ Rabbi Rachel Jackson, *Is Faith Like Fake News?* sermon preached January 3, 2019 adapted from a sermon preached during the High Holidays, 2018 to the Agudas Congregation in Hendersonville, NC

² Albert Einstein, *Induction and Deduction in Physics*, 1919

“...there are limits to my authority in our community...People might come to me to learn about Judaism, or religion, or values. But no one is coming to me to help them choose furniture or to do taxes. I can do those things, but it is not my role. And if someone asks me to rewire their home, not only is that not my role, I simply cannot do it well, and risk burning down their house.

Similarly, faith can attempt to answer great big questions ...like, “Where did I come from?” ...” How do I form a loving and compassionate society?” “Where is God in all of this? But scripture is really bad about telling us how to treat diseases, or the way the solar system is arranged, or the details of evolution.

Both are tools and like any tool, they are amazing at what they do, and they are amazingly bad at what they don’t do. Please don’t use a hammer as a fly swatter, you’ll ruin your walls. Please don’t use scripture to calculate the age of the universe. Please don’t use the Hubble Deep Field Telescope to look for God.”³

Why are we talking about this in 2019? Because there are still legislators and school boards around this country trying to have Creationism or Intelligent Design taught in public schools in *science classes*. Not in religion classes, which would raise an issue of separation of church and state. No. They are avoiding that one. They are claiming that these are legitimate alternative theories about how the universe emerged and evolved. They want evolution to be taught as one theory among many legitimate alternatives to understanding how the species came to populate the earth. The Bible’s description of the creation of the world and its population, is to be taught as science. And while most of the time it has been struck down in the lower courts, it is creeping up

³ Rachel Jackson, Ibid

toward the Supreme Court. Right now legislation is being introduced in Arizona, Florida, Indiana and North Dakota to teach “the controversy” which would mean introducing Intelligent Design or Creationism as though they were scientific theories on an equal footing with evolution. And we know that the Supreme Court has changed.

Science in this country is endangered. And there are those who have wrapped themselves in the flag of religion to destroy it. And we are called on to say “No.” Not our religion. Not in our name.

Our kids deserve better than that. Our nation deserves better than that. And our nation’s role and security in the community of nations is threatened if, while the other nations are teaching their young people science, we are teaching ours pseudoscience, denying them fluency in the scientific method, and the capacity to ask the hard questions that discerning truth from error requires.

I believe in this faith.

I believe in the scientific method and the knowledge it uncovers.

I believe they are different, and I think they are each incredibly important, essential to healthy living and sound communities. As true believers in the scientific method, and as a people of faith committed to the responsible search for truth and meaning it behooves us to resist the dissemination of fake science and stand with the faithful who understand the difference between religion and science.

For our children and our children’s children, we need to protect the ever-unfolding knowledge that it is our human privilege to discover and receive, with all the humility and reverence it deserves. May we be so faithful. So much is riding on it. Amen and blessed be.

CLOSING HYMN *Light of Ages* #189

BENEDICTION

CLOSING MUSIC (please remain seated for the closing music)