

## Pastor Bud's Buzz 2007

12/01/07

I've been exploring the sources of wisdom listed in our Principles and Purposes as monthly themes in my pulpit presentations. As we move into the Holiday Season, I will be focusing on the fifth source, "Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit." Reasonable folks might consider everything about the holidays, as we celebrate them, idolatry of the mind and spirit.

The image I get in my mind when I think of the act of idolatry is of some religious ritual usually including the burning of incense, recitation of prayers and people bowing toward an imposing statue depicting a mythical creature to which they attribute superior powers.

Members of one religion may condemn members of another religion as practicing idolatry because they worship a different version of god than their own. Early Christians took the meaning of idolatry and applied it to any desire placed before the desire for God.

Americans have been accused of worshiping Hollywood and sports personalities, wealth and their own pleasure and fame. Perhaps Humanists have the right idea in heeding the guidance of reason and the results of science in order to avoid idolatries of the mind and spirit. While humanists are not likely to propose an object for our worship, they have been willing to speak about those things that they value. Some prominent religious humanists drew up a humanist manifesto. Somewhat naively Religious Humanist declared "The time is past for mere revision of traditional attitudes. Science and economic change have disrupted the old beliefs. Religions the world over are under the necessity of coming to terms with new conditions created by a vastly increased knowledge and experience. In every field of human activity, the vital movement is now in the direction of a candid and explicit humanism." The humanist claim that religious beliefs are, "powerless to solve the problem of human living in the Twentieth Century." On the other hand they acknowledge, "...through all changes religion itself remains constant in its quest for abiding values, an inseparable feature of human life."

Religious Humanist affirm the following: The universe is not created and the emergence of man is the result of a continuous process that rejects the dualism of mind and body and that is accompanied by a gradual development of religious culture and civilization. Scientific spirit and method must be used by religion to formulate its hopes and plans. Many isms are obsolete. Nothing human is alien to the religious and the distinction between the sacred and secular can no longer be maintained. Religious Humanists seek the development and fulfillment of the human personality in the here and now. Humanist express their religious emotions in cooperative efforts to promote social well-being and see no uniquely religious emotions or attitudes. We will learn to face the crises of life in terms of our knowledge of its naturalness and probability. Reasonable

and manly attitudes will be fostered by education and supported by custom. We assume that humanism will take the path of social and mental hygiene and discourage sentimental and unreal hopes and wishful thinking. Religion must work increasingly for joy in living, religious humanists aim to foster the creative in man and to encourage achievements that add to the satisfactions of life. All associations and institutions exist for the fulfillment of human life. A radical change in methods, controls, and motives must be instituted for the equitable distribution of goods. Affirm life and its possibilities while establishing the conditions.

And an infant was born in a stable.

Stay Tuned

11/01/07 Pastor Bud's Buzz

Some among us may consider the overall message of Jewish and Christian teachings to be more of a battle cry than a call to radical love. While the message of love woven through Jewish and Christian teachings is echoed in all the major world religions, one can also interpret in all of those religions support for acts of violence.

Our living tradition as congregations of free thinking individuals is to covenant to support each other in the search for truth and meaning. As individuals some of us experience God's love at work in our lives and we respond by loving our neighbor as ourselves. All of us can be inspired by the acts of selfless love performed by Christians and Jews, people of all religious or non religious persuasion. All of us can be inspired by religious and non religious organizations that strive to love their neighbor and even their enemies as they love themselves.

We Unitarian Universalists say in our Principles and Purposes that our living tradition draws from many sources including Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves. Not all of us can embrace this source without some internal interpretation. As we move into the autumn season we are invited to express our gratitude. Gratitude for what? For being loved? Loved by God? Loved by the Universe? Loved by the abundance of our planet that nourishes us through the labor of others with a plentiful harvest? Loved in the warm gatherings of family and friends who share a common meal? The best way to show that we are grateful for the love of God, the Universe, family and friends, is to love our neighbor and yes even our enemy, for to love our neighbor is to love ourselves.

If there is one prayer that we can all say, it is a prayer of thanksgiving. While we may have different ideas about the source of love for which we are thankful, our grateful response in loving acts toward others celebrates our oneness.

During this thanksgiving season I invite you to open yourself to the love around you, feel loved, and feel grateful. May you be so blessed that you will be able to recite with conviction these words that we sing to the tune Finlandia by Jean Sibelius.

We would be one as now we join in singing our hymn of love, to pledge ourselves anew to that high cause of greater understanding of who we are, and what in us is true. We would be one in living for each other to show to all a new community.

We would be one in building for tomorrow a nobler world than we have known today. We would be one in searching for that meaning which bends our hearts and points us on our way. As one, we pledge ourselves to greater service, with love and justice, strive to make us free.

Stay Tuned

10/01/07 Pastor Bud's Buzz

As I continue with my pulpit themes on the Sources of Wisdom, October is the third source, "Wisdom from the Worlds Religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life." I think it was Karl Marx that declared Religion was the opiate of the people. Now, here's an interesting coincidence. As I sit down on September 19 to write "Pastor Bud's Buzz" for the October Jotter about religion as a potential source of wisdom and possibly an opiate, the discussion topic for Sunday September 23 will be recreational drugs and I've taken a Darvocet, prescribed after a minor dermatology procedure. To clarify, the buzz I refer to in the tile of my piece is the buzz of excitement about what is happening, not a drug induced buzz.

Can religion be both an opiate and a source of wisdom?

Opiates and other potentially addictive agents can: • Relieve anxiety • Change mood • Create feelings of self-confidence • Cause hallucinations • Alter activity levels • Bring unpleasant or painful symptoms when the addictive agent is withdrawn • Cause a preoccupation with running out of the addictive agent.

Wisdom is not measured by standardized intelligence tests. While some say wisdom comes from experience, can't be taught, and is synonymous with prudence, others see wisdom as a quality that even a child may possess independent of their experience or knowledge. Wisdom is generally recognized as foreseeing consequences and acting to maximize the long-term common good.

Just when I think I have it, wisdom slips away. I end my Jotter piece with "Stay Tuned" because I am convinced that what we should seek in religion is not freedom from pain but the easing of our pain and the strength to continue our pursuit of truth and meaning, the vibrant tension inherent in living the question.

Stay Tuned

09/01/07 Pastor Bud's Buzz

I haven't run into anyone who likes failure. We dislike it so much that we sometimes avoid taking action or making an effort because we somehow convince ourselves if we have not tried we cannot fail.

In our Principles and Purposes we say that the living tradition, which we share, draws from many sources: This month my pulpit theme focuses on the second of those Sources: Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love; While these words are a source of wisdom they are also a call to action. And action puts us square on the path to potential failure. Not just quiet unnoticed failure but often a somewhat noisy public failure. The powerful can be very effective at preserving their power. One of the best ways to preserve power is to avoid confrontations with the opposition. By making confrontations painful; economically, politically, socially and even physically as painful as they can, the powerful give those of us called to social activism, sobering second thoughts. At a recent ACLU meeting we viewed a video that the ACLU plans to make a part of one of their Freedom File events October 12 here in our building. That video focused on steps that have been taken to punish dissent in this country, here where freedom of speech is constitutionally protected. The video portrayed the impact of a growing militaristic response to dissent. My reaction to the video was "Do we really want to show this video?" In the video participants in what appeared to be a peaceful demonstration and even some inadvertent bystanders were assaulted by the local police dressed in riot gear and shooting blunt wooden bullets about the size of a large flashlight battery. Among the many injured, one woman was shot in the calf and the damage required surgery to remove flesh that had died from the impact. The surgery left her with a disfigured leg and a deep conviction that she could not and would not risk such a confrontation in the future. Everyday we hear about instances in other parts of the world where dissident groups are brutally attacked often physically maimed or subjected to other forms of violence in a methodical effort to suppress dissent, assert power and destroy freedom.

Many of us as individuals belong to groups that engage in social activism. It takes courage for us to stand on street corners to run the risk of being verbally and perhaps even physically attacked. It takes courage to write letters; send emails and make phone calls as we confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion and the transforming power of love. When we take action we run the risk of failing to make a difference, failing to change the direction set by the powerful. Take heart for we are not only confronting powers we are asserting the essential right to dissent itself, a right and a duty that we must preserve if human kind is ever to achieve its full greatness.

As we move into the fall of the year and renew our commitment to living out our principles and purposes join in our congregation's search for truth and meaning join in our congregation's actions for justice, compassion and the transforming power of love.

Stay tuned

08/01/07

## Pastor Bud's Buzz

They say confession is good for the soul. Well, my plans to conquer the Smoky Mountains in "one fell swoop" have come to a compromising end. I am grateful that, at least for now, the mountains did not conquer me in "one fell swoop" (Emphasis on fell.). I have discovered that as advertised the majestic vistas from those verdant peaks do provide room to grow one's inner spirit. I guess that gives me the best of all worlds. While I did not earn the anticipated bragging rights which might have made me more insufferable, I hope I will never get over the joy of watching butterflies play tumbling tag in the cool breezes at over 4,000 hard earned feet of elevation, around the base of the long abandoned Shuckstack fire tower that overlooks Fontana Dam. The variety of plant life is remarkable, small plants I cannot name, endless arrays of ferns along the shaded mountain ridges. Large stands of Rhododendrons and Mountain Laurel greeting us with blossom strewn tunnels to celebrate our passage.

The postings about aggressive bears at the trail head prompted us to look for markings of bear paws in all the muddy stretches. Besides watching the path was obligatory to keep from stumbling on the stones and roots. My hiking partner, Melodie was taking her turn leading the way on the descent and I thought twice about calling her attention to the paw print I spotted, but I called to her and asked her to take a look. After deciding there was no mistake, it was a bear, we continued on and in moments my fatigue combined with her nervousness about the potential danger opened a gap between us. I could have asked her to slow down but instead I asked, "Do you really want to be that far away from me right now?" As she slowed down, much to both of our relief the trail head where we had started 12 miles earlier, soon appeared before us. Moments after we had gotten to the road another couple emerged from the path we had explored the day before and said they had just seen two bears, one large and the other small. I'm guessing that small bear had left the paw print we had seen on our path.

So as I sit here healing in Ormond Beach with a plan to return for another couple of day hikes before the end of July, and as I think about August and my Jotter message, what did I learn from the mountains. I learned that going up is optional but coming down is obligatory. That at least for me, walking in partnership is easier and more enjoyable than walking alone. I learned that I can often do what looks impossible, if I take it a step at a time and from each small advance look for the next foothold or opportunity. I've learned that it isn't useful to rush when I am uncertain and that it is essential to rest when I am tired. I am grateful that when I lost my balance while climbing over a small tree that had fallen across the narrow rocky path, and as I fell backward helpless under the weight of my pack, I was caught by that same tree like a nurturing parent who sent me on my way to continue my journey and my learning. I realize there were a thousand other times when a misstep could have plunged me over the side with nothing but rocks and tree trunks to eventually stop my fall. I'm grateful for whatever complex combination of thoughts and feelings prompted me to announce to my partner at the end of the second day that I needed to get off the trail. One more night of restless sleep and one more day of rain soaked passage felt like too big a risk to take for myself and for her. For now we are not thru hikers and our section hiking may be a thing of the past. We

could become hard core day hikers. We know the joy of carrying just water and some health bars and plan future hikes. And finally, I have once again experienced the ultimate key to happiness. Getting what you want and wanting what you get.

Stay Tuned

07/01/07

Pastor Bud's Buzz

Well as I am writing this I am soaring thousands of feet above Arizona's Grand Canyon. My Southwest Airlines plane is heading toward a stop in Oakland, California then onto Portland, Oregon and the UUA General Assembly. There is nothing like flying in a jet to impress on me the interdependence of my existence. All those airplane parts tracked from the point of their manufacture, to assure reliability and failing that, liability. Not that it is particularly consoling to know that if one of these crucial parts fails and we crash someone might get sued for a faulty manufacturing process. Come to think of it, human technology while impressively interdependent is very fragile. It would not take much of a planetary crisis to bring most of our fancy systems crashing to a halt. Consider the impact of the last hurricane and here we are entering another hurricane season that is projected to be a busy one. If all that technology was swept away we most likely would be swept away with it. Maybe some of us might survive. Without the distraction of our modern technology we would really begin to appreciate interdependence at a whole new level.

By the time you read this I may already be hiking on the Appalachian Trail. I'm anticipating that I will have a chance to experience that pervasive interdependence without all that modern distraction. Melodie and I will be walking through an eco system that has been doing its thing for hundreds of thousands of years. I am hoping all that space will give me some room to grow my soul a little bit. Anthropologists claim there is evidence that the human species has been celebrating some type of spirituality for about 40,000 years and celebrating organized religion about 4,000 years. One of the things I value about our particular version of organized religion is that we make an effort to get below the surface of that organizational aspect and connect with the raw spirituality of our human experience. One of the realities that confronts us, if we dare to look below the surface, is that we are on a journey. And like a hike in the Appalachian Mountains, there is some real wisdom in traveling light. Melodie often quotes Gandhi who said we should "live simply, so others might simply live." I feel blessed to share the journey with you for a little while. As we support each other in the search for truth and meaning and ask those two basic questions "what's so" and "so what?" I hope your answer to the "what's so?" question will make you aware of the journey that each of us shares for a little while and that stretches out beyond the horizons of time. I hope your answer to the "so what?" question will involve acting with a deep intellectual and emotional awareness of the interdependence beneath the surface of being.

Stay tuned.

06/01/07

## Pastor Bud's Buzz

It's June and those leisurely summer days seem to evaporate like a mirage with our approach. I'm going to be celebrating my son's wedding on June 16, my two brothers and their spouses and one of my sisters are driving down from Michigan to help us celebrate. I will be in the pulpit on Sunday June 17 talking about our 6th UU Principle "The goal of World Community with peace liberty and justice for all." Then Monday June 18 I will be flying out to Portland Oregon to attend the Ministers Days before the UUA General Assembly. There will be six of us attending from our Congregation. We will make an effort to bring back some of the excitement. June will be a busy month.

While the pace of life can be hectic, there is always that hovering awareness that much of the world struggles under extremely inhumane conditions; often their suffering is the result of human choices, sometimes unenlightened indifference. We could become discouraged in the face of the huge gap between what we promote as the goal of World Community with peace liberty and justice for all and what we know to be the reality in so many places in the world.

I was talking to Bob Mohr the other day and he was telling me about his family history. He said his grandfather and Bob's uncles once won a tug of war against a team of horses. What they had done was outsmart the horses and their human driver. They knew that the horses would lean into the harness when commanded by the driver and if they held their ground the horses would stop pulling. When they stopped pulling the human team even though not as strong would take advantage of this opportunity to pull the team of horses backwards. Each time the horses stopped pulling Bob's grandfather and his brothers would take a little more ground and then hold it against the next pull.

When we get discouraged about the strength of the forces that contribute to human suffering and injustice we need to remember to use our creativity to just hold our ground to slow our loses and not to give up. We need to be ready for the opportunity to overcome powerful forces by outsmarting them. We need to bring even more creativity to our struggles than Bob's grandfather did. Whenever possible we need to avoid opposing forces altogether and think of alternatives that can change the pattern and move us toward a true World Community with peace, liberty and justice for all. Whenever possible we need to join those opposing forces by being in relationship with them and through a deeper communication with them, come to an appreciation of our shared suffering and our common oppression. Grounded in that common understanding perhaps we can all come to appreciate what Martin Luther King Jr. realized when he said that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Stay Tuned

05/06/07

## Pastor Bud's Buzz

As I sit to gather my thoughts I am immersed in the tragic news of thirty three lives taken on a Virginia Tech. college campus in Blacksburg, Virginia. I have just listened to our nations president offer his condolences to the survivors. I experience a deep sorrow and heaviness in my heart. A phrase from the Presidents message sticks in my mind. He reflects that those innocent victims were, "...at the wrong place at the wrong time."

In the month of May my pulpit themes will explore the meaning of our fifth principle, "The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large." While the lose of human life on this scale is difficult or impossible to comprehend, I still struggle to find meaning in this tragedy and the continuing tragic loss of life that unfolds across this nation and around the world in our cities, towns and villages as countless individuals are caught in the destructive path of a bullet or an explosive device. Most of these innocent victims are where they should be carrying on with their lives, driven by the basic necessities of survival, comforted by the daily obligations of their family and ethnic traditions. What is not as it should be? What is at the wrong place at the wrong time? It is not the innocent victims.

What drives growing numbers to take the lives of the innocent? What dislocation has put these individuals with their destructive intent at the wrong place at the wrong time? Some strike out at the innocent in carefully nurtured fear and rage because they cannot strike out at those who they believe oppress them, destroy them or their way of life. They demonize, and feel compelled to vanquish there enemy at all cost.

Can we follow the roots of this madness to its source? Is there a way to trace the systemic poison of oppression and alienation that feeds their fear and rage? Is there any cure that can stem the tide of this poison and its violence? Or are we helpless in the path of a nameless, faceless tsunami of inadvertence spiked with greed? Will we self destruct in paroxysms of fear and hate well before global warming takes its lethal toll on this planets life? Will these rising threats only numb and blind us more to the indifference and fear that forms the fertile soil where these poison bearing roots find nourishment?

Let's answer the challenge. What have we to lose? Nurture the audacious hope needed to overcome the cynicism of those who would oppress us by calling us hopeless dreamers? It has been said our failure is not the failure to achieve our dreams but the failure to dream large enough. This radical commitment to destroy the enemy can only be overcome by a radical commitment to love our enemy. One person embracing this kind of radical love can inspire another. A community embracing this kind of radical love can inspire a nation. Imagine what a nation practicing this kind of radical love might achieve? And if loving our enemies is too radical, let's just treat that person who is radically different from us in loving ways. Imagine.

Stay tuned,

5/07

### **Pastor Bud's Buzz**

During the month of April my pulpit theme is "Search." It is tied to our Fourth Principle in which we affirm and promote the free and responsible search for truth and meaning.

A friend of mine sends me articles that deal with issues that he considers may be of interest to me. Often the articles report powerful groups actively interfering with the basic freedom of individuals to search for truth and meaning.

One of those articles was by Chris Hedges, and posted on a website called "Truthdig" March 19, 2007

<http://www.alternet.org/story/49160/>. In Hedges' article he describes the dynamics of a conflict between Gay and

Lesbian groups and what he characterizes as a growing "American Fascism." He argues that many whose beliefs and lifestyles are considered unacceptable to this American Fascism are being marginalized and driven into the closet.

As Unitarian Universalists engaged in promoting a free and responsible search for truth and meaning I think we

need to oppose groups that actively persecute individuals because of their free and responsible search for truth and

meaning. The truth and meaning of fascism is vigorously debated on Wikipedia

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fascism> where a former Columbia University Professor, Robert O. Paxton contributed

the following:

"Fascism may be defined as a form of political behavior marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victim-hood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion...

1. a sense of overwhelming crisis beyond reach of traditional solutions; 2. belief one's group is the victim,

justifying any action without legal or moral limits; 3. need for authority by a natural leader above the law,

relying on the superiority of his instincts; 4. right of the chosen people to dominate others without legal or moral

restraint; 5. fear of foreign contamination."

Wikipedia continued: "...Fascism is also typified by totalitarian attempts to impose state control over all aspects of

life: political, social, cultural, and economic; in the examples given, by way of a strong, single-party government for enacting laws and a strong, sometimes brutal militia or police force for enforcing them. Fascism exalts the nation, state, or group of people as superior to the individuals composing it. Fascism uses explicit populist rhetoric; calls for a heroic mass effort to restore past greatness; and demands loyalty to a single leader, leading to a cult of personality and unquestioned obedience to orders (Führerprinzip).” There is a slogan used by many, “Freedom isn’t free.” Sometimes promoting and affirming the free and responsible search for truth and meaning is expressed through responsible dissent against the forces that stand in the way of that search. Have you participated in any responsible dissent lately? Is it now or never?

Stay Tuned

03/23/07

Pastor Bud’s Buzz

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Stay Tuned

02/28/07 Pastor Bud's Buzz

I come from up north where winter is usually accompanied by a blanket of snow and where the arrival of spring is pretty dramatic. While the last snowdrifts melt away, longer days break the icy grip of winter. The frozen surface of Lake Huron begins to crack and the St. Clair River fills with what looks like a rapidly moving glacier. Here in Florida the seasonal change is more subtle. The arrival of spring, the resurgence of life and renewed growth can almost sneak up on us. During March my pulpit themes will be talking about "Growth." Growth whether it is in nature or in a UU congregation happens when the circumstances encourage it. We in the Sunbelt even with the increasing frequency of hurricanes continue to be part of a major population migration and we experience first hand the good, the bad and the ugly of growth. There are those who say because of our circumstances growth is inevitable and the only thing we can hope to do is manage how we grow striving to preserve the quality of life that drew us to this beautiful part of the world.

When it comes to congregational growth, however growth is not inevitable. There are plenty of UU Congregations that stay well under 100 members and there are plenty of reasons that congregations stay small. When congregations grow it usually means they are doing some things that encourage growth. Even if a congregation is in an area where the population is growing, if the congregation does not want growth and fails to adjust to what growth brings they probably won't grow and they may even go into decline. We are growing and in some ways like the arrival of spring in Florida our growth

is subtle and can sneak up on us. Our values encourage us to be mindful about living and that extends to being mindful about growing. We may not want to focus on adding to our membership just to add to our membership, but most of us are pleased with what we have discovered in this community and we want to share our experience with our family and friends we care about. Our enthusiasm for being a part of this community is a major factor in our growth. We strongly supported the Uncommon Denomination and continue to use some of the advertising materials from their campaign. We reviewed the material that stated we needed to be ready to embrace visitors and help them make a connection with us at those meaningful discussions, Sunday celebrations, great potlucks, social action events and more.

The Connection Groups we have begun are one of the ways we want to make sure that the quality of community life that drew us will continue to be a part of what we share with new members. On Thursday February 22, we held an appreciation event for the many volunteers that help make our community special. We said thank you to each other for being generous with our time and energy so that we all can have the experience of being cared for. We met in groups to review the various tasks that need to be completed to make that good experience continue. We identified some one as the person who coordinates each separate process or task that weaves together to make up our total experience. Just as we need to scootch down to make room for our guests at a service we also need to take steps to make room for the new gifts that each new member and friend brings to us. As we grow together; we grow.

Stay tuned

01/28/07

During the month of February the pulpit theme will be the second UU Principle of Justice, Equity, and Compassion in human relations.

Our congregation's involvement with F.A.I.T.H. (Fighting Against Injustice Toward Harmony) is a powerful example of our justice ministry. F.A.I.T.H. had set a goal of getting 300 people to attend the Annual Assembly at Temple Israel on January 22 to select the issues that we would focus on in the coming year. In previous planning meetings our team projected that UUSDBA might have 15 members present. When 30 members of our congregation showed up that night I could not contain my pride. It was efforts like that by our congregation and many other congregations that resulted in 400 people showing up on a very rainy night to do Justice work. Now the issue committees will be trained and begin their research in preparation of a statement of the particular focus we will take to address Crime and Drugs and continue our work on Affordable Housing. If you're moved to contribute to this important work let Sharon Rich, Bill Ternent or me know and we will help you get involved.

Some of you may know that I have been visiting inmates at the Tomoka Correctional Institution. It is a Federal Prison located just west of Daytona Beach off of Tiger Bay Rd. The prisoner I was originally visiting has been transferred from Tomoka CI to Dade CI. I

regularly still communicate with him. While he was at Tomoka he was featured in a documentary that is being made about Jewish Prisoners. The person that is putting that documentary together, Rhonda Moskowitz has a web site that shows a three minute clip including Charles Johnson leading a Seder meal. I'm off camera during the filming and helped by bringing in the food that they shared as part of the Seder and as part of more joyful feast that follows. You can access the video at the following site.

<http://jewishprisoners.com/>