

**SERMON**  
**for September 16, 2018**

**BEING OFF KILTER: Did Something Influence Our Source from the Beginning?**  
Rev. Jack Donovan – Unitarian Universalist Church - St. Petersburg, Florida

**READINGS** (texts printed below, after sermon)

**Gathering**     *The Light Shines in the Darkness*, from the Gospel of John 1  
**Invocation**     *Sources*, adapted from the Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Congregations  
**Meditation**     *Amidst Joy and Woe*  
**Reading #1**     *Beginnings*, adapted from the Books of Genesis, Job, and Wisdom  
**Reading #2**     *Influences*, from Henry David Thoreau's Walden and Margaret Fuller's Memoirs

**SERMON**

“Nothing but the truth will do.” (Margaret Fuller)

On Tuesday I was walking to church, crossing near St. Anthony's Hospital at 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 10<sup>th</sup> Street, when a car came speeding south on 10<sup>th</sup> Street through the intersection even though 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue had the right of way. Whoa! I thought. Dangerous, and this is an ambulance route! Then I observed that there was a stop sign going north on 10<sup>th</sup> Street, but the one for going south was missing. That explained it, so I called the non-emergency number for the police and reported the missing sign – which the police operator promised to get quickly resolved. So I went on my way.

A few hours later, returning home the same way, I re-observed the scene and to my embarrassment I realized that the reason there was no stop sign coming south on 10<sup>th</sup> Street is because 10<sup>th</sup> Street is one-way going north. There wasn't supposed to be a stop sign there. I had incorrectly observed the situation and asked for the wrong solution. What I should have been seeing and reporting was a dangerous driver going the wrong way on a one-way street.

Wrong understanding, wrong way of responding. That too is a dangerous thing, and in my experience, not that uncommon.

Now, we the American people are just one day from the 231<sup>st</sup> celebration of the establishment of the Constitution of the United States of America with our goal of forming a more perfect Union. We are just two days from the three or four thousandth annual celebration of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the Sabbath of Sabbaths with its goals of repentance and wholeness in fulfillment of the Covenant with the Source of Being and its people.

We spoke last week about the nearly infinite potential that comes to us from the creative energy of our originating singular Source – energy for living, surviving, thriving – energy for creating and for fulfilling the potentials of our conscious minds to understand life, and of our conscious hearts to care for life. Yet seldom have we fulfilled the whole covenant or achieved a

more perfect Union. The news of every day testifies that we are far from fulfillment – far from our universalist – no, better, universal - goal of happiness and holiness.

We seem to be off-kilter. So we might ask, Is there something wrong with our understanding of who we are and what we are supposed to be doing. Are we the problem, or was Shakespeare wrong and somehow it is our stars that do influence our destiny? For weal or woe, are there other star forces that influence our potentials and our striving to fulfill them? Is there perhaps a dark star, a lucifer star, fallen out of sight of heaven's and our eyes?

In other words, Is Being Itself off kilter? Scientists report that roughly 90% of the universe is composed of dark energy and dark matter about which we know nothing except that they have found seemingly sure signs that it exists along with, but somehow separate from the quantum fields of space-time and the vibrating particles of those quantum fields that make up the suns and planets in their courses.

Referring to the theoretical sciences, Einstein said, "Imagination is everything; knowledge is nothing." In real life, can our imaginations guide us regarding such a dark unknown that even Einstein hadn't imagined?

Sooner or later as we mature, we may have to shed certain understandings – perhaps many misunderstandings - of Reality, and discover more helpful understandings. Perhaps our better understandings will come later than we'd like or even later than we can use for ourselves. And yet this learning brings the Wisdom that can help bless the world.

Greek and Jewish philosophers saw Wisdom as the female part of divinity, partnered with a male divine but unguided power – both positively composing the light when working together. We start at some point to ask about the reality of our own being – What is my Source? What am I? What are the possibilities and limitations I receive from my Source? It is sobering and humbling to realize how many books and scholars one should research before staking any claim on these questions about goodness and truth.

What if, in the Beginning, the Creator Source had said, "Let there be darkness or something," and then had to say, "Whoops, my bad."

Or if an Evil Twin Source said, "C'mon, let's make this interesting! Let's play some competitive games!" Or a God of Light said, "Who knows what evil lurks in the human heart," and the God of Shadows cackled from the darkness, "Myah-ha-ha-ha!!! I know!!!"

Or is it our own binary mind divisively categorizing this from that, joining with our conjoined but over-reaching bicameral mind of selfish fear and selfless love to say, "Something out there evil lurks."

In short, is there an evil force in the universe for which we should account in our choices if we can?

Cosmological physicist Brian Swimme doesn't think so. He speaks generally for science, though a little romantically, when he writes, "Everything that exists in the universe came from a

common origin.... the primeval fireball.... a single multiform energetic unfolding of matter, mind, intelligence, and life.... The human provides the space in which the universe feels its stupendous beauty..., its grandeur.”

But there have been compelling story-tellers from the time of Job who seemed to touch a nerve of truth, describing a *satan*, a divine tester who serves to put the human soul to the test. And many theologians have claimed worse about this figure - as more than testing – as acting malevolently, maliciously, as an evil force. Zarathustra, Manicheus, Augustine, Martin Luther, Billy Graham, to name a few, have asserted that the tempter has divine evil powers to wreck and damn people’s souls.

Even a modern day myth-maker like *Star Wars* originator George Lucas presents a concept of the originating Force of existence that has two sides – one a chaotic and destructively selfish power of darkness, the other a caring life-evolving power of light.

What do you see? What do you imagine and reason and believe and account for?

As for me, I take the Jedi phrase, “May the Force be with you,” to mean that the Force is the fundamental power of existence, to be used by each being to the best effect that the individual being can manage. It is another word for the creative energy of the cosmos, another word for grace.

My take - on whether there are other cosmic forces influencing our potentials beside the singular Source of life - is this. No, there aren’t. Rather, the reality is that when ignorant or fearful or over-powering people or peoples use that creative gracious natural energy for their selfish untempered purposes, they destroys When enlightened and loving and empowering people or peoples use it, they have tempered it so it blesses life.

Early one morning this week, Alisun and I were on our regular neighborhood walk, which takes us by St. Paul’s Church and its nursery and elementary school. I saw parents and children streaming in. I saw a car with a little queen enthroned in back on her car seat, looking all about as her mother drove her to her realm. I saw a dad on a bike, with his toddler strapped in, both wearing giant helmets, breezing by us toward the school entry with its giant statue of St. Paul holding the Christ child with its open arms welcoming all. I saw, under a covered walkway, a stream of wild-haired little kid angels in ankle length painting-smocks floated between buildings.

What was the feeling of elation I felt there? Sheer spirited joy? Soul-deep hope? Renewed commitment of will? Perhaps I should think of it as the spirit of a high holy morning, helping me and the world get on kilter – hinting to me what I can do and you can do and the world can do and the children can do - be in consort with the ever-gracious spirit of life as the sole originating force for which we have to account.

How about you? How do you see it?

## READINGS

**Gathering**     *The Light*, from the Gospel of John 1

*The light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it.* - Gospel of John

**Invocation**     *Sources*, adapted from the Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Congregations

How to grow?

**How to become our best?**

Drawing from our own direct experience

**Drawing from prophetic women and me,**

Drawing from the world's religions,

**Drawing from reason and science.**

Caring teachers are everywhere, within us and around us.

**May our hearts have enough love to learn and grow.**

**Meditation**     *Amidst Joy and Woe*

Great teachers have said that amidst all our joys or woes,

amidst all our concerns or hopes,

we have at the core of our being

a compassionate consciousness and a personal bliss.

They say we find it in the silence of our questions

and may carry it with us through our days.

Let's feel ourselves just relax, from head to foot

– note the rise and fall of breath

– enter the silence of questions:

Who taught you?

how to breathe? how to rise? how to rest?

how to greet? how to serve? how to speak?

how to presume? how to pause? how to savor?

how to thank? how to cleanse? how to laugh?

how to pray? how to quiet? how to flow?

To stay aware of our being, we stay aware of our breathing,

through all our days and ways, coming in and going out,

like grace, unless you stop it.

**Reading #1**     *Beginnings*, adapted from the Books of Genesis, Job, and Wisdom

**The Book of Genesis:** In the beginning, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while the spirit of God swept over the waters.

**The Book of Wisdom:** For wisdom is the spirit of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty: therefore can no defiled thing become part of her. For she is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of divine goodness. And being but one, she can do all things: and remaining in herself, she maketh all things new: and in all ages entering into holy souls, she maketh them friends of God, and maketh them prophets."

The Book of Job: Job was a blameless and righteous man, one who stood in awe of God and turned away from evil. But Satan the Tempter said to God, "And why wouldn't he be righteous - you give him every blessing. But stretch out your hand now and waste what he has, and he will curse you to your face." And God said, "Okay then, all that he has is in your power."

**Reading #2**     *Influences*, from Henry David Thoreau's Walden and Margaret Fuller's Memoirs

Thoreau: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, ... and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, ... and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion."

Fuller: "In the chamber of death, I prayed in very early years, "Give me truth, cheat me by no illusion." O, the granting of this prayer is sometimes terrible to me! I walk over the burning ploughshares, and they sear my feet. Yet nothing but the truth will do."