

Rev. Emily Burr
UU Fellowship of the Eastern Slopes
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Faith and Works

TIME FOR ALL AGES “Higgins the Drop of Water”¹

Once upon a time there was a drop of water named Higgins. Higgins was no ordinary drop of water. He was a drop with a goal. Higgins lived in a valley where it had not rained in a very long time, so all the lovely green grass was turning brown, all the beautiful flowers were wilting, and all the trees were starting to droop.

Higgins’ goal was that one day the valley would be a beautiful place again. But what could he do? After all, he was only a drop of water. One day Higgins decided to travel and tell others about his dream and his goal. All the other drops listened very politely, but no one believed that his dream would come true. “Higgins,” said one, “get your head out of the clouds. You can’t spend your whole life thinking about an impossible goal.”

Higgins decided that he had to do something to start on his goal, to take at least one small step toward it. So he began to think and think and think. One day, as he was walking by a rusty old bucket, he got an idea. “If enough of us drops of water got together in this bucket,” Higgins thought, “there would be enough water to sprinkle on a few flowers to help them grow and become beautiful again!”

Eagerly, Higgins told everyone his great idea. But everyone thought he was being foolish. “That Higgins is nothing but a dreamer,” they said. Higgins decided he had to do something to convince the others that he was right. So he said to them, “I don’t know about you, but I’m getting into the bucket! I hope some of you will join me. Then there might be enough water to help at least some flowers grow beautiful again.”

So Higgins ran as hard as he could, hopped way up in the air, and landed with a kerplunk in the bottom of the bucket. And there he sat . . . JUST A DROP IN THE BUCKET.

For a long time Higgins was very lonely. It seemed like no one else was going to join him. But after awhile some of the other drops could see that the grass was dying and the flowers were wilting and the trees were drooping. They all agreed that something must be done.

Suddenly, one drop shouted, “I’m going in the bucket with Higgins!” And he leaped through the air and landed—kerplunk—in the bucket. Then two other drops yelled, “Wait for us!” And they hopped through the air and landed in the bucket. Then ten drops jumped through

¹ From the storybook *A Bucketful of Dreams: Contemporary Parables for All Ages* Christopher Buice Skinner House Books, 1995.

the air into the bucket. Then thirty. Then fifty! And then hundreds of drops came from all around just to hop in the bucket!

Soon, the bucket was completely full of water. But there were still more drops that wanted to join, so they found another bucket and hopped in. Before long, there were two buckets of water—then three—then four—then ten—and then hundreds—and then thousands of buckets of water!

Along came a powerful breeze that blew over all the buckets, and all the water flowed together to make a mighty stream. Everywhere the water flowed, the grass turned green again and the flowers bloomed and the trees stood tall and straight once more.

All this happened because Higgins had a dream and a goal and he finally reached his goal. Because he knew that although he was just a drop in the bucket, enough drops in the bucket make a bucketful, and when there are enough buckets with the wind behind them, then justice will roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

MEDITATION

“Even This Is Enough” - Prayer by Rev. Vanessa Southern

So much undone.
 So much to do.
 So much to heal
 in us and the world.
 So much to acquire:
 a meal
 a healthy body—
 a fit one—
 a lover
 a job
 a better job
 proof we have and are enough
 just around the corner of now.

And up against it the reality of all that falls short and the limits of today.
 We honor the limits:

If your body won't do what it used to, for right now let it be enough.
 If your mind won't stop racing or can't think of the word, let it be enough.
 If you are here utterly alone and in despair, be all that here with us.
 If today you cannot sing because your throat hurts or you don't have the heart for music, be silent.

When the offering plate goes around if you don't have money to give or the heart to give, let it pass.

The world won't stop spinning on her axis if you don't rise to all occasions today.

Love won't cease to flow in your direction,
your heart won't stop beating,
all hope won't be lost.

You are part of the plan for this world's salvation,
of that I have no doubt.
The world needs its oceans of people striving to be good
to carry us to the shores of hope and wash fear from the beach heads,
and cleanse all wounds so they can heal.
But oceans are big and I am sure there are parts that don't feel up to the task of the whole some
days.
Rest, if you must, then, like the swimmer lying on her back who floats,
or the hawk carried on cushions of air.
Rest in pews made to hold weary lives in space carved out for the doing of nothing much
but being.

Perhaps then you will feel in your bones,
in your weary heart,
the aching, healing sense that
this is enough—
even this.

That we are enough.
You are enough.
Enough.

For these and all the meditations of our hearts unspoken in this hour, I say, "Amen."

READING "Standing with Love" by Thom Belote

If you're new to Unitarian Universalism, one of the things you will learn is that we are extremely proud of our history. In truth, our history is full of great things but it also has its share of shameful moments and embarrassing episodes. But we can trace our history and list the myriad ways that we have sided with love.

In the Northeast in the 1800s, prominent Unitarians were effective at convincing the public of the inhumanity of slavery, while in California Thomas Starr King was primarily responsible for keeping The Golden State in the Union during the Civil War. In advocacy for abolition, we sided with love.

We were the first denomination to recognize the ordination of a woman. It was in these Unitarian and Universalist congregations that recognized the religious leadership of women that the women's suffrage movement was born. Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Olympia Brown are our religious forebears, but our congregations played a role as well, opening their doors for the suffragettes to organize inside and deliver stirring speeches. In standing for equal rights for women, we sided with love.

During the Civil Rights movement, when Martin Luther King issued his call to Selma, Unitarian Universalist ministers and laypeople across the country answered his call. One layperson, Viola Liuzzo, and one minister, James Reeb, were martyred in Alabama. In Selma we marched on the side of love and our blood was shed by violent hate while we sided peacefully with love.

Most recently, Unitarian Universalists have sided with love: with marriage equality. Were it not for the powerful organizing of Unitarian Universalists in states like Massachusetts, Vermont, and Iowa, the equal marriage movement would have moved more slowly than it did. By siding with love, we UUs sped up the realization of equality and dignity for more people in our country. The tides have shifted. Love will win out over fear, love will win out over bigotry, and love will win out over homophobia.

If you've ever sided with love, what motivated you? What inspired you? What swelled up within you and gave you the moral clarity and discernment to side with love?

Can we side with love rather than being a detached observer of love? Can side with love rather than having a discussion group about love?

Whether it's siding with love and with immigrant families; siding with marriage equality; siding with health care that is more equitable, more available, and better serves human need; siding with peace... let us ask ourselves from whence we derive the motivation, the courage, the commitment to side with love rather than sitting on the sidelines of love.

SERMON: *Faith and Works*

Here is the biblical passage from which I took the title of today's sermon. It is from the gospel of James 2:14-18. It addresses the question of which is more important faith or good works. James says:

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?

¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good¹⁵ is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. ¹⁸ But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. Clearly James agrees with me that the answer is faith and works

About five pages into our Grey Hymnal on a left side page is the Unitarian Universalist covenant that includes our seven Principles. This morning we will use it as a Responsive Reading so please turn to it in your hymnal. We will all read what I think of as the “preamble” at the top of the page and then each side will read a principle so starting on my left (your right) you will read the 1st, 3rd and 5th. The other side will read the 2nd, 4th and 6th with everyone joining in on the 7th. As we read them, leave a little space between each principle to give us each time to think about our belief in the principle and how we manifested it in our life.

Two components of any religion are faith and works. Works being what you *do* to live out the values of your faith. I would agree with James, that faith without works is dead. I take that to mean that just having beliefs isn't really a viable faith. Only when our faith translates into actions, when we engage with the world do we have a living faith – a living tradition. James says people will know his faith **by** his works. They will know what he believes because they will see what he does with his time and energy.

Our Unitarian Universalist faith is inextricably intertwined with works, as we were reminded in Thom Belote's piece. It's good to keep in mind that those in Unitarian and Universalist congregations have been actively promoting our values and siding with love since before 1961 when the UUA was formed. We can be proud of our past role in abolition, suffrage, civil rights and LGBT rights. What do we need to do now, in today's world, to side with love?

Many of us are quite familiar with the seven UU Principles. We apply their values in our daily actions and decisions. Because we believe so strongly in the principles, because they are such a part of who we are, we often do this subconsciously. We may not realize that they are part of a covenant – an agreement – a promise – made by every congregation as they joined the Unitarian Universalist Association of congregations. Some UU membership ceremonies include acknowledging this covenant and agreeing to affirm and promote the seven Principles we just read. **Many** do not. Asking someone to state they agree with the covenant can seem too much like a creed. Both Unitarians and Universalists broke away from faiths that required certain beliefs for membership.

Comment [EB1]:

Our Unitarian Universalist *faith* alone is not enough to bring into being the world we want to have. We UUs are very good at affirming our belief in the values we hold. We do that within our congregations - in Coffee Hour, small groups and committee meetings. We affirm our values when we cast our votes (if we've done our homework), when we talk with our children, our friends and acquaintances. We aren't quite as good at “promoting” those same values to others. Our covenant with other UU's is to affirm ***and promote*** our Principles. What does it mean to “promote” the seven Principles?

To promote something requires more than simple faith or belief. It requires *doing* something. **Our covenant calls us to action!** The kind of action we hear when we listen to the voices of past U's, U's and UU's, who have promoted our values by acting – by actually doing something!

Those of you who are Unitarian Universalist would not be here unless you felt comfortable with the fact that every UU congregation has covenanted that we affirm ***and will promote*** the seven

principles, which guide us in knowing how to treat each other and the universe well. Let us look at the question posed by Rev. Belote. Where do we get the motivation, courage and commitment to side with love and not just sit on the sidelines? We get them from our faith and our values. Martin Luther King, Jr. said: “Faith is taking the first step, even if you don’t see the whole staircase.” There is no doubt that our Unitarian Universalist faith must include works to be a living faith. Faith and action go hand in UU hand. You truly cannot have one without the other.

One of the lessons we were taught in seminary was that a minister’s job is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. The next bit tends toward the second and may be hard for some of you to hear. I’m nudging you to put your UU beliefs, your time and energy into action. If we are to realize the prospect of the beloved community we yearn for,
We... must... act.

We cannot *promote* our values unless we get out in the world, act... – and interact with others. It is by our works that we and others will understand the strength of our Unitarian Universalist faith.

“OK! Yes!” you may be thinking. “I do have these strong beliefs about people and our universe, and I do want to help make the world a better place for all - So what do I do?????”

The UUA has developed a resource for congregations called Soul Matters. that highlights and provides readings and discussion points for a different concept word each month. March’s Soul Matters theme is “wisdom.” If we have been paying attention to what is happening in our country, we know that our country is becoming a place where our values are being upended. We will need wisdom to discern how to live in our challenging world.

This past summer, when I returned to South Africa, where I served in the Peace Corps from 2011 - 2014, for the first time, I was not proud of being an American. What can I do to my country one I can be proud of again? With our fifth Principle, we covenant to affirm and promote the use of the democratic process in our congregations and in society at large. It is not always easy to act on our values. We genuinely believe in affirming and promoting the inherent worth and dignity of every person. If we do, then are we being true to our faith, if we do nothing? If we stand by while so many people are being treated as if they have no worth and are left with little dignity? As Edmund Burke, an 18th century British philosopher wisely said, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

“I know. I know.” you may be saying to yourself. “But I have so many other things I have to do!!” It is so easy to get wrapped up in the details of living that there hardly seems any time... And there are so *many* things I could? should? be doing to act on my faith! In Friday’s *Concord Monitor* there were so 5 or 6 articles on things of that caught my attention. Each brought an immediate response of I should.... I really want to...

How can we decide what needs our energy the most? One thing to know is I, you – one person - cannot do it all.

There are other drops working on the values we, as individuals and a congregation, care about. There are other people in our denomination who have jumped in the bucket. In New Hampshire, we have a state-wide Unitarian Universalist advocacy network. Since shortly after the election in 2016 I have been a founding member on the Leadership Team (Board) of UUActionNH. Our Mission is “To amplify Unitarian Universalist voices and values throughout New Hampshire.” We exist to promote our principles in the public square – within our democracy.

The UU Congregation of the Eastern Slopes can support us by becoming a Member Congregation. You can do that by paying annual dues of \$2 per member. One action you can take as an individual is to join our email list and follow our Facebook page. Even better, sign up to be a sustaining member. I brought brochures and any you fill out will go on to our Executive Director, Tristan Husby, who will add you to our email list. (You can also sign up by going to our website <https://www.uuactionnh.org/>) You will receive a very reasonable number of emails about various actions you can take to promote UU values.

As I have become involved in working for our values in NH, I have discovered other drops who have jumped in other buckets: GSOP (Granite State Organizing Project – a faith-based org.), ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union), NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), and AFSC (Quakers). I think of these folks as “fellow travelers” because I see them at so many gatherings, of various kinds, for social justice issues I believe in. Another group I have become aware of is the NH Council of Churches. NH Council of Churches includes nine liberal Christian denominations with 400 churches in NH. That’s a lot of drops in many buckets. I asked to be on the board because I know that our Unitarian Universalists values will have more power and a better chance to affect NH laws if we work together with as many others as we can. We may not agree on everything but must work and act together to have an effect – even or maybe especially when we have to build those bridges between our divisions to get work done where we do agree.

This congregation has already taken many actions. You have educated yourselves about our history of oppression of black Americans and those who lived here before white folks arrived. You support social justice in your community with your gifts of Special Collections, work with the Way Station and End 68 Hours of Hunger. You have hosted demonstrations on the corner.

When I checked out your website I found some of the ways UUFES members and friends put their faith into action:

Letter-writing campaigns after Sunday services, Canvassing, Learning how laws are made, Contacting senators and representative about issues of interest or concern, [UU Action NH](#), Marching/Protesting for justice, Joining Veterans Stand for Standing Rock—protesting the Dakota Access Pipeline in North Dakota, [Indivisible NH Citizens In Action for Democracy](#), [NH Rebellion](#), [Black Lives Matter](#), Donating food and household supplies weekly to local food pantries

I am humbled by your many efforts. I encourage you to continue all the social justice energy you are currently contributing to efforts to bring about a world with UU values. Other ways of acting to support our values are that even more of you: show up for legislative days and workshops, write and call your state and federal representatives, write a letter to the editor of

your local paper. We need every drop in the bucket we can get to act for UU values. Knowing there is so much we could do to further our values is part of the “It’s really *not* easy being UU!!!” We struggle to balance the time and energy we put into social action with time for work, family and self-care. What will you do with your time and energy?

During this sermon you may have wondered about my choice of today’s meditation. The sermon and meditation seem to be diametrically opposed. In ways they are. The meditation message is that who you are right now and what you have been doing - are enough. While in the sermon, I am saying simply believing is not enough. I’m asking you to act - to do more.

We Unitarian Universalist ministers often preach to ourselves. These two messages reflect a struggle I have lived with the last few years. I have two opposing motivations. One is that I want to see the beloved community, and know how much work needs to be done to create a more just world. I want to spend every minute of my time and every bit of my energy to making it so. That is the stronger, louder message I hear. I am a true NE Yankee (though an avid Red Sox fan – Maybe next year??) My other, currently growing, motivation comes from the realization that always thinking and doing leave little time for being.

We can get so busy doing, doing, doing that we lose sight of the search for truth and meaning. I’m learning to take more time to be present and explore the being side of truth and meaning. This entails taking time to be – in my home, with my family and friends, with myself – doing things that bring me joy.

But when I plant garlic or do a jigsaw puzzle or spend an hour reading the Concord Monitor and drinking coffee, I feel a little bit guilty because I’m not out there “making the world a better place”. Each of us will find that balance point and when we do, it will be enough.

Being Unitarian Universalist today means not only having UU beliefs and values but includes putting your time and energy into actions that help promote those values in the wider world. So, remembering that we need to have time to be, what one action will you take to show yourself and the world your faith?

Be Higgins, or one of the drops that joins him. You can’t do it alone – you don’t have to. There are many others joining together to make a difference.

What will your drop contribute? What can you commit to? Know that when you do listen to those voices in your heart and soul and act, whatever you do will be enough, especially when it is lit by the fire of commitment to our Unitarian Universalist values.