

Unitarian Bicentennial Sermon for the Waterville Parish, c. 1833

“Our Faith, Tending To The Better Part of Our Nature”

Friends in Faith,

Thank you for having me here today. I find myself traveling much these past days. Yes, I have suffered great sorrow. My travels were my antidote to melancholy. But in so doing, I have discovered a newfound awareness of God, the wonder of nature and the mystery of faith, the belief in the goodness of mankind. To see, to deeply FEEL the wonders of God is to experience the essence of our faith. With zeal, I appreciate the majesty of God’s power to create mighty oaks and pine trees, expansive and powerful seas and rivers, and, when tilled and tended, bountiful fields of wheat and corn. It is awe inspiring in spite of the trials and challenges that confront us daily.

No doubt, we live in perilous times. We are challenged each day.

Are you powerless against these stiff winds? Our faith,

Unitarianism, affirms that God is a powerful partner. **The** Almighty is the singular and unique creator of the universe. In fact, it is quite simple, God is the one creator, the one true guiding light in our journey through this world. God has built a world where people of all walks, races, and nations have the capacity to choose justice, have it in their heart to lend a hand to those in need, AND to sincerely care for others.

We should never be deceived that a faith so grounded in compassion, honesty, and justice was created solely for certain nations, or peoples. For to believe that our faith is somehow reserved for us, white people of European decent, while abandoning those of other nations, of other tongues, of other traditions is to turn our backs on God.

It is good to be reminded that our religion is not only something we hear from the pulpit on the Sabbath, nor teachings only written in books, but it is a beacon of light that gives us the

power... power to not merely exist, but to grow like a sturdy maple tree able to withstand a gale force.

In this year of our Lord eighteen hundred and thirty-three, in a country that is yet young we find ourselves in need of a stable foundation in all walks of our lives. Many among you have cleared these fields with your hands. The forests that once stood thick upon the land have been cut away by your patient labor. The homes in which you live were raised by diligence and mutual help. None of these things were accomplished in a day, nor without great effort.

So it is with the life of the soul.

God has planted within each of us the seeds of goodness—a conscience to tell us what is right, the capacity to use reason to guide our understanding, and affection to bind us one to another. Yet these seeds, like the grains in our fields, must be tended if they are to bear fruit. If the farmer leaves his ground untilled, weeds

will surely grow. *If* we neglect the better part of our nature, selfishness and anger will take root.

But if we cultivate patience, honesty, tolerance, and kindness then the kingdom of God grows quietly within us.

I beg of you to be reminded that the Almighty does not delight in confusion or harsh judgment. His works around us—these hills, the forests, the wide rivers of our state—show a goodness and wisdom that invite our trust. And the same goodness calls us to live uprightly before Him.

Religion, then, is not chiefly a matter of dispute about doctrines which good people may understand differently. It is seen most clearly in the conduct of daily life. When a neighbor is in want and another lends a helping hand; when harsh words are restrained and patience takes their place; when a parent teaches a child truthfulness and reverence—there the spirit *of the Almighty* is present.

Each of us has our appointed labor. Some till the soil, some tend shops, some guide their households and instruct the young. These duties, faithfully performed, are themselves a kind of worship when they are done with a sincere heart and a regard for what is right.

And let none suppose that humble circumstances place them far from God. The poorest cottage may be as near to heaven as the grandest house, if within it dwell honesty, compassion, and charity.

How then, my neighbors, might our faith, Unitarianism look 200 years hence? Principally, we are a faith built upon reason, justice, tolerance, and compassion. As it is fundamental to us in these 1830's, we are a faith that holds most dear that each and every human is to be loved, valued, and respected, none above the other for all are the works of the Almighty. We hold this belief today,

and I am sure our descendants will hold this simple, yet essential belief higher than any in the days to come.

Please go forth, bow to the mystery and be well.