

Bicentennial Service - Closing Words

June 28, 2026

What a delight this morning to hear spoken in our church, the messages of these ground-breaking ministers. May the aspirations of their thoughts and dreams take root in our community, in our new state, in our young country, in our hearts and through us and our generations to follow, flow out into our whole world. What is the simple truth that encompasses all the insights, the struggles, the hopes, visions and dreams of all the generations of men and women around the earth? Our brother Jesus speaking for his spiritual brothers, and sisters in the Near East and with his forbears in China, India, Persia, the Middle East, Greece, Rome and smaller communities of wisdom on every continent, put it simply and eloquently:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 22:35–40)

Our Universalist faith tells us that when this spirit we call God looks at us it sees what we humans cannot. This loving power sees what’s on the inside while we can only see the outside. On the outside we see superiority and inferiority, power and weaknesses, heaven or hell, all determined by belief and tradition, while the love of God sees the inside of each living thing: striving to grow but hampered by ignorance, longing for closeness but held prisoner by fear, begging for forgiveness but terrified of a hell. The love of God enlightens ignorance, fosters community, forgives eternally and dispels the hopelessness of hell now and for all time. Like this God, we must love all of neighbors near and far.

Our Unitarian friends (and future partners, I expect), tell us to expand our minds as well as our hearts. Reverend Emerson challenged us to leave behind anthropomorphism when we contemplate God and free ourselves from the prisons of ancient texts and traditions. Living religion has nothing to fear from the discoveries of science. Reverend Emerson follows the great intuition of the man Jesus when he says to open our minds about this universal power and then love

what we come to know with “all of our heart, all of our soul and all of our mind”—as each of these continue to expand.

As we meet this morning in 1833, fellow Americans and human beings beloved of God are trying to escape the physical bondage of slavery. Frightened but unbelievably courageous, these fugitive slaves have no idea where they are headed but they know that they are willing to risk all to leave behind a state of imprisonment that is physically, morally and spiritually unbearable. They are risking all to journey into the unknown.

Universalist congregations across the Northeast are organizing to help these men and women and their families make a new home and to protect them from self-righteous bounty hunters who would return them to lives of bondage. For, in truth, as love and learning open our eyes, we see ourselves in the struggles of these fugitive friends. We too are engaged in the long exodus out of the lands of ignorance, fear and iron-bound tradition into a New World where men and women are seen as equal, where of course a woman may speak with authority from a pulpit or from we expect some day from the halls of Congress. We will keep moving until men, women, and children from every race, every tradition, every persuasion have secured the freedom which was their right from birth.

May it be so.

And now let's extinguish the chalice with some words from Mrs. Ball who will then lead us in a unison benediction.