

**Rev. DC Fortune**  
**Sermon, November 13, 2022**  
**UUCSV**

The election is over.

Well, mostly.

Despite conspiracies of vast voter fraud, pretty much everybody agrees that this year's national elections went pretty well and were not tainted by hanky-panky. A few outliers are still complaining, but they're also pretty sure that the last election was disrupted by Jewish Space Lasers and a dead Venezuelan dictator, so there's that.

Here in Pennsylvania, the legislature is dominated by Republicans, but the governor, Secretary of State, and Attorney General are all Democrats.

In Washington, it appears that the Republicans will have a whisker thin margin in the House, but Democrats may well retain the Senate.

Whatever happens, they're going to have to occupy the same spaces in order to do their work. Figuring out how to work together seems like it would be the wise thing to do.

This is not to say that that is what they will do, merely that it seems to be a reasonable option.

This afternoon I will take down my political yard signs and dispose of them. My neighbors have a kind of year-round art installation extolling some guy named Brandon that has been up for months, so I don't think it will be coming down soon. But that's ok. They voted. I voted. Some of my candidates won, some of theirs won. We still share a property boundary that includes lilac bushes, and that's good. We're not super close, but we get along just fine.

Going forward once the contest is over can be tricky business, especially when the politics have been so bitter and vitriolic. Longtime rivalries are hard to let go of, but that's what's got to happen if the commonwealth or the US Congress wants to get a budget passed so that things can get done.

The broad message that voters across the country (except in Florida) seemed to be communicating is that they're tired of the nasty rhetoric and would like elected leaders to do some work instead of flinging excrement at one another like monkeys at the zoo.

How do we move on after the kind of rhetoric that has been spewed in the last few months, or, if we are to be honest, over the last six or seven years?

Hurtful words cannot be un-said, and their brutality cannot be undone. The bruises and scar linger, and it can be a real challenge to sit down with someone who has done personal harm to you or to those you love. Conservatives have been using transgender children as a "wedge issue" for a number of years. They've been targeting LGBTQ folks

forever. They accused educators of grooming children for some nefarious purpose – perhaps to make them liberals? I'm not exactly sure, nor, frankly, do I care. The teachers I know are trying to keep their students alive and engaged and maybe teach them the information on the lesson plan and maybe how to think for themselves. You know, between meetings and workshops and active shooter drills. Like that.

But I digress.

Like the two athletes in this morning's Time For All Ages<sup>1</sup>, we've got to figure out how to put our personal stuff aside and get on with the work before us. We still live in neighborhoods, we still go out in public, we work with other people – we've got to do what needs doing.

And working with others does not mean that we immediately forgive and forget the harm done. It means that we don't let it get in the way of our job in this world. It's not easy, but it's what we must do.

We understand ourselves to be critical thinkers, I would guess, on most days. Is that fair? We are reasonable. We adjust our understanding of things when we have new information, yes? Right, I thought so.

I'm going to speak for a moment about what may sound like insider UU baseball. Bear with me if you would.

We are familiar with our seven principles, yes?

They are on all our stuff. They're in the hymnals. They're on all our pamphlets. They're on those handy wallet cards.

For many of us, they are quite concrete to our understanding of our Unitarian Universalist faith.

They are very nearly ... doctrinal.

Which is a real problem for a faith that claims to be a living faith, rejecting creeds and doctrine for continued learning and development.

We are so committed to being a living faith, that we built into our bylaws a clause that requires the periodic examination of Article II of those bylaws to see if they need revision to reflect our vision in the present world. It is required that we examine Article II – which is where the seven principles and six sources are located – every 15 years.

The process goes like this: a commission is created to examine Article II. They spend a couple of years listening to people, asking questions, and examining how the current Article II functions as a foundational statement of our denomination. The commission then draws up a draft of whatever revisions they think are appropriate, they submit it to the UUA Board, which then releases it to the member congregations and their members.

There is a goodly amount of feedback and some editing, and a final draft is put to a vote of the delegates at the General Assembly. For those who have not been to General Assembly, or who might be new to our movement, GA is an annual gathering of Unitarian Universalists, many who are official representatives (delegates) assigned by their congregations to cast votes on important issues. The structure is not unlike the New England Town Meetings that I grew up with, where the whole town gets together in the school gym to vote on new ordinances, new members of the town council, and to approve the budget. General Assembly is not quite that granular, but it does serve much the same function.

The Article II Commission's draft revisions were released this week, and they're causing something of a stir in UU land. I will explain in a moment.

When the commission was encouraged to look toward verbs, and

“ ... propose any revisions that will enable our UUA, our member congregations, and our covenanted communities to be a relevant and powerful force for spiritual and moral growth, healing, and justice. Proposed changes should articulate core UU theological values. The Board believes that one core theological value, shared widely among UUs, is love. The Commission on Appraisal, in its report, *Engaging Our Theological Diversity*, cites Robert Miller's study of Unitarian Universalism, stating "UUs ranked loving as an instrumental value and mature love as a terminal value more highly than did respondents from other groups, religious and nonreligious." Dr. Cornel West says that "justice is what love looks like in public." Our commitment to personal, institutional and cultural change rooted in anti-oppression, anti-racism, and multiculturalism values and practices is love in action, and should be centered in any revision of Article II.

The full charge to the commission is available on the UUA website, as are the texts of the current Article II and the draft revision offered by the commission. I have printed out some copies of the current and draft versions and they'll be available at the back table after the service.

Early this fall I preached about Humanism as it relates to Unitarian Universalism, and discussed how the Humanist Manifesto is now in its third version, which is markedly different from the original in many ways. The current version of that document takes into account the Humanist obligation to examine structures of inequality and privilege and work to dismantle them so that all humans have the same opportunities to succeed and learn.

There were changes proposed to the General Assembly back in 2010, but they failed to garner support from a majority of the delegates present. This was frustrating to the members of the commission who had done a great deal of work, but this is what happens when the final authority in the denomination rests in the congregations and their delegates.

When I first read the proposed revisions, I confess I was confused. All of the beloved language of our seven principles was gone and the structure was greatly changed. Our values all shone clearly through in the new language, but it was far more challenging, more directive, urging action instead of merely stating what values we affirm and uphold.

I saw an interesting meme come through my social media feed recently, talking about Jesus' sermon on the mount and the Nicene Creed.

When Jesus preached on the mount (or the plain, depending on your source) he spent a lot of time telling people what to do. Be kind, feed the hungry, visit those in prison, help each other, call out hypocrites and lead them into righteousness.

But by the time the Council of Nicea was convened by Constantine just over 300 years later, that council produced the Nicene Creed, which was all about what to believe and nothing about what to do.

It feels like the seven principles and six sources have sort have become like our Nicene Creed. They've become the thing we worship. They are too holy to challenge, too holy to even change the language from "women and men" to "people" as happened a few years ago. Oh, we changed it, but the discussion was protracted and painful as people defended the seven principles as though they were handed down directly from William Ellery Channing or Theodore Parker or one of our early big shots.

The words in our bylaws were put there by us, and we can move them around. When we know better, we do better. That's what it means to be a living tradition. As we learn, we progress, and change our behavior.

Change is always challenging. If it were easy, we'd do it a lot more often.

As you look at the language in the two versions of Article II, I encourage you to pay attention to what you are feeling and see if you can pinpoint the source of those feelings. If you are anxious, examine where that upset is coming from. Is it because this is unfamiliar? Does it seem like a lot more work? Is that what is making you idgy?

I'll preach again on the draft version of Article II after Thanksgiving. I wanted to give you some time to read and think and sit with your feelings about this process. I encourage you to ask if the seven principles have become our ten commandments. Have they become our creed? How does the proposed language differ from the old? Don't worry about the wallet card or how we'll sing the kids to their classes. We'll figure that out. Consider what these words ask of us.

Getting back into the swing of things is challenging. Whether it is after an election, or working with some changed language, it will take some getting used to. But we can do it.

We can do it because we are smart, capable, adaptable creatures in an ever-changing, ever-evolving world. And we can do it because we are not alone. We are in this

together, making each other stronger, supporting each other, when need be, and receiving support when we need it. We'll get there. But for now, let's lean into the discomfort of a new learning experience.

May we remember this as we go forward into this day and this week.

Amen.

1“When Enemies Learn to Become Friends” by Sara Kelley; basis for the story is here:  
<https://www.indystar.com/story/sports/columnists/gregg-doyel/2018/10/10/enemies-since-childhood-become-best-friends-depauw-football-team/1553644002/>