

CALL TO WORSHIP – “OUGHT TO” – J. DONALD JOHNSTON

I cannot love because I ought to. I cannot hope because I ought to.  
 I cannot believe because I ought to. Or because I want to or am taught to.  
 Or because it is reasonable or desirable or possible for someone else.  
 I can only love and hope and believe sometimes or often,  
 Not quite or almost, seldom or never really,  
 And I need you (and you and you) in between.

**Sermon: Memories From a 1960's Ministry in Middleboro**  
**Rev. Richard M. Fewkes – Minister Emeritus – First Parish In Norwell - April 26, 2015**

In May of 1964 I was due to graduate from Andover Newton Theological School. I was 28 years old and a fairly new convert to Unitarian Universalism. I was told by the staff of the Department of the Ministry at UU headquarters in Boston that I couldn't expect my name to be sent to any of the larger churches. I would have to gain some experience serving one of our smaller churches, which was fine with me. I think my name was sent to two churches. One of them was the First Unitarian Universalist Society in Middleboro, Mass.

I remember being interviewed by the Pulpit Committee in the basement of the church. The Chair of the committee, Emil Cobb, asked me, "Can you tell us, Mr. Fewkes, what practical experience you have had in the parish ministry?" I was afraid they'd ask that question. I'd had practically no experience in the parish ministry other than one church year as a student minister to youth in a Congregational church in Auburn near Worcester. The truth of the matter was I'd had zilch experience in a Unitarian church except for less than a year as a congregant in the Unitarian Society in Wellesley Hills. I listened to some excellent sermons by Dr. William Brooks Rice, a fine preacher indeed. So, I told them right out, that I was an inexperienced young greenhorn minister who needed on-the-job training, and that I couldn't even be sure I really wanted to be a minister until I tried it for awhile.

That wasn't exactly a dazzling display of how to sell yourself to a prospective Ministerial Search Committee, but Emil and the committee seemed to like my honesty and forthrightness and decided to ask me to be their candidate. Since there were no other pulpit committees beating a path to my door, and I needed a job real bad, I was delighted to be asked and said, "Yes", I would be honored to be their candidate for the minister of the Middleboro church. My candidating sermon was titled, "The Lion and the Lamb." I worked real hard on it and told them everything I knew and believed. How it would ever be possible to preach another sermon I did not know. Fortunately, I was only asked to preach one candidating sermon to the folks in Middleboro. I guess the congregation was sufficiently impressed, because they voted to invite me to be their next minister. I had until the following September to worry about writing another sermon.

I was the last minister to live in the church parsonage on 11 Courtland Street. I was a bachelor minister then and I had a dog and a cat to keep me company. The dog, Penny, was a tan beagle pup I adopted as a stray at Camp Squanto, the Boy Scout Camp in the Myles Standish

Reservation in Plymouth, where I was a Chaplain for two summers 1964-65. Penny had a litter of pups and I gave one to Larry and Phyllis Carver for their kids David, Tommy and Michael to enjoy. My cat Tiger, was a gray tiger cat, I forget where I got him, but when I had to go away for personal or religious retreats I would leave him with the Johnson Family, to Connie and Sally's loving care. Once Sally entered Tiger into a local contest about pets and Tiger won an award for the biggest cat of the lot. Got his picture in the paper being held in Sally's arms. Ever since, I've been quite partial to fat cat members of my congregation, especially during canvass week.

After I accepted the call from the congregation in Middleboro to be their next minister, I received a telephone call from George Spencer, head of the Department of Ministry at the UUA. He wanted to assure me that if things didn't work out in the Middleboro church, not to worry, the UUA would not hold it against me. Middleboro apparently had a reputation as a challenging congregation for young inexperienced ministers. My immediate predecessor, Porter Schermerhorn, I guess, had a difficult time of it, why and what about I'm not quite sure, but George regretted that he hadn't cautioned me ahead of time. Well, that didn't exactly make my day, but I was nonetheless determined that I would do my darndest to get along with whoever was in the congregation, difficult or not. I figured afterwards that George Spencer may have been referring to a retired school principal, Henry Burkland, a very strong personality, indeed, and a leading figure in the choir. Yes, he could be difficult sometimes, bellicose even, but he could also be tremendously supportive if you got on his right side. I figured if I could get along with Henry, I could get along with anybody, and I did just that. We became good friends, and I learned a lot about the art of ministry from him, and also from his dear sweet wife and lifelong companion Henrietta, who was a treasure and unfailing support to her church and minister.

I remember well the day of my ordination and installation as minister of the First Unitarian Society in Middleboro. I was just getting used to owning the name Unitarian Universalist, and here I was about to be officially ordained as a minister in my very first church. It was November 1st, All Souls Day, 1964. My family from Springfield and many close friends came to celebrate the occasion with me. Think of it. That was 50 years ago this past November. 2014 also marked the 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of this church and congregation. I am proud that my nearly five years of ministry here was part of the ongoing 125 years of ministry and service that still continues to this day.

I have many fond memories of my early ministry in Middleboro. I remember Christening five children at once one Sunday morning, all from the same family, Shirley March and her full crew of boys and girls, all coming up to the front of the church to be sprinkled and dedicated. That's still a record in my ministry. I recall Jackie Warren's cheerful endeavors to help me publish the weekly Sunday Bulletin and the monthly church newsletter aptly called One Liberal Voice. I remember Myron Hinckley telling me one Sunday how much he enjoyed coming to this church, because, as he put it, in contrast to other churches, you never knew what to expect at a UU service. I remember Eleanor (Walker) Osborne's guest vocalist solos, always a pleasure to hear, and Ken Johnson's ever so skillful classical piano renditions, and Ethel Cook's ability to make the organ come alive with her gnarled arthritic hands. I also took great delight in the fact that the congregation never objected to my being an active member of "The Cranberry Players", a local theatre group, letting me ham it up center stage and winning some awards for major and minor parts— one as a blind man in "Anastasia" with only six lines to memorize, and the other as a cemetery plot salesman in "Send Me No Flowers." Lots of laughs.

In the second year of my ministry in Middleboro, in December of 1966, I took on the Chairmanship of the Middleboro Mental Health Committee, with the assistance of Dr. Mary L. Warren and Mary Edgerly, in affiliation with the Taunton Mental Health Clinic, in the hopes of providing affordable therapeutic services to Middleboro residents. The Middleboro Committee eventually established a Thrift Shop above the Martinson building near the corner of Center and Oak Sts., to raise funds for the mental health project. Connie Johnson from First Unitarian Society helped coordinate the running of the Thrift Shop along with the very capable help of Jane Sullivan and Marilyn Doherty from Sacred Heart. The long term goal was to bring such services directly to the Town. The Middleboro Counseling Center on 94 South Main St. is the remnant or outcome of that effort from the 1960s, in the very house where Avis and Don Clay once resided.

The Civil Rights Movement and Protests Against the Vietnam War were the hot button issues of the day during my ministry in Middleboro. While a theological student at Andover Newton in the early '60s I recall going to hear Joan Baez sing, "Last Night I Had the Strangest Dream" at the Golden Vanity Coffee House in Boston. Her passion for peace was palpable and contagious. I was moved to speak out against the Vietnam War from the pulpit and did so. Following my sermon, Emil Cobb, the Vice-President of the congregation, asked if he might be permitted to say a few words in response to my sermon. He was recently returned from working as a lay engineering advisor in Saigon. Well, Emil spoke for another 15 minutes on the other side of the issue. It was an unrehearsed and unexpected demonstration of the freedom of the pulpit vs. the freedom of the pew. Some of the members didn't like being held captive for another unscheduled sermon, but I didn't mind. I thought it was a good lesson in putting the democratic spirit into practice. I was proud of Emil and proud of the congregation as well.

I remember becoming embroiled in a controversy with the John Birch Society in Middleboro, a controversy which involved me in an exchange of letters and a phone call from His Eminence Richard Cardinal Cushing (who had been misquoted in the local paper by the John Birch Society) and which made the front page of the *Boston Sunday Herald* and was entered into the Congressional Record. I never dreamed I would get my name in the Congressional Record after only one year in the ministry. What added to the intensity of the controversy was that our church had invited Leo Kahian, local head of the John Birch Society, to make a presentation about the political views of the Society at a Community Forum sponsored by our church. It was well publicized in the Middleborough Gazette. The highlight of the presentation was when the Birch Society portrayed former President Eisenhower as a Communist Sympathizer whether by intent or not. It was hard to believe what we were hearing, but there it was. Our Community Forum was living up to its reputation to provide a platform for any person or group to speak their mind whatever their beliefs or doctrines might be.

What sticks in my mind from that event is welcoming Leo Kahian into the front narthex of the church where he observed a framed statement of our now outdated Unitarian Universalist principles: "The Fatherhood of God, The Brotherhood of Man, The Leadership of Jesus, The Progress of Mankind Onward and Upward Forever." He was deeply touched by the sentiments expressed therein and said so. What Leo had not heard was the parody of those lines which said that Unitarians believe in the Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of Man and the Neighborhood of Boston—poking fun at our somewhat narrow focus on the geographical center of our faith. It's good that we can laugh at ourselves.

Well, even though Leo and I were miles apart in terms of our social and religious views we nonetheless came to have mutual regard and respect for one another. For at least a year or two Leo and Harry Soper, the Methodist pastor in town, and myself would meet every other week at the YMCA gym on Main St., and do our morning run and workout together. We all got along just fine when we were endeavoring to make ourselves more hale and hearty. Who'd of thought that would ever happen? But it did.

In addition to sponsoring a variety of Community Forums your church and its minister participated in the promotion of programs of what came to be called the Council for Religious Understanding. Ecumenical and interfaith dialogue was very popular at that time, and we had some good, hearty religious interchanges. I remember debating the nature of human nature with the local Baptist minister in town, Paul West, as well as the Catholic priest, Father Robert Rice, at one of the Council programs. There were also programs on "The Death of God" and "Was Jesus Divine?" Back in those days the town and churches held a Baccalaureate Service at the Church on the Green. I was invited to preach the occasional address and dared to speak on "Evolution and God" and suggested that we all had the capacity to participate in the evolution and growth of our spiritual selves.

It's been well noted in the public media that March 2015 also marks the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the March on Selma. I remember it well and preached a sermon entitled "The Faith of An Outsider" about the martyrdom of UU Boston minister James Reeb, and then days afterwards also of Viola Liuzzo, a UU lay leader from Detroit. As a small denomination we paid a high price and sacrifice for our participation in that history making event, the same kinds of sacrifices of life and limb that blacks had been making for two hundred years or more. Larry Carver, who was President of our congregation at that time, called me to let me know that if I felt it important to go to Selma to participate in the March, that he would back me 100%, and was sure the board and congregation would do so as well. I was not able to make the trip, but I felt fully supported by congregants and church leaders to do whatever I felt I needed to do under the circumstances.

As it turned out I had become Chairperson of the Ballou Channing District Social Responsibility Committee. I don't remember the details, but Homer Jack, head of the UUA Social Concerns Department, wanted to come and speak to UUs in our area about what the UUA was trying to do in response to the critical events in Selma. With the support of our own lay leadership I was able to offer the use of our church for this District wide program. The church auditorium was packed and the UU audience was deeply moved as we heard the details of what had happened and what needed to be done.

A couple of years later, in 1967, this church was again host to a district wide program on the Unitarian Universalist Response To the Black Caucus Rebellion, within the UUA itself, and in society at large. Elsie Gaudette, your royal queen of service extraordinaire was a member of the planning committee with me for that event. Though much progress has been made in race relations since the 1960s, it seems we are reliving many of the same kinds of issues that troubled church and society some five decades ago. Selma has become Ferguson and now Baltimore. "When will we ever learn?"

I remember performing two weddings at D. W. Field Park in Brockton in the summer of 1967, one by a waterfall. The waterfall wedding made the newspapers. The records showed it was the first wedding ever held in the park in its history. The best wedding that year, however, was my own, on the 17th of December, in this church, to Elinor Potter Buckley, the Secretary for the Ballou Channing District of UU Churches, and a member of the Brockton UU Church. The officiating minister was the Rev. John Kolbjornsen, minister of the First Parish in Norwell. Little did I know that a year or so later I would be his successor and minister in Norwell for 31 years.

The Middleboro congregation may have thought that they had seen the last of Dick Fewkes, but I snuck in the back door again when I sent you two of your finest future ministers, Elizabeth Tarbox and Tricia Tummino, who had the sense or nonsense to do their student minister training under my tutelage in Norwell. I preached their installation and ordination sermons here and gloried by proxy in their rich accomplishments of ministry. So here I am again, on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of my Ordination, come back to wish you well and to say you are well on your way to another successful and accomplished ministry in the person of Sarah Person. Here's to the next 125 years.

READING FROM "THE FAITH OF AN OUTSIDER"  
(RESPONSE TO EVENTS IN SELMA) - R.M. FEWKES – MARCH 1965

There are no "outsiders" anymore when it comes to the rights of all citizens to human dignity and justice. In such matters, there are only "insiders", and the only "outsiders" are those who continue to make a mockery of human rights and justice....The murderers of James Reeb are already out on bail. What are the chances that they will ever be brought to trial and convicted? Who are the "outsiders" and the "insiders" when it comes to the rights of the Negro in a court of law, or to the white "nigger lover"? Suddenly they find themselves to be "outsiders" who have lost their rights which they never really had in the first place.

It is strange how many of the great heroes of faith of old were considered "outsiders" by the people of their time. Socrates was a disturber of the peace, an "outsider" in terms of his constant questioning of the ways and thinking of his people....Jesus was considered an "outsider", a Northern Galilean Prophet, who had come to Jerusalem in the South to stir up trouble by upsetting the money changers in the Temple. He was executed as a criminal outside the walls of the City on Golgatha. The apostle Paul was an outsider everywhere he went. He preached a Gospel of Oneness in Christ which broke down the false barriers of slave and free, Greek and Jew. It was a step towards universalism.

Michael Servetus was considered an outsider by John Calvin in Geneva and he was put to death on the stake because he questioned the doctrine of the Trinity and believed in the principle of religious tolerance in questions of faith and doctrine.

Abraham Lincoln was considered a meddling outsider by the Southern States during the Civil War. They wanted to go their own way against the Emancipation Proclamation. In actual fact the only “outsiders” in this land which is your land and my land are those who would exclude people who belong to this free earth by their natural birthright. The “faith of an outsider” (the faith of a James Reeb), encircled the very people who drew a circle to keep him out. His circle was the largest circle of all, the circle of sacrificial love.

### PRAYER OF COMMEMORATION

Spirit of Life and of all Ages, past and present, and times yet to be, let us indeed this day, call to mind the names and persons of those who have served this congregation well in times past, both ministerial and lay leaders in various capacities and offices, during the ministry of Richard Fewkes, and before and afterwards as well, both those who have passed on, and those still among the living—we hold them all in sacred remembrance:

Helen Ashley; Lois Buck; Henry & Henrietta Burkland; Phyllis and Larry Carver and sons David and Tommy and Michael; Florence Chamberlain; Emil Cobb; Anita Cole; Dorothea Elkin; Elsie Gaudette; Rae Guidaboni; Bob and Jean Halleck; Myron Hinckley; Bill & Margy Hydorn; Ken Johnson; Sylvia McLaughlin; Joy Manchester; Celia Reimels, Pret Richmond; Everett Saunders; Sarah Cowen Shea; Bud Soule; Roger Tilton; Jackie Warren; and Ministers and their spouses: Frank Schlater; Howard Waterhouse; Porter Schermerhorn; John & Betsey Skeirik; Pat Herdklotz; Elizabeth Tarbox; Tricia Tummino; and our own current minister the Rev. Sarah Person. We lift up our hearts in deep gratitude for their ministrations and benedictions upon our lives and upon the continuing life and ministry of this congregation.

Each of us carries in our hearts and minds additional names and personages who have touched our lives through our connection to this congregation, the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Middleboro. You are invited, as the Spirit moves you to speak their names into the surrounding air, or to speak their names silently in the quiet depths of your inner being. (Let us take a minute or two to do so.)

As it was in the beginning of the spiritual life of this congregation a century and a quarter ago, is now, and ever shall be, may the life and work of the Beloved Community continue in each and everyone of us, wheresoever we may be, howsoever long we may live. In the generations to come, the people will tell of their wisdom and the congregation will show fourth their praise. Blessed be. Amen.

Rev. Richard M. Fewkes 4-26-15

**BENEDICTION**

**Now let us bless one another,**

**And keep one another;**

**Let us make our faces shine upon one another;**

**Let us lift the light of our countenances**

**Upon one another;**

**And in the great adventure of living,**

**Give each other peace and joy and love,**

**Both now and forevermore.**

**Amen.**

**--Harold Dean**