

## **U.N.itarian U.N.iversalism**

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October 24, 1993

Good morning. We've heard a lot about the United Nations and international peace this morning. We're doing this as a way of commemorating UN Day. The UN was founded 48 years ago today. Some would say that it was founded as a way for the Allies to try to stay in power and enforce the treaties which ended World War II. Others see it somewhat less cynically as an organization to promote world peace and understanding.

I know, all this is well and good, but what does it have to do with a Unitarian Universalist here in 1993. Well, sit back and let me ramble on a for a few minutes about why we, perhaps, should call ourselves U.N.itarian U.N.iversalists -- to make it easy I'll call us UNUNs instead of UUs.

Let's start with our basic UU principles. We read them this morning as a reminder of what we believe.

We believe that all people are important. Not that all of our neighbors are important; not all United States residents; and not even all "First World" residents. But ALL people. That includes the African tribesman, the Pacific Islander, the Muscovite, the South American coffee farmer -- ALL people. If you believe that, you've taken the first simple step to being an UNUN.

We believe in justice and equality in human relations. That would help explain the work of the World Court, the World Bank, and other UN-sponsored organizations to bring justice to the world.

We believe in the right of conscience and the democratic process in society at large. We believe in the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all. These words could just as easily have come out of the U.N. charter as out of our own principles.

How about respect for the interdependent web of all existence? What does it mean when we say that we believe that all things on Earth are connected. Well, it means not only all people, but the entire natural world. Ah, so we must support the U.N.'s efforts to improve the world environment, develop a global environmental perspective, and so on. Are you ready to call it UNUNism?

I'm sure some of you are ready to jump out of your seats and tell me about all of the horrible things the U.N. has done over the years. You'll tell me how the U.N. ignored one-quarter of the world's population in Mainland China for decades. You'll tell me about the U.N. bowing to the Arab countries and condemning Zionism which brought the only thing even approaching a democracy to the Middle East. You'll tell me about the blatant ethnocentric politics which runs rampant. About the bloated bureaucracy, the waste of money, and so on.

Okay, I never said it was perfect. In fact, I never said it was the best we could do. I never said it shouldn't be changed or improved. But I think we all should be glad that the U.N. is there.

I remember when I was a teenager, a few of miles from my house someone put a big sign on their front lawn: Get U.S. out of U.N. The sign stayed there for months. And this was on a well-traveled road, so there must have been thousands of people each day who saw this sign. I wonder what people thought when they drove past. I wonder what motivated someone to put a sign like that on their front lawn in the first place. And I wonder how that person would feel today, when the U.N. is taking much more seriously its role as the world's peacekeeper.

For all its problems, what would be happening in Somalia if the U.N. were not here? Remember, we didn't even get there until hundreds of thousands of people had died from starvation. Would this country have had the political guts to invade another country to save starving people? Not to save oil; but just to save people? I have my doubts. But with the authorization of the U.N. -- more accurately, because of the conscience of some members of the U.N. -- we were able to join with other concerned countries and at least try to do something.

Do I support a military solution? Of course not. Did I support one in the Persian Gulf? No. That's one of the flaws of the U.N. -- too many militarists and not enough pacifists. But I'm not willing to abandon the idea of some form of world government. In fact, I think we'd be hard-pressed to name a national government that we couldn't say the same thing about -- too much emphasis on the military and not enough emphasis on finding peaceful solutions to our problems.

Whoa! Enough of my little lecture on World Government 101. You know, standing up here is kind of fun. You can watch people's eyes. And every now and then they start to wander -- usually over to these beautiful stained glass windows. I confess. When I'm sitting where you are, I often do the same thing.

Do you all know what these windows show? I'm guessing that some of you don't, because I was here for quite a while until I realized what they were. This one -- on your right -- is the parable of the Good Samaritan. To put it in context a little, realize that to the Jews of that time, the phrase "good Samaritan" was an oxymoron. Samaritans were the arch enemies of the Jews -- much like some would consider Palestinians today. Let me just read to you for a minute from the Gospel of Luke. Aw, come on, this one's good -- it's a lawyer story (one of my favorites)!

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. [--Now who else would have the guts to stand up and test Jesus? See why I like this one?--] "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" The lawyer answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself." And Jesus said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

But wanting to justify himself, the lawyer asked Jesus, "and who is my neighbor?" [-- These lawyers ... Jesus just gave him the key to eternal life and he has to ask another

question.--] Jesus replied by telling him this story: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road [-- realize that the Jewish priests were not just religious leaders; they also were the most educated people, often political leaders or judges --]; and when the priest saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite. [-- the Levites were the priests' helpers -- sort of the middle class of the time --] When the Levite came to the place and saw him, he passed by on the other side, too. But a Samaritan [--remember, the Samaritans were their enemies--] while traveling came near him; and when the Samaritan saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day the Samaritan took out two denarii [-- that's about 2 days' wages --] gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Then Jesus said: "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" The lawyer said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to the lawyer, "Go and do likewise."

It means something that one of these windows reminds us to remember the good Samaritan. Your neighbors aren't the people who just say they love you; they're not the people who are your leaders or who happen to live close to you; they're the people who actually do something to help you. Those are your true neighbors.

And the United Nations? Through UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Health Organization, and others -- they are being true neighbors to people around the world that have been forgotten by their leaders and the people who live close to them. Many of us may not like the U.N. -- they may be like the Samaritan was to the ancient Jews. But we should recognize the goodness in the Samaritan and, when she shows mercy, recognize her as our true neighbor.

The eyes are wandering over to the other window -- the one on your left. And I can't say I blame you. While the colors aren't quite as vibrant, it is nonetheless a beautiful window. This one depicts the story of Jesus at Jacob's well. Talk about coincidence -- this one is about Samaritans, too. For this story, we have to go to the Gospel according to John. Before I start, let me set the stage a little. Jesus was heading back home to Galilee, basically to try to defend himself. To get there, he had to go through Samaria -- not a real friendly place for a Jew. Now we pick up the story:

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria? Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked

me, and I would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again; but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Then Jesus does one of his miracles and tells the woman all about her life -- how many times she's been married, and so on. Just enough to make her believe that he's no ordinary man. She was so taken aback that she left to get other people to see this wondrous man. I'll skip that part and get to the point. While she was gone, the disciples were urging Jesus to eat.

But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together."

Then Jesus hangs out in Samaria for a couple of days, wows the masses with his supernatural powers, and goes on his way back home.

So why does this chapel commemorate Jacob's well? I don't think it's because we want to celebrate Jesus's supernatural powers. Rather, I think it's because of the real message of this story: That the greater gift -- the living water or the food you can reap in the dead of winter -- is the message of peace. There in the middle of enemy territory, Jesus tells the story of peace. Remember who he's talking about. The sower is the one who has the money to own the land and plant the crops. And the reaper is the one who owns nothing but is willing to work in the fields just to receive a small part of the harvest. Jesus is saying that, when they focus on what's really important -- the interdependence of all people -- they will work together and they will rejoice together. There in the middle of Samaria, Jesus gives us the message that will lead to peace -- that all people are brothers and sisters.

At its best, this is the work of the United Nations. Here in a rich, Western country, we may sow. But let's not forget to share the bounty of our harvest with others who are less fortunate, but no less deserving. Bring together the rich and poor nations; bring together the arch-enemies of the world -- today's versions of the Jews and Samaritans; bring together people of all colors and all nationalities -- to resolve their differences, so that we can all rejoice together.

In a few minutes, when we go next door, the children of our Congregation will be trying to help us turn these words into deeds -- literally asking us to put our money where our mouths are. They will be collecting money for UNICEF and selling cards, calendars, and other gift items from

UNICEF. Please be generous and help show why we consider ourselves U.N.itarian  
U.N.iversalists, too.

Thank you.