



High Country Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

Summit County, Colorado

Celebrating life in community
in the beautiful mountains of Colorado!

November 5, 2017
Monthly Touchstones Theme
Faith

Sunday Services, 4:00 pm weekly
Fellowship Hall
Lord of the Mountains
Lutheran Church
56 Highway 6, Dillon, CO 80435
(Services are not held in the
months of October and May)

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Giving Faith Life

Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland

A Language of Reverence

During his tenure as President of the Unitarian Universalist Association, the Rev. Bill Sinkford called for the creation of a language of reverence. This project has been informed, in part, by exploring earlier meanings of religious words, which often are more compelling than current understandings of those same words. As an example, consider the word worship. According to one definition, "Worship is an act of religious devotion usually directed towards a deity." Yet, the word worship comes from the Old English word *weorthscipe*, which combines the words "worth" and "shape." For Unitarian Universalists, worship is an activity of exploring and shaping those things to which we ascribe worth.

Faith and Belief

In a similar manner, the meaning of the words "faith" and "belief" has changed in ways that are unfortunate. Consequently, faith became associated with either blind faith or a leap of faith that involves accepting something beyond the bounds of reason. Belief was reduced to accepting things for which there is no evidence. Both were found wanting in terms of intellectual assent, yet that was never the meaning of or basis for either word.

The scholar Karen Armstrong reminds

us that the word faith has its roots in the Greek word *pistis*, which means trust, commitment, loyalty, and engagement. When Jerome translated the New Testament from Greek to Latin in the 4th century, *pistis*, became *fides*, which meant loyalty. He translated the verbal form of this Greek word (*pisteuo*) into the Latin verb, *credo*, which came from the phrase *cor do* meaning, "I give my heart." The translators of the original *King James Bible* then translated *credo* into the English word "belief," which came from the Middle English *bileven* meaning "to prize; to value; to hold dear."

Armstrong writes, "During the late seventeenth century ... as our concept of knowledge became more theoretical, the word 'belief' started to be used to describe an intellectual assent to a hypothetical—and often dubious—proposition." This new use was first adopted by scientists and philosophers, but by the mid- to late-19th century this usage had become common. It is no wonder that faith and belief have been disparaged, especially by those who value the use of reason. Unfortunately, misunderstanding both words, the baby was thrown out with the bath water.

Faith versus Belief

While belief and faith are often considered synonyms, they are different. According to Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916-2000), a Professor of Comparative Religion (whose course on World Religions I took when I attended Harvard Divinity

Our Mission: It is the purpose of the High Country Unitarian Universalist Fellowship [HCUUF] to be a community filled with love, beauty, and compassion. We are committed to freedom of opinion, expression, and spirituality. We seek to be of service to each other, our families, our larger community, and our natural environment.

School), belief has to do “with the holding of certain ideas,” which is to say that belief is about content. Faith, on the other hand, is about process. Belief is a noun, faith is a verb. To put our faith in something or someone is to “faith.”

High-wire Acts

Martin Copenhaver, president of Andover Newton Theological School, writes, “Imagine that you are at a circus. A skilled high-wire artist has accomplished so many marvelous feats that the audience has come to believe that he can do almost anything. The ringmaster



addresses the crowd: ‘Ladies and gentlemen, how many of you believe that this daring man can ride safely over the high wire on his bicycle while carrying someone on his

shoulders? If you believe he can do it, please raise your hand!’ Many in the audience raise their hands. ‘Very well, then,’ says the ringmaster, surveying all the raised hands, ‘now who would like to be the first to volunteer to sit on his shoulders?’ The difference between belief and faith is the difference between staying in your seat and volunteering to climb on the shoulders of the high-wire artist.”

Looking through a Window

In his book, *Faith for the Unbeliever*, Unitarian Universalist minister Daniel Kanter writes, “More than an adherence to a belief system, faith is an orientation to life. It is looking out at the world

from a particular perspective, and using that perspective to consider the meaning of our existence.” Kanter uses the image of a four-paned window as a metaphor



for faith. We look out through the window onto the world, life, and “the vast landscape of our experience.” Each pane corresponds to a specific aspect of faith:

“guiding beliefs, areas of trust, loyalties, and worldview.” As Kanter observes, “One pane may need a little cleaning, while another may be more clear.”

The Experience of Faith

Faith is a condition of being human that grows out of our experience. The newborn’s relationship to his or her par-



ents and other caregivers is based on faith. To the extent that those adults are faithful with

their love and care, the newborn forms strong bonds with others and learns to trust life itself. If nurturing is absent, the infant will not form attachments and trust will be replaced with life-long distrust and an inability to make meaningful connections.

The United States?

Our relationships with institutions are also based on faith. When faith decreases, the fabric of society becomes

frayed. The components of faith, which are trust, commitment, loyalty, and engagement are



weakened or absent. The “United” States is a result of a complex matrix of elements that includes

- ◆ vision, ideals, courage,
- ◆ conflict, history, laws,
- ◆ compromise, traditions, affection,
- ◆ patriotism, connections, and much more.

This unity, as well as our faith in it, has never been guaranteed. It must be won anew in each generation through dialogue, compromise, civility, respect, agreeing to disagree, and an abiding commitment to the common good.

On July 27, 2004, Barack Obama delivered the keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention. He said, “There is not a liberal America and a conservative America—there is the United States of America. There is not a black America and a white America and

Latino America and Asian America—there’s the United States of America.” His words captured the ideal of America, but not the reality. It is distressing to realize that we are divided into opposing groups with almost no overlap in the middle.

A House Divided

On June 16, 1858, Abraham Lincoln, who had just been selected as the Republican candidate for the US Senate for the state of Illinois, said in a speech on slavery at the Republican State Convention, “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” While he was accurate in his biblically-based assessment (Mark 3:25) of America, many felt that he lost the Senate race against the Democratic candidate, Stephen Douglas, because of his views on slavery in that speech.

Another Civil War?

Various polls in America have chronicled a decline of faith in politics, in democratic institutions and democracy itself, in people, generally, and in those who are part of the partisan opposition, specifically. We live, writes Ross Douthat, a *New York Times* columnist, in “increasingly self-segregated social worlds.” Finding comfort in tribalism, we have allowed stereotypes to triumph over reality.



Little Round Top, site of a Civil War battle at Gettysburg

Recalling Lincoln is intentional because some believe that America may be more divided now than at any time since the Civil War. Heather Digby Parton writes online in *Salon*, “...I think ... that conservatives and liberals have finalized the realignment that began back in the 1960s, when the civil rights move-

ment and the GOP's ... 'Southern strategy' changed the two parties' centers of gravity. Both parties are now more ideologically and culturally homogeneous than they've ever been in the modern era."

She continues, "Whatever the reasons for this deepening ideological division, it will make this political period exceptionally difficult. The American system has a bad track record in dealing with intense polarization, as a look back at the decades before the Civil War will tell you. Many of the fundamental issues that animate the divide today are similar to those that splintered the nation back in the 1850s. Indeed, they have never been fully settled...."

Survey Says!

Digby, as she is known, was reacting to a survey published in October 2017 by the Pew Research Center on political polarization in the American public. This survey has been conducted periodically since 1994. The survey concluded that "divisions between Republicans and Democrats on fundamental political values—on government, race, immigration, national security, environmental protection and other areas—reached record levels during Barack Obama's presidency. In Donald Trump's first year as president, these gaps have grown even larger."

Pew further comments that "the magnitude of these differences dwarfs other divisions in society, along such lines as gender, race and ethnicity, religious observance or education." Based on ten political values in the survey, the average partisan gap grew from 15% in 1994 to 17% in 2004, and to 36% today.

In 1994, fewer than 20% in both parties viewed the opposing party very unfavorably. "Currently, 44% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning have a very unfavorable opinion of the GOP, [while]... 45% of Republicans and Republican-leaning view the Democratic Party very unfavorably."

Perhaps most notable is the difference in opinion about America. In terms of what contributes to America's success, 68% of Democrats attribute the

country's success more to "its ability to change," while 61% of Republicans say the nation's "reliance on long-standing principles" has been more important. Another Pew study conducted in April 2017 shows that while 59% of Republicans expressed quite a lot of confidence in the future of the United States, only 28% of Democrats express a similar confidence.

A Loss of Trust

Edelman, the world's largest public relations company, has been conducting the *Trust Barometer* survey for 17 years. The survey is now done in 28 countries. In 2016, the bottom on trust dropped out. CEO Richard Edelman said, "...we are in such a crisis with trust that our faith and connection with the integral parts of our society is in collapse."

Edelman noted that, trust "...is now the deciding factor in whether a society can function. As trust in institutions erodes, the basic assumptions of fairness, shared values and equal opportunity traditionally upheld by 'the system' are no longer taken for granted. We observe deep disillusion on both the left and the right.... There is growing despair about the future...."

Edelman outlines four elements related to the implosion of trust.

- ◆ First, the collapse of trust has become a systemic threat.
- ◆ Second, while there may be modest trust in institutions of business and government that does not transfer to the leaders of those institutions who are routinely distrusted.
- ◆ Third, government is no longer considered an effective force in leading change.
- ◆ Finally, the media is now seen to be so politicized that it is unable to meet its reporting obligations. Its default is following social media rather than driving the conversation.

Tonia Ries, Executive Director of Edelman Square, writes that the 2017 results of the *Trust Barometer* reveal a direct link between a decline of trust in institutions, especially government, and the rise of populist movements. Faith is

replaced by fear, and the consequences are devastating.



Losing Faith in America

We are, in fact, a house so divided that our ability to continue to stand is now in question. Given this, where do we place our faith? Given this, how can we narrow and heal the divide?

Lee Hamilton, a Democrat, served in the US House of Representatives from 1965 to 1998. He is concerned that we've lost the ability to use the techniques of democracy:

- ◆ civility
- ◆ negotiation
- ◆ compromise
- ◆ transparency
- ◆ respect for minority views and
- ◆ accountability.

The biggest casualty, however, has been the loss of trust and its impact on our faith in America. Jeff Boss writes, "Without trust, there is no basis for relationships, no shared purpose, ... and thus no room to grow. Without trust in oneself and/or others there is no capacity to change." We, all of us, should have as our goal "giving faith life." The central task in achieving this goal is building trust. This task is daunting in the age of fake news, alternative facts, a growing culture of lying, Internet trolling, etc. Yet building trust is the only way to restore the "full faith and credit" of America.

The Speed of Trust

Stephen M.R. Covey, son of the late Stephen R. Covey (1932-2012), has expanded on his father's work. The elder Covey wrote, "Trust is the glue of life. It is the glue that holds organizations, cultures and relationships together. Ironically, it comes from the speed of going slow. With people, fast is slow and slow

is fast.” In response, the son wrote the 2006 book, *The Speed of Trust*.

Covey explores five aspects of trust:

- ◆ self-trust
- ◆ relationship trust
- ◆ organizational trust
- ◆ market trust and
- ◆ societal trust.

He explains that trust is a combination of character and competence that together involve thirteen behaviors. Behaviors associated with character include

- ◆ talking straight
- ◆ demonstrating respect
- ◆ creating transparency
- ◆ righting wrongs and
- ◆ showing loyalty.

Behaviors associated with competence include

- ◆ delivering results
- ◆ getting better
- ◆ confronting reality
- ◆ clarifying expectations and
- ◆ practicing accountability.

The last three behaviors involve both character and competence. They are

- ◆ listening first
- ◆ keeping commitments and
- ◆ extending trust.

Covey’s description of the opposite of each of these behaviors provides a chilling portrait of some of our current political leaders, and further emphasizes why trust is so critical to a well-functioning society.

Reaching Across the Aisle

Despite the current situation, there are reasons for optimism. The trust deficit in America has the power to unite people in ways that transcend ideology and promote bipartisan approaches to engage the problems that America faces. This requires reaching across the aisle. The most pressing job of Congress is not this or that piece of legislation, but rebuilding trust in Congress itself. We should demand of our representatives at all levels of government that they reach across the aisle with the goal of building relationships and creating trust so that we can have faith in America again. But this is not enough. We, too, must reach across the aisle to those with whom we

disagree, to those who seem to be different from us, even to those who we might fear. In this reaching, it is necessary to first learn who they are. We are not looking to confirm the differences between us, but to surface any similarities that may exist. The chasm between us and them is already too wide; we do not need to add to that. As Pete Seeger said, “It’s a very important thing to learn to talk with people you disagree with.”

Building a Bridge of Trust



Our task is to begin to build a bridge of trust through talking. We can only do this from our end of the chasm. We only do this by asking questions of someone on the other side. Some of the questions may be these.

- ◆ What is the country that you long for?
- ◆ What makes you proud to be an American?
- ◆ What makes America, America?
- ◆ What or whom are you afraid of, and why?
- ◆ What can you do with your fear?
- ◆ What or whom do you love, and why?
- ◆ What or whom do you hate, and why?
- ◆ How can we work together to heal the divide that threatens America?
- ◆ How can faith in America be restored for everyone?

Before we consider engaging someone with these questions, we should answer them for ourselves with as much honesty and courage as possible. This will help open our heart to the answers

of those on the other side of the chasm. In engaging the other, we would do well to see them, not with “the hard eyes of judgement, but the soft eyes of respect.” We will not change them, but perhaps we will begin to understand them. And perhaps this will encourage them to try to begin to understand us. Perhaps they will even begin building a bridge of trust from their side of the chasm.

And then.... And then, who knows what else may be possible.

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