

What I Believe — by Rev. Joan Gelbein — February 27, 2010 Unitarian Universalist PEACE Fellowship, Raleigh, NC

Since I'm a minister you'd think I'd be used to being bombarded with this question in one way or another for years. Yes, I am, and I have been!

Mostly, the question aimed at me, at least 365 times every year and through the years is, "What do Unitarian Universalists believe?"

Well, I'm a Unitarian Universalist, so that should be what I believe, right? But, my answer usually wraps around something like – "We UUs don't have any creeds or dogma to tell us what to believe" – and – "UUs are free (and encouraged) to question their beliefs as they open up to new ideas and test them, and as they experience more of life and reflect upon that."

Unitarian Universalism IS a "Process Theology", not one that's essentially fixed in time, content, and teachings. So, this question we keep serving up to ourselves these past several months, here in this Fellowship, is a matter of process, not product.

The assignment should have been: "This I Believe ... Today!"

One thing I know about myself in this process of growing my spirit, you might say, or my character, is that I'm very sensitive to input. (Some of that "input" being things seen and read about; relationships lived and reflected on.) It's true that "everything" changes all the time – and is much too much for any of us to absorb.

But, I change in relationship to things changing in the moment, and that's what matters.

I believe in elastic, and shadows, and clouds, and wind, and peripheral vision; in choices between one direction and another every single second. I believe that my days and years become incredible stories that I can't even tell, but that I'm telling them to myself, in one language or another, all the time.

However, this statement, needing to be relatively brief, means I have to come down on something, and something important.

OK!

Here's one of my 'something important' beliefs: That "God" is in the relationship; a relationship; all relationships. I didn't dream that up, of course. Martin Buber included that insight in his books.

Whatever that illusive and bandied word – G*O*D – means, can be found while in relationship.

And, of course, "relationship" is always in a state of "process" writ large.

God, or “meaning”, can be found in what or who you are in relationship with at any time, and it has a shifting and occasionally intense quality according to the attention you’re paying to it.

This thought, this sense of reality and meaning, can be a long unraveling, but I want very much to share with you one aspect of finding meaning in relationship that I am deeply affected by and feel committed to.

Responsiveness!

Each of you is a fleeting presence in my reality; in my attention span. In each of us, our attention span has the possibility of being incredibly precise at times.

I believe that small aspects of what I see and hear and feel in brief connection with you, or longer connection with some, needs some response from me.

There are no guidelines for what that response should or could be.

But, if I’m attuned to you (and we all are attuned to one another to whatever extent we choose), I can say or do something that had its cue in what you broadcast to me.

We’re all broadcasting. And, it’s a strong feeling inside me that if I don’t pick up some of your signals and respond to you, or you don’t pick up some of mine and respond to me, that we will miss the very roots of human compassion.

I don’t know if compassion is the name of God, or the description of “meaning,” but I suspect that it is at least one of the rich sources of meaning that is open and available to us.

This I Believe.

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