

THIS I BELIEVE
Marty Parker September 6, 2009

Good morning. My name is Marty Parker, and I've been a member of Wildflower for about a year and a half. I don't like labels, but if I had to put one on myself, I'd say I was a Unitarian Universalist Liberal Christian. My working definition of Christian means that I try to follow Jesus' example. You know, he was really radical for his time.

I moved to South Austin in December 2007 from the Westlake Bee Caves area. My daughter, Mary Avery, had gone to a Galveston UU group and visited Wildflower when she moved back here. She invited me, I went, and from the first time I set foot in here, I knew I was home. I never even visited any of the other churches on my list. Wildflower brings me joy and gives me a large extended family, as well as an opportunity to be with a growing & vital group of people working toward common goals.

Background

I am one of those people who was always UU but just didn't realize it. I was raised in the Methodist church. Mom was the church choir director and high school music teacher in Monahans, Texas when she and Dad met and married in the late 1940s.

Mom directed and Dad sang in the choir, along with many of their lifelong friends. From age 2, I sat alone on the front row during church, and Mom came to sit with me during the sermon.

Mom is a life-long Methodist, very progressive and open in her views. Dad was Christian, but he had a lot of Native American philosophy in him. He spoke of the Great Spirit, and had a deep respect for nature and all animals. He often said he could worship just as well on the back of a horse or on a golf course as in church, but he was always there with us. (I come from a family of strong women.)

We had bedtime prayers and said grace before meals, but I don't remember a lot of talk about religion. It was more of a personal thing. Mom read to my sister and me from this book, Little Visits With God, short practical lessons on Christian living for children. Some of the titles are How to Treat Others, The Way to Love Everyone, The Peacemakers, and Don't Bear a Grudge. The image was of a God who loves us all.

When I was 5, we moved to San Angelo where Mom soon directed the children's choir at First Methodist, the church she's gone to for over 50 years. I went through confirmation as a preteen there, though I had no clue what it meant, and I was active in the youth group as a teenager.

Our best family friends for about 50 years are Christian Scientists, which is a metaphysical religion, based on healing the way Jesus did. Our Christian Scientist friends emphasize the Spiritual rather than the Physical world and believe that Spirit rather than Matter is real. The physical world is an illusion. I love their synonyms for God – Father Mother God, Soul, Love, Good, Divine Principle, Substance, Truth, Spirit.

I drifted away from the church in college and as a young adult. After I married and had my daughter Mary, we attended a Presbyterian church and then Methodist

churches in Austin, and I sang in the choir everywhere. With a mother who taught voice and directed choirs, in my family, you sang!

I was pretty active in a Methodist church here in town for a number of years. For several years both of the ministers at my church were female, and we became friends. I realized that ministers were just normal everyday people – at least most of them <*just kidding, Eliza*>.

Several years ago, there was some sort of coup that resulted in my dear friend and pastor Sue leaving and going to another church. I was never comfortable there again and felt like the church had been hijacked. Those of us who didn't want Sue to leave didn't even know about it until it was too late.

While at this church, I had a wonderful experience with a Methodist-affiliated Walk to Emmaus. The name refers to the Bible story in Luke of that first Easter afternoon when Christ appeared to two disciples walking together along the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. It's a 3-day retreat where outside distractions are eliminated, including watches and cell phones.

You pretty much have to just go with the flow and let others call the shots, which was not easy. During the retreat, you hear speakers and do various activities. There is lots of worship and prayer and soul-searching. For the first time, I physically felt God's love for me, warts and all. From that day forward, I felt as though a burden had been lifted off of me.

What I Don't Believe

When I started working on this, I found that it was easier for me to come up with what I didn't believe first, and then to work on what I did believe. So here's what I don't believe.

I don't believe that God causes illness or disasters.

I don't believe in Hell, eternal torture or damnation. But I don't have a clue what happens to serial killers or people like Adolf Hitler when they die.

I don't believe that God loves any of HER children more than the others (black, white, gay, straight, male, female, transsexual, transgender, whatever).

I don't believe that God favors any group of people more than another, even though the Bible says the Jews are God's chosen people.

I do believe in some sort of life after death (I'll get to that in a minute) but I don't believe that the only way to "heaven" is by believing that God sacrificed his only son.

I don't believe that I have to figure everything out or have all the answers. The mystery of life is what keeps it interesting.

Now, Down to What I believe

I believe in a loving Father/Mother God, Spirit, Love, Life Force – It's all the same to me.

I believe there was a man named Jesus or Yeshua that was a preacher. I've never worried about whether he resulted from "immaculate conception" or was the "Son of God", since I believe we're all God's sons and daughters.

I believe that the Bible is a fascinating narrative that has been interpreted and translated and revised countless times for many different reasons. I always think of the game Gossip where you pass a sentence around a group and see what it ends up as.

I love the historical study of the Bible, and I don't take it literally. I have to work very hard to respect and tolerate those who do.

I believe that there is life or spiritual existence or "heaven" or reunion or something after death. I hope mine's in a cool climate where it rains occasionally.

I believe that we may have messages from God and from those who have passed on before us. My precious father died in February. A few months later, I was in Randall's just down the road when I had a really intense craving for sauerkraut. I don't think I've ever bought sauerkraut. I didn't really like it, and I certainly never craved it. Like any normal and hormonal middle-aged woman, I craved chocolate and Jalapeno Cheese Nips.

Anyway, I bought a can of sauerkraut and ate the whole thing for supper. The next day it hit me. Dad loved sauerkraut. I called Mom and confirmed that with her. I felt like Dad was saying he was okay, but I asked Mom, "Why in the world would he pick sauerkraut?" She said, "Because it's out of the ordinary, and you'd never think of it on your own. It got your attention." Whether it was a message or not, it comforted me. So the next time you have sauerkraut, maybe it's just Bill Parker saying Hi.

I believe that God designed the universe, the Earth, the planets, evolution, humans, and the rest but then sort of stood back. I believe we have free will.

I believe that animals are with us after death. I believe that our departed animal companions will meet us at the Rainbow Bridge. If they're not there, I'm not going!

I believe that all faiths and belief systems have good, loving, honest people as well as mean, hateful, hypocritical people. Of course, Unitarian Universalism doesn't have many of the latter.

I believe that Wildflower Church is a sanctuary, and I'm not referring to a building.

I believe that our varied and diverse spiritual journeys are our greatest gifts to Wildflower Church as a whole and to each other.

I believe that we have much to learn from each other and that there is room for all belief systems.

I believe that I'm deeply grateful to have found Wildflower Church.

Amen and blessed be.