

**A Marriage of Heart and Mind:  
The 1961 Unitarian Universalist Consolidation  
October 3, 2010**

Thank you everyone. Thank you, through your beautiful singing, for lifting my own heart this morning. You know, this sermon was intended to be about the marriage of heart and mind, in the context of the 1961 consolidation of the mind-centered Unitarian and heart-centered Universalist faiths, and I'm *pretty* sure I'll get around to that. But honestly, right now, with the week that's just transpired, I kind of feel like just spilling my Unitarian Universalist *guts*. Just stand here and confess, and maybe, in doing so, get slain in the Unitarian Universalist *spirit*. Heal! Someone will say, and I will be healed. It would be so nice, such a relief, if all of life's problems were solved that easily.

But when the heart is married to the mind, and the mind as well is married to the heart, one must learn to use both--to let reason guide our passion down the right paths, and to let our passion awaken our reason to the fact that each one of us actually *does* exist beyond just the neck and up.

Knowing that to be so, let me see if I can find some way to open the floodgates of my guts just enough, so as not to spill and wipe everyone out, but at least to release. I will start with the news of our new contract with the South Austin Senior Activity Center, which we affectionately know as

SASAC. The new contract prohibits us from having any open flame during our services. I completely understand the reasoning of the contract--fire insurance, fire codes, people's safety, so on and so forth--and I will not protest it. In fact, Eva Andries and I have already met with SASAC's very kind and very competent manager to get absolutely clear about how important and firm this new rule is. I thank that manager for her hospitality.

And, my heart hurts. It hurts because, as someone who has had no other religion but Unitarian Universalism, who has had no other religious symbol or ritual than that of the flaming chalice, who has a flaming chalice tattooed to her right shin, I feel as though someone has said to me something analogous to "Well, you can't actually eat the communion wafer," or "Well, we can't actually sprinkle the baptismal water on your child's head." It hurts because, during World War II, in a refugee camp in Spain, when workers with the Unitarian Service Committee asked refugee Hans Deutsch to design a symbol that would stand out so people fleeing the Nazi regime would recognize them, he drew not a chalice with a light bulb, but a chalice with a flame. The flame of justice, the flame of sacrifice, the flame of hope. Our closing hymn today, written by Unitarian Universalist minister Jason Shelton, is called "The *Fire* of Commitment," not "the light of commitment." You get my point. And I get that my passion may be straying from reason's path. Maybe this is my *fire* and brimstone moment.

Although, honestly, I don't even know what brimstone is. So it may be more accurate to say this is my fire and bronze moment. For this chalice, made in memory of Don and Mary Esther Young's daughter Amy, is made of just that. Fire and bronze. And come to think of it, I might say Amy was made of fire and bronze too. So, right now, I feel that our religious symbol, made manifest in this particular chalice, has been cheated. Not through injustice. Not through unkindness. But through--and here reason takes the lead--as I discussed just a few weeks ago, the givens of life. Remember them? Everything changes and ends. Things do not always go according to plan. Pain is part of life. Those givens. Oh, and that other given, known as fire codes. Reason brings me back to earth, and I know, I know....

I know. And yet my heart hurts. I know. My heart hurts. Thus, out of necessity enters the marriage of heart and mind. Hold both. Hold knowledge and hurt. Hold passion and reason, knowing both can move me and us forward, to a day when we will have a home of our own. In the meantime, both heart and mind say loudly and clearly, give thanks, give thanks, for all that we do have, including this beautiful tent which shelters us in our journey, and for the people who have said to us, stay here, rest here, for as long as you need.

But while we stay here and rest here and build beloved community here, let me confess to you a little more. This week, I found out that a beloved teacher of mine from a school I attended a long time ago was

given her termination notice last week, her contract ended five years early, with no offer of severance. I set out immediately, with her permission, to gather up names of fellow alumni who would be willing to sign a letter of protest. Passion drove my initial letter, and in that passion, I inadvertently misinformed everyone as to the immediacy of the situation, and was soon hearing from the very administrative leader who had told this teacher of her impending termination. His letter to me suggested that I, quote, “read the facts and context.” Well, I did go back and read, and I read too the facts as my teacher had laid them out to me. Then, I wrote a second letter to my fellow alumni, apologizing for the misinformation I had earlier shared, and supplying them with updated, more detailed information. I managed to get reason on board, supporting the passion while pulling back the reins, and I felt much better about my second letter.

And yet I confess, that situation calls to me to make one more confession. You see, in her correspondence with me, one thing my former teacher emphasized was that she was told more than once by her “superiors,” “Please don’t share this with anyone. It will hurt the institution.” Would it? Or would it just reveal things as they really are? I don’t know.

I do know that overall, when people are asked or told not to share their pain, or even just their true selves, to keep it inside, to go it alone, to buck up, cowboy up, butch up, close up shop in their hearts and take the express elevator to their heads, for the alleged good of the community, I

know that overall, things go wrong--often terribly, terribly wrong--leading, in some cases, in the end, to hundreds, even thousands, of hearts being broken.

So I confess that my heart feels broken this week. It feels broken by the recent suicides of five young gay men, ages 13-19, from all around the country--New Jersey, Rhode Island, Indiana, California, and, yes, Texas-- five young gay men, boys, really, who took their own lives because they could not bear the pain anymore of being harassed, exposed, devalued, dehumanized. My heart feels broken this week by those deaths, and by the death of the 19 year man at UT who, I am grateful to say, did not take the lives of others though he easily could have, but who did take his own, for reasons that seem completely unknown, even to his own family. And my heart feels broken this week by the death of a sixteen year old boy, name not yet released but who looked like hundreds of other teenage boys you might meet on the streets of Austin: red hoodie, baggy shorts, bright white sneakers--right down on William Cannon, shot and killed when he pointed his own gun at a police officer during a burglary. What did he want? What did he need? What, at 16, drove him to believe this was the only way?

This may sound more like a nonsequitor than a segue, but you know what I did yesterday? I walked with about 25 other Wildflowers and maybe a thousand others in the annual NAMI Walk, a fundraising walk for the National Alliance on Mental Illness. You should have seen all the people--all

the ages, the races, ethnicities, abilities, families, sexual orientations, shapes and sizes walking in hope and in solidarity. There was no stigma, no isolation, no desperation. There was no “buck up; keep it quiet, be invisible.” These were people saying, there is help. These were people saying, “You are loved,” and “I am lovable.” These were people affirming and promoting the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

And as I walked the route with my fellow Wildflowers, from Auditorium Shores, across the bridge and over to Congress Avenue, around the Capitol and back down, I was reminded too of Wildflower walking in the annual Gay Pride Parade, and I thought, you know, it’s bigger than just pride and festival and celebration. Pride Parade is saying “You are loved,” and “I am lovable.” So if you think that the Pride Parade is just for the subculture of those/us queer folk, and that since you’re not gay or lesbian or bisexual or transgender, it’s not really relevant to you, then let me say this: I bet any one of the parents of the five young gay men--boys--who took their own lives in these past weeks would give anything to walk with their son in a pride parade right now, saying “I love my son. I love my child. I affirm his inherent worth and dignity, and I do it out on the streets with the drag queens and the roller derby girls and the butch firefighters and the guys in leather because I am going to love my child no matter who he is or who he loves.”

The parents of the young UT student, the parents of the young man shot dead on William Cannon in the midst of a burglary attempt, the parents of those five gay men, ages 13-19--their minds are spinning and their hearts are breaking because their sons all died way too young, all in acts of desperation. That's what's happening right now, to those parents. Minds spinning, hearts breaking.

Now, I know the story of the young man caught in the middle of a burglary is a little different from the others who all committed suicide, and I bet there's at least a seed of a thought in this room that he might be just a *little* less worthy, because he was a *criminal*, because he *did* wear a hoodie and baggy shorts and bright white sneakers, and maybe even because his skin might have been just a *little* darker than that of most of the others. If there is that little seed of that thought somewhere in this room, I want to ask a couple of questions. Is that your heart or your mind feeding you that thought? And, if you were to open your heart and your mind a little more and ask, "What drove him to crime?", what might you discover? Poverty? Racism? Hunger? Addiction? Generations of systemic economic and social injustice, systems that promote competition over cooperation, me versus we? I'm just wondering.

I'm wondering, and I'm thinking, and I'm feeling, hmm. Maybe I like the idea, according to Warren Ross's book, *The Premise and the Promise*, that with the consolidation of the Unitarians and Universalists in 1961,

Universalism won. Maybe I *really* like that, as Ross says, “ especially in recent years, there has been a very conscious effort to recover the Universalist emphasis on a more egalitarian faith, one that emphasizes feeling as well as reason,” and that, with the 1961 consolidation, all that was lost, in Ernest Cassara’s eyes, “was snob appeal.” I don’t need my religion to turn its back on, or raise its nose up to anyone.

On the other hand, I wonder about Jack Mendelsohn’s thought, that with their combined resources, with the consolidation of the Unitarians and the Universalists, we haven’t yet realized “our hope...that we could do better in influencing public policy.” And I wonder about Charles Gaines’ feeling that with the consolidation, we have “lost the Universalists’ evangelism and populism.”

With the consolidation, we haven’t doubled in size, as was hoped. In fact, in the past couple of years, membership in the Unitarian Universalist faith has dropped. According to the most recent issue of the *UU World*, “a year ago, UUA membership declined by 132 members for a total of 156,015 members. This year membership dropped 267, a decline of .16 percent. Total adult membership this year is 155,748.” That’s right. Fifty years after the consolidation of the intellectual Unitarians with the heart-centered Universalists, we have just 155,748 adult members in the entire country. Maybe we still are an elite group, after all. Or, maybe we’re an egalitarian David, doing our best amidst the megachurches of Goliath.

Either way, fifty years on, we have work to do, if we want to keep our flame alive. More importantly, we have work to do if we want to be a people who can proclaim and show that hope and beloved community are alive for all who have lost both, or experienced neither.

I believe, beloved people of this church, that we have something good. I believe it, and I can show it. It's as easy as this: put out your right hand. Let that represent mind and reason. Put out your left hand. Let that represent heart and passion. Now hold the hand of the person on either side of you. What we have now is an interdependent web of mindful, heart-full people--a web that is strong, that is compassionate, that is creative, and that is *afame* with a commitment to transform ourselves and the world around us through acts of compassion, love, and social justice. For the sake of those bereaved, those alone, in despair, seeking beloved community, may this strong web be so.

Amen.

Please rise in body or spirit and join in singing hymn #1028 Fire of Commitment.