



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST

CONGREGATION OF FREDERICK
Spirituality · Community · Justice

(My) Journey to UU
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August 28, 2023
frederickuu.org

My journey to UUism?!!! Ha! I can remember it like it was yesterday! It didn't come from realizing that ALL PEOPLE's inherent WORTH and dignity mattered. I was taught that thinking of Love and compassion in all things came AFTER your belief. No, in the religion of my youth (or family), you had to believe what we believed!!! That Pentecostal/Baptist denomination could never accept a SINNER, let alone someone QUEER. The sinners are going to hell with the UUs! They didn't care if you're searching, you'd better hurry up 'cause hell is hot! And if you don't follow this scripture precisely to the letter (even though no one did), you are surely doomed. In this process of MALE ONLY leadership that disregards the society and the interdependence of all people. I never even thought about racism; I was focused on survival.

Most people share their stories from beginning to end. It usually starts happily: "Once upon a time, in a faraway land....." But this story begins with the ringing of gunshots on a random Tuesday in the hood. Imagine Miami, FLORIDA (*we can speak of the governor after worship*). We're all familiar with THIS HOME RIGHT? It's very much like my home was, in yet another underserved community, dilapidated, empty, with no vibrancy. But Why? Why do SO MANY of our untold (or underdog) stories begin this way?

My (coming of age) story exemplifies the interweaving of complexities of social classism, racism, and systematic oppression. **My** journey invites you onto a path of discovery along with me—a journey Where we continually evolve together. Come with me, destiny is here, where water meets spirit, and the divine is waiting.

Being black, queer, and male made life interesting. In my culture(s), there are specific expectations of a male-embodied person, expectations that lean toward toxic masculinity, borne out of a need to survive the harsh and unaccepting world we must navigate. I can recall a time when I was six years of age. My Bishop was preaching and made references that I was, at the time, 'acting like a sissy.'"

In the heart of our human experiences, we each carry stories that shape us, stories that challenge our identities and our understanding of who we are and where we belong. For me, one such tale stands out vividly, etched in the memory of my six-year-old self. I stood there, a young soul yearning for acceptance, listening to the words that pierced the air – 'acting like a sissy.' Those words, innocent to some, held within them the weight of judgment, of misunderstanding, and the power to inflict pain.

At that moment, I didn't know the depth of the hurt and the pain that my mother was experiencing. I always sang in the choir, but with tears in her eyes, she said, 'You can't sing tonight.' Confused, hurt, and puzzled, I remember asking, 'Why, Mama?' Her response was a heavy sigh, a glance of sorrow, and a soft command to 'go to the car.' In the silence of that car ride home, with only the melody of The Winans playing softly in the background, I felt the ache of isolation. (it was one of my first memories of isolation, feeling the harshness of judgment and the loneliness it brings).

Sing-"Millions didn't make it. But I was one of the ones who did.'" Music became my way of praying when tears hindered my words. The lyrics of that song remind me of the resiliency we all carry within us. The strength to endure, to rise above, and to reclaim our sense of self even in the face of adversity."

But that was only the beginning. I soon learned the heaviness of hate and how damaging the church, a place that should offer solace and unity, can be. My mother's experience mirrored my own, her spirit was often lifted by fellow Church members and Church Mother Miriam. However, her heart still ached from witnessing her children verbally attacked within those sacred walls by someone who was supposed to love God - to preach love, acceptance, and compassion. No one spoke up, the silence hung heavy like a cloak, drowning out the voices of justice.

"It reminds me of the words of Dr. King when he stated, 'In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.' The silence can be as painful as the hurtful words themselves."

Yet amidst the silence, a powerful voice emerged. It was my father, fierce in his love and unyielding in his defense of his children. The walls of our home may have contained the words, but they reverberated with the strength of a father's protective love. I heard him say, 'Tell that Mother***** to call **me** a sissy.' For me, my father was a symbol of solidarity, and the refusal to be silenced in the face of injustice. Like the author,

"In the intersection of my identities – black, queer, and male – I found strength, resilience, and a determination to rise above the wounds. My journey is not without its scars, but these scars bear witness to the battles I've fought, the battles we all face when our existence challenges the status quo."

Many of you may know my story. (reference the picture) Yeah, that's me in 2014 on a cruise in Jamaica. I ported from Miami (la pasé bien chica) and could relax and enjoy the nature that I would soon be more connected with—the water. Yes Music is the way that I had begun to pray, but The water is where I experience the divine. Can you imagine the divine as water? I can, and This is why I'm a stereotypical Millennial.

Can you imagine the divine morphing into ice or vapor and then back to water? It would not have a gender, so its pronouns would be they! (Trans community, whats up?) If the Divine were water, it would make sense that all living things would need it to survive. In Fact, your human existence is made up of 70% water. And our globe, EarthEarth... Yeah, It's made up of 71% of water. You and the EarthEarth are connected! We are one with this planet. It's time we started treating Mother Earth as we would treat ourselves! This is all statistical data given by the U.S. Geological Department.

This philosophical and spiritual question - What if the divine were water? - can be interpreted or answered in many ways. Here are a few possible interpretations:

1. Love is the Source of Life: Just as water is essential for life. This could mean that the divine is seen as the source of life, nourishing and sustaining all living beings.
2. God as Omnipresent: Water is everywhere on Earth, from the deepest ocean to the highest cloud. This could symbolize the omnipresence of the divine, existing everywhere and in everything.
3. Do you know that divine Love is a Cleansing Force?: Water is often used for cleansing and purification. This could represent God as a purifying force, washing away negative energy.
4. The divine is Adaptable: Water takes the shape of whatever container it's in; it can be a solid, liquid, or gas. This could symbolize God's adaptability and flexibility, being present in many forms and aspects of life.
5. The Divine is Powerful: Water can be gentle and nurturing but also powerful and destructive (like in a tsunami or flood). This could represent the dual nature of God as both a loving and formidable force.

The words of Octavia Butler: “All that you touch You Change. All that you Change Changes you. The only lasting truth is Change. God is Change.”

Speaking of which, this is what we understand article 2 to address. This is what we understand to be the coming changes to our UU Principles and Sources. This summer at UU General Assembly, the first of two hurdles was passed to shift our movement toward revolving around 7 values with love at the center.”

Yet when I see this image, this is what I see.

More verbs. But what I see may not be from the same perspective as yours, what I see is likely not what YOU see. I am privileged to be a sighted person, with a small need for corrective lenses. But I wonder how this image comes across for those who are colorblind and can't see or process the significance of the colors? (Facts about color blindness)

Back to the story... Fast forwarding a few years to 2017, on the jetway from Pittsburgh airport, to Tampa.

So, on my way home! It's cold. It's December. I'm tired. The semester of seminary has come to a semi-close, but it still needs to conclude. I have final exam papers pending and a waiting family in Florida. As I've always done, I board the plane from Pittsburgh to Florida. On this cold winter morning in December, I asked the flight attendant kindly. "Hello, ma'am. Can I please have a seatbelt extender?" She changes her posture. She leans back and look at me with contempt . Now , y'all, let me just say, (with high ignorance), I'm black, queer from the hood, and all the ghetto rose up in me. I'm serious; I thought she was trying to front me! She spoke up and said, "I don't think you'll need one, but if you do, when you check at your seat, just hit the attendant button above your head, and I'll bring one over to you."

I was Confused. Wondering. I was even dazed! As I sat in someone else's seat on the airplane (we can talk about that later), I remember thinking similarly to Dorothy, "Toto. We're not in Kansas anymore." but this, This was my New Birth experience. On a Southwest 737 jet, in the wrong seat. I was born again. This was the first time I realized the plight that our trans family is experiencing. That the body that everyone else sees is not the body that I identify with. I've always catered to Big D. So who is this slimmer version of me? Divine tears rolled down my eyes. I couldn't help it. In n my mind, people have these kinds of experiences in nature or an intentional atmosphere. But mine was on a Musty Southwest jet, in a seat that wasn't even mine.

Okay, let me tell you about the seat. While bawling, someone taps me and says, "Sir?" I think you may be in my seat. This is CDF; you might belong in ABC on the other side." I was too embarrassed to show that I'd been crying. But I needed to lift my sunglasses to see my seat number. He was right. I needed to change rows.

Fast forward a few years and I've been unofficially diagnosed with PPS: post-pandemic syndrome. Sound familiar? Common things that we are dealing with like social anxiety and starting conversations or connecting with others in the community. Fear of Infection: Even in a post-pandemic world, some people may still harbor fears of passing or getting the virus. You might have it too; and if you do, you know that therapy works! (jokingly... Go)

Along my quest for truth, therapy revealed the hatred I was constantly battling from the wider/non-accepting world, the rigidity of the (faith) community I was a part of, and offered me the opportunity to listen to others. Someone recently once asked me, "What will you do with your other ordinations after UU ministry?" My response was "I choose to remain true to my calling and convictions rather than compromise my integrity to meet stringent living requirements for ordination. I will not live in fear or dishonesty to maintain ordination when I believe that Love has called me to do this work regardless of how a group of others suggest that I should live."

Growing up divergent, which, according to Webster dictionary is, "tending to be different or develop in different directions." made life hard. Again, it makes me wonder what others are experiencing as they navigate the struggles of sexuality, identity, and religion. Do I blame my parents? No. They have faults as parents, and they did their best with what they had. Do I blame the church? Not anymore. Do I blame society and the difficulties that they place in advancing societal norms? Yes! Someone has to take responsibility. Right? Either that or I'll blame it on Trump and his supporters who unabashedly show up and speak their version of truth, vehemently and with great vigor. If there is one lesson we can take from the good ol boys in our fight for justice, it would be to stand strong and firm in your beliefs that every person has inherent worth and dignity - say it loud and proud - loud enough that the youth and children in the back of the sanctuary and in their Religious education classes can hear you! You never know who is listening and how your words of affirmation can change or even save a life.

This Morning, let us remember the power of speaking up, of being allies to those whose voices are stifled. Let us recognize that each of us is responsible for creating spaces of acceptance, understanding, and love. Let our words echo the sentiment that injustice will not go unchallenged, that silence will not prevail. May we be the voices that shatter the silence, stand beside one another, and proclaim with strength and compassion that we all deserve respect, love, and the right to be ourselves.