

Theme for April - God:
The Practice of Connection

“We are free as Unitarian Universalists to define our faith more broadly, to widen our circle of inquiry, as a religious act, not an irreligious one.” The Rev. Dr. Forester Church

The subject of God can be for, Unitarian/Universalists, fraught, compelling, fascinating, infuriating, or a complete non-issue. Some of us reject the idea of God as a personality, and some of us question that there could be a God at all. And some of us hold the idea of a personal God. This might sound like a recipe for congregational chaos, but the question of the nature of the divine is, in fact, central to roots of both the Unitarian and Universalist sides of our faith.

But our faith doesn't answer it. It's not even a given that UUs will even ask the question of themselves or their clergy. So how can a church leave the question that would seem to be so central unanswered and sometimes unasked? The answer lies in two things. We are a church that encourages individuals to do their own religious thinking in order to grow spiritually and ethically. And because ours is a faith in which we bind ourselves to one another with a covenant to frame our responsibilities rather than a creed which defines our beliefs. This covenantal form is a central part of how we form our community.

And it is also through community, through connection with others that people can find access to the eternal - to that which is bigger than them, to the transcendent. Each person can define the eternal in their own way. For some it is a god of their choosing and description; for others it's nature or science; for some it is other people or even an object.

Realizing that we are interconnected with others, that we are not here alone or in a void, gives us hope and strength. It engenders the faith and trust that fuels optimism. Where would we be without this connection to others?

This actually plays out in the verb form, connecting. It's an active 'sport'. It takes putting ourselves in places where we can connect with others, like our church, our family, our workplace. It does not mean that we have to agree with others. Many people in church say that what attracts them is the opportunity to rub shoulders and views with those whose view of the world and spiritual matters differs from theirs. This connecting is the place, the moment, in which new growth, new ideas can emerge. Connecting leads to listening, to hearing things newly, even our own, long-standing thoughts. In connecting we can hear not only ourselves and the other person, we can hear that which is bigger than us.

Questions for Discussion and Discernment on your own, or with each other:

What does the word “God” mean to you?

Why do Unitarian/Universalists answer that question differently one from another?

Is God a noun or verb?

How has your idea of God changed over the years?

What do you want God to be?

If you believe in God, where, when, how do you feel God is with you?

Who or what is God for you? Who or what isn't God for you?

Does it control, does it observe, is it an active force within us?

Is it a force for good battling evil?

Or is it a force that embraces all of life?

Does it call us to the good or is it nature itself, and all the miraculous processes, and if so, why call that God?

Is it something unknowable but possible, or impossible altogether?

From the quotation below

- What does Forrest Church mean in saying God is not God's name?

- What does he mean by "We extend religion's compass"?

"Religious experience springs from two primary sources, awe and humility. Neither awe nor humility is served by those who refuse to go beyond the letter—either of scripture or of science—to explore the spirit.

Some Unitarian Universalists employ God language; some do not. It really doesn't matter. When people tell me proudly that they don't believe in God, I ask them to tell me a little about the God they don't believe in, for I probably don't believe in him either. God is not God's name. God is our name for that which is greater than all and yet present in each. Call it what you will: spirit, ground of being, life itself; it remains what it always has—in Rudolph Otto's definition of the Holy—a *mysterium tremens et fascinans*, an awe-inspiring mind-bending mystery.

Unitarian Universalists do not reject religion; we extend its compass...we are free as Unitarian Universalists to define our faith more broadly, to widen our circle of inquiry, as a religious act, not an irreligious one."

Rev. Dr. Forrest Church

Prepared by Worship Associates Penn Young and Alan Cantor.
Please visit the UUAC website for additional material.

“A Theology Adequate for the Night”

Not God as unmoved mover:
One who set the earth in motion
and withdrew. Not the One to thank
when those cherished do not die –
for providence includes equally
power to harm. Not a God of exactings,
as if love could be earned or subtracted.

But — this may work in the night:
something that breathes with us, as others
sleep; something that breathes also
those sleeping, so no one is alone.
Something that is the beginning of love,
and also each part of how love is completed.
Something so large, that wherever we are,
we are not separate; which teaches again
the way to start over.

Night is the test: when grief lies uncovered,
and longing shows clear; when nothing we do
can hasten earth’s turning or delay it.

This may be adequate for the night:
this holding; something that steadfastly
breathes us, which we also are learning to breathe.

Rev. Nancy Shaffer

“Poem # 65 from Xiape”

i thank You God for most this amazing
day:for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky;and for everything
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today,
and this is the sun's birthday;this is the birth
day of life and love and wings:and of the gay
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing
breathing any--lifted from the no
of all nothing--human merely being
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

E. E. Cummings