

SERMON: SUBTLE ACTS OF EXCLUSION

October 4, 2020 Rev. John Crestwell

I am a Unitarian Universalist and therefore I start from the premise that we are one body—one organism—that human beings are interconnected in a great big web of life where mutuality and reciprocity must prevail in order for us to live in relative peace. What happened this week in our nation with our current leader and many close to him is another example of how we are connected for, better and worse. My prayers are with all those in this administration—that they will learn this lesson. You see, peace cannot prevail if we do not have any ground for which to agree. That is why agreed upon truths are important. We cannot play with national issues—creating false realities—and expect it to not eventually take a toll on all of us as an organism. We must find grounds for which we can agree—and build society from there. This is also true with any community, institution or church. We cannot create a successful product if we are stuck in modalities that are inauthentic, dishonest and deceitful. Eventually, this waters down integrity and the system(s) fractures. That is why separate, and unequal will never work. That is why we must embrace instead of erase. The majority must be vested in an idea that benefits them as well as the whole that is the sustainable way. That is how we can survive and thrive as a people. This is hard work. But it begins when we have shared language. Shared understanding. That's why Rev. AZ and I emphasized covenant in September. This month we move into the theme of AWARENESS—what does it mean to be a people of awareness? Sit with that.

To be aware means we notice—the big stuff and the subtle stuff. As we work for justice, we notice the large acts of injustice and the subtle acts of exclusion they alienate people and deny them their worth and dignity. For me, this means we are always learning, shifting and adapting our perspective.

We are always updating our mental software. A computer is a good analogy here. A computer, if it is to stay present and current needs updates. Have you ever used a 20-year-old computer? A good computer needs daily, weekly, monthly updates to continue to be usable—to stay relevant. The great human mind designed the computer and so the computer is a reflection of us. Computer analogies can be human analogies. Think of how good you want your PC to be and think about how good you want your humanity to be.... So, we need a common technology or for humans a common language to hold each other accountable.

UUCA, the one thing I've learned from you is that YOU DO THE HARD STUFF. Being a UU is not always joyful. It's hard and painful sometimes because we are doing our best to live our values in a world that is more and more becoming valueless. Living our values starts with knowing our impact on others; being sensitive to our and others' needs. We seek to do less harm with our thoughts, words and deed. We seek justice for all human beings. Unitarian Universalism and UUCA have led the way, historically, in this arena. Marriage equality, racial justice, environmental justice. That's what we do. But the next thing is for us to become even more radically inclusive and we cannot do this if we keep getting in our own way—offending POC—unknowingly. We have to

check our bias and prejudice and think about what we think about. EVERY interaction we have with another human being or animal is holy. Therefore, we must become more aware of our impact. And we today it is vitally important that we do this hard work for ourselves, our nation and each other.

UUCA, we did that with marriage equality. Our legislative ministry, ministers and people fought for it and were the major reason it passed in Maryland. After that, it passed across the nation. We show the way. That's what we do...

You called your first black minister near the same time this nation called its first black president. That's what we do.

We invited Robin DiAngelo here, twice, to talk about "What does it mean to be white"—and she rocked our world! But right after that she was featured at our UUA General Assembly and then is a national best-selling author as our nation erupts again with racial tension. Last GA, the UUA passed a resolution for dismantling white supremacy. Did we/UUCA play a part? Heck yeah! We were/we are catalysts for change. We lead the way forward. Whatever we decide our work to be it seems to me that it becomes the nations work. That's big. What's next? Learning a common language to talk about race and culture without offending someone is up on deck. That's what Subtle Acts of Exclusion are all about.

First you recognize where you have been belittled or slighted or left out or forgotten or taken for granted—then you apply this to your new knowledge about systemic racism

and realize that whole societies have felt this even more! And you think, “My God, how could I have missed this?” “My God, I said some of these SAEs to marginalized identities. And it humbles you. It should. Getting defensive is the wrong response. Humility is required. That’s how we grow. We get curious and listen more and ask questions and we assume best intentions when we are “paused” or when someone says “ouch” to us from something offensive we said, unconsciously. That’s how we heal ourselves and each other. We apologize, sincerely, and then we begin again in love.

If we want a greater connection with others we have to “increase our cultural fluency and empathy for people that are different from us.” That’s a quote from Tiffany Jana. Her co-author Michael Baran said this: “When other identities differ greatly from our own, we can sometimes dismiss the pain and experiences of others far too quickly.” We must be more sensitive and look beyond just our personal pain to the collective pain—which sounds like torture; but in my experience that is where we truly come alive and see life anew! After the resistance comes the real awakening of seeing yourself in every living thing. Glory be! Therefore, Black Lives Matter leads me to realize that if people have to state this obvious fact (in the 60’s it was ‘I am a man’) then there must be a historical problem that needs to be addressed. We address it by engaging with a common language of respect and care. We pause our tendency to be over-critical (over-personalizing everything we hear) until our new understanding becomes who we are. Then we can share what we’ve learned with the next person and over time, we will

change the world. Over time, we will witness thousands more say that they too are Unitarian Universalists. I WANT TO BE A PART OF THAT FAITH! THEY ARE MY PEOPLE! But this cannot happen if we keep offending POC who walk through our doors. This work, for me is what it means to be a UU.

Finally, the little things are the big things. The little slights become big slights and tear out our ability to be in right-relationship; they fracture our ability to forgive and love. We have to become more aware; more sensitive to others' understandings by finding a common language to build our relationship. That is what the framework you will learn after service provides you with. It is the next step for our church and our nation, and my prayer is that we embrace this next step because—if we do—I have no doubt our nation will follow suit.

Be excited that you are shaping the global consciousness. We are changing the world. We are creating beloved community. Friends, the gospel producer Hezekiah Walker has it correct when he wrote his song "I Need You to Survive". Please allow me to give some UU context to his words as I close: He said this... "I need you and you need me. We need each other, and we are all a part of one great organism—God's body. Stand or sit with me and agree with me that we are a part of one great body (scientist and spiritualist). And it is our WILL and Spirits WILL that every person's needs be supplied. Because you are important to the whole—you are important to me—and I need you to survive." Let this be our prayer. Amen.