

“Children as an Act of Faith”

Rev. Carol Allman-Morton

December 24, 2009

Unitarian Universalist Meeting of South Berkshire

Unitarian Universalism is a hope filled faith. We believe that there is a purpose in life. We believe that although there is suffering in the world, we human beings have the tools to make the world a better place. We have hope and faith in the human story.

The human story *is* a hard one. The suffering of our fellow humans, and of creation can seem overwhelming at times. I was listening to Bill McKibben from 350.org on NPR this week, talking about the Copenhagen climate talks. McKibben and many activists are disappointed at the results of the talks, because of the urgency they feel to make change now, for fear we will lose too many people to climate change. Other political and environmental leaders are happy that at least negotiations are beginning to move forward. They were concerned national self-interests might stall the process entirely. One of McKibben’s reports talked about a coming ‘hell on earth’ from climate change. I sat in my car and grimly thought, “well, where do we *go* from here?”

I imagine that at the time of Jesus’ birth, there were a lot of people saying, “well, where *do* we go from here?” The Roman Empire was stretching out as far as it could. It offered the Roman peace, or *Pax Romana*, which meant that they would give your people roads and infrastructure, but in exchange, you had to toe the Roman line. You were required to honor the Roman government, gods, and taxes. Make the authorities unhappy, try to foster any sort of rebellion or autonomy, and you were dead. Some people were anticipating the end of time. The Jews were waiting for a messiah, a prophet from God who would deliver them from this fate.

The story of the birth of Jesus comes from this context. Jesus grew up to be a prophet who stood up to the Roman authorities. His followers wrote the story of his birth to reflect the life he led, and the role he filled in the story of the Roman occupation of the Middle East. The authors of scripture believed that Jesus’ birth heralded a new beginning, where top down authority would no longer rule their lives. They had hope and faith in their messiah. In the story of the birth of Jesus, angels of the lord visit Mary and Joseph when she finds out she is pregnant, they also visit the shepherds. In the Christian story, God lets the people know they should pay attention to this child; that *he* is the one who is going to make things right and change their fate. Luke wrote, “The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”¹

For some of the Jewish community a little over 2000 years ago, the answer to “well, where do we go from here?” was to follow this prophet and build a community that could stand up to Roman power. We all know the human story both before and after the birth of Jesus is one that has been marked with suffering, war, and human beings doing terrible, unthinkable things to one another. At a most basic level we have struggled with seeing one another as being part of the same human family. Our societies have been able to dehumanize other people to the point of treating them as if their lives had no meaning, their bodies no feeling. Through all of this suffering, we continue to have hope. We have continued to have children and raise them, anticipating that some day, we human beings will get it right, and understand better how to live together.

¹ Luke 2:10-11

Today, we are struggling with violence around the world. Humans experience war, famine, disease, violence between people, against the earth, and indifference to suffering. With all this that might hold us apart, we are at the same time more connected than ever before. Around the world, we are connected through our ability to communicate and travel to create together, and we share economic and environmental fates. Perhaps *this* is a time when we can get it right.

“Where do we go from here?” When we are faced with leaders who cannot make needed changes because of economic and political pressure, it can be hard to have hope. However, we also know that we as human beings have been in places that seemed hopeless before. We have struggled with issues that seemed so dire, they would lead to the end of our world. We have lived through wars like the crusades, world wars, and the cold war. We have come through colonialization, and around the world, are still dealing with the results of the suffering *that* caused.

For some cultures and people, the impact of other human choices, surely did change or end their world as they knew it. For the millions of Native American people living in North America at the time of the invasion of Europeans, it surely must have felt like the end of the world. World War II changed the Jewish world in particular, and Europe in general, forever. The loss of generations of knowledge, relationships, and the loss of trust changed the people of Europe. In 2005, the catastrophic failure of our government to respond to Hurricane Katrina was televised for the world to see. Again, breaking relationship and trust between people. Hundreds of years of Western Colonialism affected every continent with oppression, disease, war, racism, and religious imperialism. For the conquered lands and people, the world as they knew it ended. Colonialism also, with largely unintended consequences, has now brought much of the world together with threads of common colonial history. The work of Ghandi to liberate India from Britian’s oppressive rule was influenced by observing racism in South Africa. The work of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King to end dehumanizing segregation and racial violence in the United States was influenced by Ghandi as well as Jesus. The work of Aung San Suu Kyi, who works against the violently oppressive regime in Burma is influenced by both Ghandi and King. Through the work of these modern prophets, they have helped to change world for the better. They have changed the world into something that earlier oppressors would not recognize as the world they knew. When all has seemed lost, human beings have continued on. We have continued to build societies, relationships, and love.

Human beings continue to struggle with suffering and violence. Through our global interdependence, we also all struggle with issues of climate change and economic crisis. Whether we address the climate crisis or not, in the next generation, the world *will* look and feel different. I move forward with hope that there will be a world worth living in for my children. I raise them to care for their fellow human beings in faith that they will be part of the answer to human suffering. As a society, we work to raise our children and provide a place for them to live their lives. As a congregation and a denomination we foster religious and ethical growth through our Lifespan Religious Education programs, and by our example in worship and service to others. Honoring interdependence and caring for one another are touchstones for our faith. Our faith is based in love, and we are called to do the work of fostering these ideals in the world. Most of you probably know the quote from the Great Law of the Iroquois Nation, “In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations.” Can you imagine what our world might be like if we lived by such a code?

There is much to be hopeful for. There are great minds working to deal with issues of the climate and how to live with a smaller footprint. In my lifetime alone the world has changed, the iron curtain fell, the cold war ended, and people stopped worrying day to day about nuclear holocaust. In the United States, though we are so far from getting there, rights for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender people are moving forward. Though there is much work left to be done, in my life, the rights of women and gender stereotypes have changed for the better. What else is there to be hopeful for? Bald Eagles are off the endangered species list. The depletion of the ozone layer was averted. Apartheid ended, Mandela was freed, there is a local food grass roots movement going on in the US. After Hurricane Katrina, individuals and communities around the world, including this congregation, worked together to help suffering survivors. This month a city in Texas elected lesbian mayor and an African American man is the President of the United States working with a female secretary of state. There is much to be hopeful for.

“Where do we go from here?” I have not heard about any angels of the lord appearing lately to herald the birth of a Savior. However, I do believe that the answer to moving forward as human beings is to consider all of our children potential saviors of humanity. To behave as if preserving the life of the planet and of societies that foster the growth and humanity of generations is vital to the survival of humankind. Because frankly, it is. Sophia Fahs will be quoted all over the Unitarian Universalist world tonight, “Each night a child is born is a holy night”. Her words were never more true. May this be a time when we get it right. Let us build a world that can hold the children of the next seven generations.

May it be so.

Amen and Merry Christmas.