

October Theme

Gospel: The Practice of Truth-Seeking

Introduction

Gospel, the topic for this month, is often understood to be the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in the New Testament of the Bible. The word ‘gospel’ comes from ‘God’s spell’ and means ‘God’s word’. The word gospel, for many signifies ‘truth’. In fact, an alternate definition for the word ‘gospel’ (according to the New Shorter Oxford Dictionary) is “a thing regarded as undoubtedly true”. Christians and Biblical scholars of many denominations have held strong beliefs about these teachings. For many, their truth calls them to believe in the gospel as the word of God as a way to eternal salvation.

Some maintain a steadfast conviction in a literal interpretation of the Bible while others consider new and evolving ideas of the words written in these books. The word gospel became associated with music in 17th century America. Without the right to become educated and to worship freely, call and response songs may have been a way for slaves to educate and worship. For some, music became a way of sharing their truth. Singing gospel music may have been a way to offer some hope of a freedom they did not know.

Unitarian Universalism does not teach the gospel as the undisputed word of God. Some UUs come from conservative Christian faiths and believe many of the ideas they were raised with. Other members of our community with similar and different faith experiences in life, believe very differently. Regardless of where we have come from, our UU faith encourages us to appreciate and understand rather than to judge one another, and to be seekers of our own truth. This church and this religion provide a place where we are challenged, not merely to disagree or disbelieve, but rather to identify what it is that we hold as our own truth.

One person’s truth may not always be the same as another person’s truth. Contrary to the Oxford Dictionary, there can be doubt associated with the word ‘truth’. What is gospel to one person may not be gospel to another. Our congregation promotes the seven Unitarian Universalist principles, including the fourth, “a free and responsible search for truth and meaning”.

Developing one’s own sense of what is true can be an essential part of a lifelong journey. What resonates as gospel to each of us may come from a variety of sources. Our Unitarian Universalist faith can help each of us to shape our spiritual truths. Our faith supports us in being seekers of truth and meaning by encouraging us to embrace our own stories, discover new understandings and to remain open to the many sources from which we draw our traditions.

This month’s theme was composed by Jane Detwiler and Maria Kempner and the Worship Associates.

Questions for discussion and discernment on your own, or with each other:

- What do you consider to be gospel?
- Has your concept of what is 'gospel' changed throughout your life? If so, how? And why?
- What does saying the words "to seek truth in love" mean to you?
- How do you seek the truth? A truth? Your truth?
- How do you know when you find it?
- How do you accept changes to your truth?
- How do you determine whether information is true or not?
- How does it feel to be in community with people whose truth is different from your truth?

Quotes and Short Readings

Everything we hear is an opinion, not a fact. Everything we see is a perspective, not a truth.

-Marcus Aurelius

Believe nothing, no matter where you read it or who has said it, not even if I have said it, unless it agrees with your own reason and your own common sense.

-Buddha

You have your way. I have my way. As for the right way, the correct way, and the only way, it does not exist.

-Friedrich Nietzsche

Of course I want the truth, but here's the rub;

Truth doesn't sit around still as a rock,

It breathes and flows and turns inside out.

Ever seen a lion in a cage? He paces and glowers.

That must be how God feels locked in our little religions.

Look how big the sky is, the deep distances between stars.

Little speck, that's you; laughable speck, that's me.

How could we contain The Truth, all that overwhelming light?

Our truth is just a pinprick in mystery's velvet curtain.

Even so, see how we struggle to fix an eyeball to that – peepshow's tiny window.

- Janet Hutchinson, "Becoming: A Spiritual Guide for Navigating Adulthood"

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