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Salvation

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"Are you Saved?" conjures many responses in Unitarian-Universalists (UU). For the average pew dweller, it is mostly negative, if we grew up in fundamentalist church. In the last issue of Quest, the monthly liberal newsletter (clfu.org and QuestForMeaning.org) Jan 2013 the topic is Salvation and has several answers to that question of what saved means to several UUs. Of particular interest are the two African American theological writers Mark D Morrison-Reed and Genna Rae McNeil.

The first, Morrison-Reed recounts his conversion from Unitarianism (the religion of his birth and youth) to Universalism. Listening to Gordon McKeeman's address The Persistence of Universalism, an image of God dragging every last person "kicking and screaming into heaven" moved Morrison-Reed. As a seminary graduate and recently beginning his ministry in local UU church, something clicked about his this particular brand of UU religion. Here "was a religion of radical and overpowering love. Universal salvation insists that no matter what we do, God so loves us that she will not, and cannot, consign even a single human individual to eternal damnation. Universal salvation - the reality that we share a common destiny - is the inescapable consequence of Universal love."

Morrison argues that through this image of unconditional love we learn to love. In this world there is no escape from the embrace of "the creative force that upholds and sustains all life." He asks a good question. Why is it that this view of an all-loving God more difficult to understand than virgin birth and bodily resurrection? Easier to believe the "unbelievable" than to believe that humans are all one family loved by God?

This is a good question, because I have always answered the question as why fundamentalism is so popular is the security of clear answers. What could be more secure than God loves us unconditionally? As Morrison-Reed reminds us while we yearn for the unconditioned love, we actually experience conditional love everywhere we turn. The good receive love, the bad do not. So as a reflection of our own human experience, evangelicalism has created a God that does the same thing. From Afghanistan, to Syria, Palestine or domestic terrorists like the Sikh temple killer and the US criminal injustice system which throws millions into a lower caste, we desperately need to hear the message of unconditional love. We have tried dividing the world into us versus them. It leads to dead ends and death.

I brought suffering to myself by setting myself apart. contently seeking to shore up my separate ego/self. Instead, since I have begun to surrender my separateness and relax into my connectedness, letting down my defenses against reality and embracing what this moment has to offer, life has been easier, less stressful, less anxiety provoking, easier to be with myself and not needing to distract me from the feelings and emotions of the moments. Liberated from defending the indefensible, I can just be. Be present fully here now.

While we need to appreciate all the differences between us, at the root we are all "us." UU minister David Bumbaugh is quoted by Morrison: "Beneath all our diversity and behind all our differences is a unity which makes us one and binds us forever together in spit of time and death and the space between the stars." This is a reality (call it God if you like) that I can submit too, surrender too, or be saved by.

As I have been saved from a mental habit of dividing myself from others, as I have see my own condition as more like others, as I see my enemies suffering from the same experience as I, I experience my connectedness and unconditional love for myself as well as for those around me.

Do not have enough room to discuss more of the quest issue on Salvation. Will talk about Genna Rae McNeil later.

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