

The Aquarian Gospel, Eschatology and the New Age

Rev. John T. Crestwell, Jr.

November 10, 2019

For the Unitarian Universalist Church of Annapolis

First Reading: The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus, written by Levi H. Dowling, 1907

Some of you may know that I enjoy reading mystical literature; Gnostic texts, writings by Kahlil Gibran, Howard Thurman, and a host of other authors. My reading this morning comes from a book I got at a book swap at the first UU congregation I served, Davies Memorial. I have gotten many a good book from book swaps! This reading by Levi Dowling, written in 1907, comes from his book, *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus*. Like in the Gnostic writings, his book covers Jesus' birth, youth and supposed training in the secret esoteric teachings by sages in Egypt, India, Persia, Assyria and Greece. This was a "channeled" work meaning that Dowling intuited most of it. The book also covers some of Jesus' ministry as reflected in the New Testament. And, in my opinion, it is a work of fiction but all fiction contains some fact so there is wisdom to be had. Hear these words in the section of his book where Jesus is speaking to a poor person in India.

In silent meditation, Jesus sat beside a flowing spring. It was a holy day, and many people of the servant caste were near the place. And Jesus saw the hard, drawn lines of toil on every brow, in every hand. There was no look of joy in any face. Not one of all the group could think of anything but toil. And Jesus spoke to one and said, "Why are you all so sad?" The man replied: "We scarcely know the meaning of that word. We toil to live, and hope for nothing else but toil, and bless the day when we can cease our toil and lay us down to rest in Buddha's city of the dead." And Jesus' heart was stirred with pity and with love for these poor toilers, and he said: "Toil should not make a person sad; people should be happiest when they toil. When hope and love are back of toil, then all of life is filled with joy and peace, and this is heaven. Do you not know that such a heaven is for you?"

The man replied: "Of heaven we have heard; but then it is so far away, and we must live so many lives before we reach that place!" And Jesus said, "My brother, man, your thoughts are wrong; your heaven is not far away; and it is not a place of metes and bounds, it's not a county to be reached; it is a state of mind. God never made a heaven for humans; he never made a hell; we are creators and we make our own heaven or hell. Now cease to seek for heaven in the sky; just open-up the windows of your hearts, and, like a flood of light, a heaven will come and bring a boundless joy; then toil will be no cruel task."

Second Reading: From Soul Matters Sharing Circle packet on our monthly theme of attention:

Mary Oliver said that "Attention is the beginning of devotion." It's a beautiful way of saying you cannot love something that you do not really see. Love simply isn't possible without deep noticing. And noticing deeply seems to inevitably lead to love.... Love asks you to look without expectation of who you want someone to be. It requires us instead to focus simply on who they are RIGHT NOW. It's a type of looking that keeps on looking until you discover something entirely new, entirely other, entirely and uniquely them. And once you notice something that is uniquely new, you're in trouble because you will most definitely be devoted. You will no longer think about what you're getting. You will only want to give.

Sermon

"All this time I was finding myself and I didn't know I was lost" says Aloe Blacc. All this time the world awaits sages and Saviors, but we forget to look at ourselves as harbingers of hope and peace.

We tend to look outside of ourselves when we think about world peace and ending conflicts. It's something someone else should do on our behalf. We try to do our part though. We vote our

conscience and hope to get leaders elected who will reflect our values. What is the goal? The end goal? What are we striving for? Inner peace? World peace? Beloved Community? As Unitarian Universalists, our goal is reflected in our principles. In all of them. Justice, equity, and the goal of “world community with peace, liberty and justice for all.” We actively and passively wait for the coming of this day. What if the day is today? What if there is no end or beginning? But we strive for this goal, nonetheless. It’s an expectation that love will prevail—and that’s good. Many of the world’s religions have a name for this goal. They call it heaven or paradise. In fact, I bet that most human beings share this aspiration—this longing. It comes from some place in our DNA that I know not of. But whether we hope for heaven in the after-life or in the physical world we share this universal yearning for safety and freedom.

It is this yearning that gives birth to “eschatology”. Eschatology is a theological word. It is one you will hear and discuss in seminary. What does it mean? “Eschatos” means LAST and “LOGY” means WORD---the last word of God. God gets the final say in human history. In the Christian context, eschatology is concerned with the final destiny of the soul and human beings. This idea eventually morphed in to Christian dogma as “the second coming of Jesus Christ”—that one-day Jesus would return in the flesh or in some form to rapture the good from the evil and usher in 1,000 years of peace. Rev. 21 tells the story there about the new heavens and new earth. In the bible this is a part of what scholars call “apocalyptic literature”. Most of these books that discuss the end and victory of good over evil were left out of the final canon of scripture. They were too controversial. In fact, the book of Revelation--a cryptic and scary book of death and destruction—It’s pretty violent. Way back then, it was heavily debated and did not get in the Bible until the 200s in the common era. And when you read it, you can see why. Today, you still see billboards saying, “the end is coming”. “Look at the signs of the times”. So much hurt has been done by the literalists’ interpretation of this book and scripture in general. It has pitted one against the other. AND, when you add the Puritan American influence into the mix with their doom and gloom preaching about sin and salvation, well

you get what we have today in America—a culture of blaming and finger-pointing. “We’re right and you’re wrong. We are saved, and you are doomed.” We’ve inherited this judgment mentality from a literalist projection of Christianity and religion in general, through the ages. When you couple this with the human tendency to want resolution to inner and outer conflict, it’s an easy solution—you bad, we’re good. I studied the book of Revelation in seminary and it was clear to me that the writers were describing the early Roman Empire not present-day America. The question is: Why do things that happened so long-ago match what’s happening today? Because humans are cyclical creatures. “History repeats itself.” So, in some ways the signs of yesterday are the signs of today. Therefore, we should always pay attention to the cycles and patterns in history and in life in general. But we don’t need a book to tell us that. We know this intuitively.

Whether Humanist, Christian or Buddhist all human beings wrestle with the end of their lives--and that uncertainty has led us to some rather creative guessing on how our demise will come, individually and collectively. Those in power are not immune. They too project their yearnings and because of their influence, they manipulate us into believing toxic ideologies that pit us against each other. Institutional Christianity and its billions of converts have promulgated to western society, directly and indirectly, the idea that “The end is coming for evil! You better straighten up and fly right!” “If you want to live eternally, you better be good.” “God punishes the wicked.” “Hell-fire awaits the sinners.”

The idea of the second coming of Jesus (and the resolution of human suffering) was born as a result of the early church councils where the Fathers of the Church were trying to create a central organized religion. There they debated the divinity and reality of the man, Jesus... Did he exist? Is the story a compilation of ancient myths synthesized into one dying-resurrected god-man? Was Jesus divine? Was he divine and human? Was he made through human sexual intercourse or begotten of God? All were early conversations in the church. Who was there in the room? Well, in the room in the 300s of the common era, were those who believed in Jesus literally and those symbolically. Athanasius and the

Church fathers were literalists, while the Arians were more mystical. In the end the Arians were kicked out, disinvited from the debates and the story took a fundamentalist turn. The point here is that that decision had a great impact on the story that is playing out today in Western civilization and why we exist now in a BLAMING culture. And by the way, The Arian teachings are related to us—as Unitarian Universalists. We are post-modern Arians in a world surrounded by fundamentalist religion. Arianism, Gnosticism and New Age teachings are all related to the other side of the story. The other side of the story is very different. So, there is a dichotomy—the primary story and the secondary story.

New Age teachings are a part of the secondary story. When I hear the term “new age” I think that is not an accurate description. New Age teachings are really old age philosophies. Much of what New Agers believe today and back in the 70’s when they got popular, were really synthesized esoteric teachings from Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Christianity, to name a few. These things have been underground and passed along for millennia. That’s partly why the Aquarian Gospel got my attention. The author’s perspective was not the story handed down from the literalists, but a more nuanced story of how Jesus became so wise. In the Aquarian Gospel, Dowling believed that the time would come when the other story (mysticism) would be told as primary instead of secondary... I agree.

For those of you unfamiliar with new age teachings. New Age is all the other stuff in western religious society that is not a part of traditional Christian dogma. Astrology, metaphysics, crystals, reiki, acupuncture, psychic readings, figurative or symbolic interpretations of sacred writings; channeling, yoga, numerology, earth-centered worship; transcendental meditation, and the list goes on and on and its massive and had a huge impact in the last century—especially since much of it has become secularized and popularized in books. Today, some fundamentalist churches will offer yoga and many of their members go to meditation and get acupuncture. The primary story is giving way to the secondary story. Some balancing is occurring, and it is affecting the stature and stability of the Christian church in America. In my next

sermon I am going to talk more about this shift and that a New Transcendentalism has emerged—and that it’s our time.

In a nutshell, Christian institutional dogma (not Jesus the man) says: You have no power, are a sinner, and are helpless without (big G) God and his big (J) son Jesus the Christ your Savior. This has allowed for the civilizing of western society, for better and worse. Some good has come from this story but we’ve also killed millions based on this paradigm. The Promised Land still eludes us.

New Age, as an antithesis to the primary story says this: You are very powerful, made with love, master of your fate, a (small g) god manifest in human form. You are divine. Everything is God. And you are an anointed one. All are anointed. New Age teaches that the Bible and Hebrew scriptures are books of coded messages. The words should not be taken literally but figuratively. And the goal is to guide the reader to greater understanding of themselves. Esoteric mysticism shows us that sacred literature is symmetrical, precise and based in numerology and astrology. In fact, they would say that much of the Bible is an astrological account about the beginning of the Age of Pisces; that the procession of the equinox (the way the earth rotates around the sun) moves human behavior from age to age. Look up procession of the equinox. It’s interesting. The Age of Pisces (the fish) is described as the time when humans build empires. They say it is ending. We are in the age of Pisces. When Jesus says, “I will be with you even until the end of the age” this is coded language about the astrological movement of the planet and stars. Indeed, you do see the fish associated with Christianity everywhere—even today. And in the Bible, there are stories about Jesus and fish. Mystics say that that’s on purpose. It is coded language. Prior to the fish age of Pisces, they say humanity was in the age of Aries or the Ram. And you see this in stories from ancient Egypt with King Tut who is symbolized with a ram.

In astronomy and astrology, the Procession of the Equinox HAS a major shift every 2,150 years From Aries to Pisces, to Aquarius. We live in the dawning of the Age of Aquarius. That’s what the song was all about in the 60s. “This is dawning of the Age of Aquarius, the Age of Aquarius!” The hippies were

into this stuff! The Age of Aquarius is supposed to be a time of truth-telling, global networking and supposed higher consciousness or awareness that we are interconnected and interrelated beings.

When I read that, it caught my attention because it resonates with our UU principles. The New Agers say that this is the time when humans will live in paradise on earth. I don't know. I'll be dead. But it is interesting to think about. And it is a positive and affirming outcome for humanity, although it does feel like "predestination"—that our fate is set. I'm not as comfortable with that. But still, it makes for interesting conversation.

But this I do know: I've eaten my full share of the primary, literalists story—we all have in western civilization, and that has left me with a stomach-ache and blaming others. It does feel like the primary story is reaching its inevitable conclusion. But isn't an end just a beginning?

What's the point for us this morning? Well, here's my truth:

In the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas, dated in the 90s of the common era, there's a passage that gets me to my point today... It says this: "The disciples asked him, 'how will our end come?' And the great teacher said, 'Have you found the beginning, then, that you are looking for the end? You see, the end will be where the beginning is.'"

The circle of life is real to me. There's power in circles, as Black Elk said. His people moved in a circle to allow the land to replenish itself. The earth spins on its axis in a solar system that circles around the sun. The sun is circular; and some say the universe is a gigantic sphere. Circles and cycles are real—that is not made up. And we know this from our own lives. There are ends and beginnings; beginnings and ends in constant motion. It's all energy. Science says that energy never dies it transmutes. I am energy. You are energy. We are the circle of life. The Hindu Upanishad scripture says, "Thou art that." I am a micro of the macro planet. I am a micro of the macro solar system. I am a micro of the macro galaxy. I am a micro of the macro universe. I am a micro of the macro super-universes. So, I must pay attention to this beautiful symmetry that plays out in the cycles of time and in my life. I see this circle of life all around me in the seasons, in how I age; when I watch my children

grow. It finally makes sense to me: "What goes around comes around." We are cycles and patterns of matter. We are constant cyclical change. And I am a part of a larger circle that connects to something so massive I am in awe of it. I have no words... And amidst the despair and muddiness of life I can find joy because I know that it's going to be okay! How do you know that? Because I know the pattern. If you are knitting or sewing, or playing a video game, you know this—once you know the pattern you can relax because you know, even though it may take a while, the pattern will work itself out. We are creation, preservation, and regeneration in an endless cycle of life.

"From the day we arrive on the planet
And blinking, step into the sun
There's more to be seen than can ever be seen
More to do than can ever be done

Some say eat or be eaten
Some say live and let live
But all are agreed as they join the stampede
You should never take more than you give

In the circle of life, it's the wheel of fortune
It's the leap of faith, it's the band of hope
Till we find our place on the path unwinding
In the circle, the circle of life."

"Thou art that." We can trust this; we can lean into this inner-knowing. Say YES to life and enjoy the ride with all its joy and sorrow. It's going to be okay, because you are the end and the beginning. You are the circle. Watch for the signs! Balance the primary story with the secondary story. Pay attention. As Mary Oliver said, "It's the beginning of devotion." And remember that the end is preexistent in the beginning.

Now listen one last time, to the wise words of Levi Dowling, as I close:

The man toiling in the soil replied: "Of heaven we have heard; but then it is so far away, and we must live so many lives before we reach that place!" (that's the Dogma speaking—the primary story of humans not being worthy of life). And Jesus said, "My brother, man, your thoughts are wrong; your heaven is not far away; and it is not a place of metes and bounds (you can't measure and calculate to find it—it's not a piece of land over there). Jesus says,

“It’s not a county to be reached; it is a state of mind (this is the secondary story). He says: “God never made a heaven for humans; he never made a hell; we are creators and we make our own heaven or hell. Now cease to seek for heaven in the sky; just open-up the windows of your hearts, and, like a flood of light, a heaven will come and bring a boundless joy; then toil (living) will be no cruel task.”

Amen.