

“Looking back, Letting Go” — Sea Raven, D.Min.

This is the first Sunday after Christmas. For Christians it is a kind of null point between the birth of Jesus and Epiphany – which is the story of the discovery of who Jesus was, and what his birth may have meant – especially to the Roman Empire of the time, probably early in the second century. How the Christian church year got defined is an interesting topic, but not particularly to Unitarian Universalists, and other folks who are sick & tired of Christmas – which of course started sometime before Hallowe’en. So I won’t go there this morning. I mention it so that we can situate ourselves in time – somewhere between Christmas and the end of 2014 and the beginning of 2015.

One of the traditional tasks of the season – which to my mind can be just as boring as some of the Christian church trivia – is to look back at the old year, take stock, and then let it go. I mean, some of the stuff that happened I would rather not revisit; and as for “letting it go” – well sometimes that’s impossible. What does that mean anyway? – “letting go”? Forgetting? Stuffing it into some dark place in my mind where it can bite me later in nightmares, or arguments, or other psychological triggers?

Suppose that – “letting go” means embracing whatever happened and incorporating it into our sense of who we are.

That seems to me to be the healthy way to move on, into whatever happens next. So – we’ve seen a lot of death in this congregation this past year – good friends, leaders that inspired us to do more than we thought we could; lovers, wives, husbands – children. Some major illnesses have been discovered among our friends and families.

We’ve passed some milestones in our community life: our Carl Gregg finally jumped through all the hoops (or nearly all) and we issued a Call to him as our first Settled Minister in nearly a decade. Our membership is growing; we have a choir that’s only a step or two below the

Mormon Tabernacle; so many folks are attending now that the parking lot can't hold them all and we had to go to two services.

We've seen some good times – births, graduations, marriages – Ah yes – marriages. Here's where social justice comes in. Prohibitions against gay marriage fell in 2014 like the Berlin Wall – the Supreme Court is going to make a ruling on this in the coming year, and my bet is they won't dare do anything other than confirm what 35 states have already done.

So there is a lot to grieve, and a lot to celebrate.

But what about the wider community?

Those of us who lived through the 1960s and 1970s, through the Civil Rights movement, the Viet Nam war, Watergate, are wondering if we learned anything at all from that wrenching, challenging, terrible, transformative time?

I can't think of a more horrible illustration of the myth of the slaughter of the innocents than the fact that just since the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, 14 more children have been killed by police. Among them 12-year old Tamir Rice. Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala survived the attempt to kill her for being an educated Pakistani girl, calling for the education of all girls; and there are hundreds of others: The girls kidnapped by rebels in northern Nigeria; and the slaughter of 142 children at their school in Pakistan. I suggest that at a very deep, archetypal level, children like these cannot be allowed to live because they are a threat to the Empire – that is, a threat to the way society has set itself up.

True Justice is not retribution and payback. Real justice – the kind of justice that wells up from the best of humanity – is distributive justice-compassion. That means radical fairness. Radical fairness means the presumption of innocence when found at the scene of a crime no matter what

one's record may have been or what race you happen to be or what religion you happen to practice . Radical fairness means if I have more money than you, I pay more taxes so that even though I don't have children, your children can go to good schools.

This is not easy. Jesus – and a lot of other people since he walked this earth – have given their lives for the principle of distributive justice-compassion because distributive justice is anathema to Empire. Radical fairness means abandoning self-interest so that others can have a chance. This principle of radical fairness, this radical abandonment of self interest, this distributive justice, this love, applies to personal relationships, business relationships, political relationships, domestic government policies, international government policies, and to corporate business governance.

When the people live like that, what happens? The prophet Isaiah tells us that when the people embrace radical fairness and abandon their own self-interest, the other nations of the world change their minds about us. We get a new name.

Most of you know that Mike Morse and I have made a sacred commitment to one another to build a future for ourselves that includes the continuing care and nurture of Carol, Mike's wife of 54 years, who is now in the late stages of Alzheimer's.

This commitment, indeed this arrangement, is unorthodox and unconventional. It challenges the usual paradigms of marriage and relationships; it honors the deepest integrity and needs of all three of us, allowing for inclusion rather than exclusion, embracing the profound realities of love within the context of the dire consequences of the terrible disease of Alzheimer's. It means that the rest of the journey of our respective lives will not be traveled alone. It means we have new names, new ways of thinking about ourselves and one another.

I live from the personal conviction that what I do on a personal level shifts what the Germans call the *Zeitgeist* – the paradigm – the normalcy of social organization. So every time we do

something that undermines the baked-in social unfairness that hangs over us all, we affect the wider web of existence of which we are a part.

What name could we get if we challenged the social paradigm in which we live by choosing non-violence and inclusiveness? Would we then as a people stop torturing prisoners, stop supporting corrupt dictatorships, start creating a health system that truly cared about our individual well-being?

Isaiah wrote – about 3,000 years ago –

Isaiah 61:1-4

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.

Isaiah 62:1-2

The nations shall see your vindication,
and all the kings your glory;
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the Lord will give.

So Mote It Be