

I've Seen the Promised Land!

Rev. John T. Crestwell, Jr.

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Theme: Journey

Ad in Capital paper shown

I'm sure some of you saw this... This was your staff's response to what happened last week in the United Methodist Church. I don't claim to know the details as I wasn't there, but it appears the UMC is sticking to its stance on GBLTQI clergy (must remain celibate and that the church will not perform gay marriages. Our Administrative Assistant, Maurita, a Methodist, was visibly shaken by this outcome last week and your ministers wanted to support her and also make a statement about this congregation and our UU faith. We wanted to let folk know that *"you may not find inclusion in your church but we are striving to be inclusive and you are welcome here. Some places won't welcome your diversity and love, but we will. We welcome you and your family here; and we will marry you too! BTW, if you join the church we'll do it for free. Because that's who we are!"*

Around this time, seven years ago in February 2012 same gender-loving couples could get married legally in our great state of Maryland. It passed! And we celebrated here. We hoped that it would happen one day soon (I didn't think it would be so soon) and many were shocked that we finally got the legislation passed. Make no mistake about it, we here at UUCA with and through our UU Legislative Ministry, founded in this congregation—together, we sat and stood and rallied and advocated until marriage of same-gender-loving people became law. History will not give our congregation or the UULM much credit; but those on the ground know that we were

a major catalyst in ushering in marriage equality in Maryland. It would not have happened so quickly without our tireless effort, along with many others. I'm proud of that. Because THAT'S WHO WE ARE!

UU History & being on the cutting edge

Go back in our UU history and you will see that in our DNA, sure there's dysfunction, but there is also a dogged determination to create justice, equity and compassion in human relations. We are a small miniscule faith (about 200,000 of us compared to 12-mil Methodists) but we've let our light of freedom shine for a very long time... From the Edict of Torda to the work of Theodore Parker during slavery, and Henry David Thoreau radical words, and Emerson's transcendent mind--and so many others-- we have been on the leading edge, religiously and socially. Small in body but large in spirit... That's who we are! We don't get much credit in the history books, as I said, but whether we are talking about religious freedom, tolerance, theological diversity, inclusion, racial justice, there are stories—good stories—of our people answering the call of love—of our people opening the circle of privilege wider and wider—our people taking on the hard thing! And that's why I'm a Unitarian Universalist! I like that edge. The edge is where life comes alive. Ask the writer Gilliam Apollinaire He wrote "*Come to the Edge*". "*Come to the edge! No we are afraid. Come to the edge. No you will push us. Come to the edge! They came to the edge. He pushed them. THEY FLEW!*" The poem is the antagonist to the protagonist. The anti-thesis to the thesis. Our voice is important in history.

I don't know why you are here or come here. I hope it's because of some of what I've already mentioned; and because you find yourself at home; you feel your kids will get an eclectic religious education. You come here because you feel understood, respected, loved, seen as important as a divine manifestation of the cosmos. I hope you are here because you believe there

is a better way for humans to be together—and that we can practice it together, here. I hope you are here because you know we are stronger together. That when we join our hopes and dreams we absolutely create ripples of love and understanding in the systems that are trying to pull us apart and make us hate each other. I hope you are here because God is love and love is God and life is a blessing. I hope you come to be in a community that shares your values that affirms your beliefs and gives you the space to grow your soul. Because that's what we do!

2000-2019...nearly 19 years (coming up on two decades) I've been a UU. As I've shared on many occasions, this faith saved my life... Gave me a path. Showed me people who were weird (in a good way) like me. Amen. Normal is overrated. I knew when I walked into my first UU church that I would be a UU minister. That I would spend the rest of my life finding others looking for our salvific message. From the time I found UUism in a book—a religious almanac—and read and believed every word in that book—something I never do—I cried tears of freedom that day. I committed myself to growing and preserving this institution from day one. I WAS IN. Can you imagine with all that is going on in the world NOT having this place? I can't. And that's why I'm committed to our faith, to you, and this church. I believe scripture when it says, "To whom much is given much is required..." Or that great hymn in the Methodist church "What Shall I render Unto God." *"What shall I render unto God for all the blessings? What shall I render, what shall I give? All I can give is my body and my soul. That's all I can render, that's all I can give."* And I'm committed to that. What about you? What are you committed to? What would you give your life to/for on this grand journey of consciousness?

Journey & Destiny

I believe we are destined for greatness as UUs and human beings. It doesn't look that way and rarely has, historically, so I'm not sure where this is coming from—I hope from some higher

place—but I can see an invisible hand of justice moving us toward a more egalitarian way that will change this planet and world in the next millennia. IT uses our hands and our feet and our blood, sweat and tears and we co-creatively move forward, together. Sometimes a little backward but mostly forward... I have great hope in humanity. And this hope drives me and depresses me; but mostly it drives me to press on. I can see the virtue and victory amidst the vice and misery.

I see that we are living in a time of #metoo and “being woke” and talking about “white supremacy culture” like never before; and discussing privilege, and toxic masculinity, and so much. This is a time, I believe, history will remember as a moment of ACCOUNTABILITY AND RECONCILIATION. This is a watershed time—a defining twinkling in our human history. And like in the past the “gentle-angry/justice-seeking people are being called to act in the margins of history.... Oh yes, it’s our time! It’s your time to speak truth to power and answer the call of love.

America has always been an experiment in diversity unlike any place on the planet. And, we still are, in spite of the current situation, the greatest nation on earth. What happens here happens in the rest of the world, eventually. However, if we can be devoted and diligent with this grand experiment in love, we will absolutely transform this planet for better in time. That is my deep and sincere belief.

And then you turn on the TV and there’s Mr. Cohen. ****DEEP BREATH****. We are witnessing the depths of corruption and indecent behavior, unprecedented. We’re witnessing on the news—also known as reality-TV—a show that is mesmerizingly sad. We’re watching and we know how this ends. Carlyle said, “No lie can live forever.” We are watching impending DOOM. They (current political administration in the White House) do show us an aspect of what we are

when we are not allowing our higher self to emerge. But when choose to live in those transcendent places, the better angels prevail. We do the right thing. We fight for fairness, and equity and equality. We know that bigotry and racism is wrong, we know that separating children from parents is wrong... We know because WE KNOW.

We will heal from this time and, as a nation, we will do the right thing to reconcile our past sins and failings, in time. Over a long period of time...

Some perspective: What you are really witnessing on the news and cable TV is most certainly backlash from the march too freedom by progressive liberalism (in its purest form of the word). The negative you see is "An equal and opposite reaction" to previous years of progress. I've said this before. Progressive Liberalism is on the move now...

To be liberal is to be open-minded, not ridged or stuck in a pattern or way that is gone. You are flexible and broad-minded with an eye on progress not regress. So what's happening in our nation is a paradigm shift. You see, when a paradigm or even a light bulb begins to die, it gets more aggressive (if you're a light bulb you get brighter). But not too long after that the bulb dies—in other words death is forthcoming before the rebirth or new way becomes the way. Stand back and look...What you're seeing is a dangerous last stand, if you will. A last gasp before the new prevailing paradigm takes over in probably less than 100 years. All systems face this sort of tension between the past, present and future. But that's not where I'm going... I'm talking about the long trajectory of history...You can see that the moral arc does swing toward justice. I quoted a Unitarian just now. It may seem that evil is winning for a time but look at history and you'll see that the power of progressivism is real, on the move, and cannot be stopped. It can be slowed, perhaps, but it cannot be stopped. Why? Because it is a cry for

freedom and humans will not stop until all are reconciled; until freedom is experienced by all souls. Dr. King would say this yearning is inexorable. It is unescapable—this desire to be free.

I think Martin Luther King saw a vision (I hope similar to mine) when he gave his last speech.

He said, *“I’ve been to the mountain top and I don’t mine.”* He said like a modern day Moses,

“I’ve looked over and I’ve seen the Promised Land....And so I’m happy tonight. I’m not worried about anything. I’m not fearing any man...Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the

lord!” His last speech... King was quoting a song written by Unitarian Julia Ward Howe “The

Battle Hymn of the Republic”. Julia Howe used a famous tune about John Brown, the

abolitionist who led a revolt against slavery at Harpers Ferry in West Virginia, and gave up his

life for the cause. Julia used a song about a man fighting for the freedom of slaves, to write the

Battle Hymn of the Republic which Dr. King used that fateful night to say to his people “you

will be free one day.” That’ he’d seen the Promised Land, which is a reference to the Hebrew

and Christian Bible’s hope for freedom and peace on earth. Powerful connection here. This is

the work we are here to do! King, Howe, and Brown...All three prophets with the same message

of freedom. Because that is the goal—to be free.

I too have seen the Promised Land for this nation and world and this congregation. And it’s

wonderful. BTW, we don’t get to see it all in our lifetime. But we do get to experience “a

foretaste of its glory divine” right here—each time we practice being a beloved community at

UUCA. That is our blessed assurance.

Breathe this in...The Promised Land is where there’s freedom of religion; it is where you have

freedom to seek and find love in its many manifestations and expressions; freedom to be

different; freedom to explore life’s depth and breadth without fear of another human being.

Progressivism is moving us to this great day. So hold on a *change is gonna come*, as Sam Cooke sang it so well.

And that's why I'm here. And I hope that's why you're here... "You're in the right place at the right time you are just where you're supposed to be" (Daniel Nahmod). Bring your light and love. Bring your friendliness and openness. Bring your joy and sorrow. And tell somebody about your joy and hope... I'm TAGGING you. TAG you're IT. Scripture says, "To whom much is given much is required." Like in the soundtrack for Hamilton, "History has its eyes on you." You are called to share this message of freedom and love as far and wide as you can—because that's what we do. So I'm commissioning you. I'm sending you forth this morning. To be holy and bold. Because it's needed in the world and in our faith. I need your help-- to join me in our faith's call to bring freedom to this planet.

An aspect of being a part of this community means we feel compelled to share. You may not know this but we do evangelize as UUs. I did not say proselytize which is about telling others about the right and only way to truth. NO. Evangelizing is SHARING your life's "good news" with people seeking what only this faith can offer. You see, I know what this faith has done for me....And I'm committed to finding all the other John's and Joni's out there who need a space like this for their family. I'm committed to finding those who need our solace; to help find those who are seeking something beyond a 'spoon-fed theology'. Help me find those wrestling with whether there's a place for them because there is! UUCA is that place! Just like that ad in the Gazette last week, let folks know we are here at 333 Dubois; in the state capital of Maryland 21401. Let them know that we are building a fearless congregation that is tackling the hard stuff head on...and we are growing deeper as a result. Let them know that your faith embraces multiculturalism and pluralism and diversity and all that beautiful messiness-- with a hope that

one day we will learn to love -- not despite differences-- but because of differences. Let them know you're at a place where we are trying to do the right thing in people's lives. Share our good news and our hope for freedom.

I'm done but let me close by quoting a great Universalist Evangelist, John Murray, who single handedly recruited thousands to the Free Church in his lifetime. I close with his words; words that commission and compel. Powerful words of hope that remind us of the inexorable march of progressivism in the world; and in our journey toward human wholeness. I send you forth with these words:

"Go out into the highways and by-ways of America, your new country. . . . You may possess only a small light, but uncover it, let it shine, use it in order to bring more light and understanding to the hearts and minds of men and women. Give them, not hell, but hope and courage. Do not push them deeper into their theological despair, but preach the kindness and everlasting love of God."

Amen.