**November 7, 2021**

**Today’s Message:** “Spirituality and Military Service”

**Guest Speaker: Lou Botta**

ZOOM Meeting ID: 688 366 1936 Password: 265357

**Gathering Music** –“Colonel Bogey March” Alford

**Welcome and Announcements**

**Greet your Neighbors**

**Prelude –**“Variations on God Save the King” Nicholson

**Lighting the Chalice –**All Recite

**Opening Words***– From President Barack Obama’s 2009 Nobel speech:*

The soldier’s courage and sacrifice is full of glory, expressing devotion to country, to cause, to comrades in arms, but war itself is never glorious. And we must never trumpet it as such. So part of our challenge is reconciling these two seemingly irreconcilable truths: that war is sometimes necessary, and war, at some level, is an expression of human folly.

**Opening Hymn** –#103 “*For All the Saints*”

**Affirmation of Fellowship: –**All Recite

**Candles of Joys and Concerns**

**Words of Reflection – From** *Red, White, and UU,” delivered by Rev. Cynthia Kane, US Navy Chaplain in March 2009:*

Returning from... war are people—especially young people—with a crisis of faith, hurting and wounded to the core. For many of the service members, all they thought they believed about God and goodness is destroyed; they are looking for a way to make sense of their experiences and their lives.

The question for UU congregations is this: will we be the communities that can open our arms to these hurting people? Can we model how to move beyond assumptions about military members and their reasons for serving, and reach out to souls searching for another way of thinking, another way of being in the world? I believe we can.

Though initially my call to Navy Chaplaincy did not make sense to me, it does now. Since conflict and fighting have been a part of human history since the beginning of time, then for me to do the work of peace is more than just practicing peace, I must understand the making of war.

...We—you and I—we are a part of our nations’ souls. We, too, are patriots who cherish the rights and privileges of our countries. And we, too, support and defend our countries’ ideals through the very practice of our faith. Our countries need us. And we, in the military, need you.

**Silent Reflection**

**Offertory Music** –“Sakura” traditional Japanese melody

**Offering –**Please send check to: KUUF P.O. Box 1578,

New London, NH 03257

(also please consider adding KUUF to your will)

**Offertory Response** (to “Old Hundredth”)

**Hymn –**#166 “*Years are Coming*”

**Message** –**“Spirituality and Military Service”**

This coming week, we commemorate Veterans Day, a day devoted to celebrating those who served in our uniformed services throughout our history.  It originated at the end of World War One, supposedly the War to end all Wars, and yet we are here at the end of the longest conflict in our history.

This congregation has more than its fair share of veterans, still going back to World War II and Vietnam. And I fervently hope we can add more members soon, whose service incorporated a later period in our history.

We are celebrating Veterans Day because we share common values in a country where it often seems that our people repeatedly challenge and reformat our national mores.  As a country that reveres personal freedom as one of these intrinsic values, oftentimes we seem to take these same liberties for granted.  And moreover, as a society, we oftentimes fail to stand up to mitigate the injustices, both in our land and abroad, that are the cause of conflict.

Veterans Day is an opportunity to look to the sacrifice made by all our uniformed services.  The Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, and yes, there are two others, the US Public Health Service, and the National Oceanic and Space Administration Commissioned Corps.

As well as those members not in uniformed services whose lives are placed in danger while supporting our vital national interests, those in our Intelligence Community, whose service is an indispensable part of the asymmetrical nature of today’s wars.

This day for me has special significance as  I was not born in this awesome land.  My country of birth became a dictatorship early in my childhood.  We lost everything.  We came to these shores looking for freedom.  The day I landed on US soil, I made a solemn oath that the rest of my natural life would be dedicated to the welfare of my new nation.  I haven’t waivered in that commitment. And my faith has been deepened and expanded through our Unitarian Universalist principles.

Today, I want to touch on three topics as both, a man of arms and a Unitarian Universalist.  For some of you, these may be contradictory and perhaps even contentious. The first, is our chosen faith’s long relationship with military service and how the values and principles of Unitarian Universalism dovetail with and support military service and our brethren in arms.  The second topic is that as Unitarian Universalists, the concept of peace, engendering peace, and maintaining harmony are not exclusive of military service.  And third, that supporting the spiritual well-being of our people in uniform is our common responsibility.

It is proper to render a short historical nexus between Unitarian Universalism and military service going back to the great schism of the Puritan Church in the mid 1700s....

Let’s remember that the first drop of blood shed in the American Revolution at Lexington Green, was on the portico of the First Unitarian Church of Lexington, Massachusetts.  And that the Provincial Congress meetings in the events that culminated with our independence took place at the First Parish in Concord…

Seven US Presidents were formal or informal members of our chosen faith.  Some ardent revolutionaries and Founding Fathers were Unitarians or Universalists.  Thomas Paine, one of the main ideological leaders of the American Revolution, was an ardent supporter of the breakup with the motherland.  Ethan Allen, the man who gave us the Green Mountain Militia. The history of the Adams dynasty is also an intellectual history of their spiritual growth from Puritanism to Unitarian ideas.  Today, the ancestral church of the Adams family in Quincy, is the First Parish Church of Braintee, which went Unitarian in 1736.

The second Unitarian Church where I formally became a member, All Souls Unitarian in Washington DC, contains in its charter, the signatures of President John Quincy Adams and John C. Calhoun.

Both, the US Naval Academy in Annapolis – the brainchild of US Navy Secretary George Bancroft, and the US Military academy at West Point, founded by Sylvanus Thayer, were founded by Unitarians.

Go forward in the Abolitionist movement and the Civil War and the contributions of Unitarianism Universalismn are indelible.  The words of the Battle Hymn of the Republic resonate even today, composed by a Unitarian.  The ideological base of Abolitionism and its nexus to the values that supported the North in the Civil War were seeded largely by Unitarians and Universalists.  And so were the concept of Women’s suffrage and desegregation later.

Today, the largest growth in military chaplaincies is in Unitarian Universalism. It is part of the growing diversity of creeds and as well, of the new outlooks on life and spirituality among our general society and as a result, our military.  Our members in uniform come from every religion, every race, every ethnicity, and every socioeconomic status.

Before the advent of the All-Volunteer force, many were pressed into service during times of war or emergency.  To do an honorable duty and to answer a call of duty that transcended their very being.  From Lexington Green to the Barbary Coast, to Antietam and Gettysburg, to Havana Harbor and San Juan Hill, to the Argonne, Pearl Harbor, Corregidor, Midway, Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima, Okinawa, the Ardennes, Anzio, Montecasino, Grenada, Kuwait City, Fallujah, Baghdad, Tora Bora, Kandahar, Panama, the jungles of Colombia, Haiti, and other places too many to mention.

Our men and women didn’t go to war to make the Supreme Sacrifice because they enjoyed war.  They engaged in conflict because of a cause higher than their very being.  Such is the life and the soul of the American fighting forces.  And we owe them a debt of gratitude.

Reverend Arthur B. Fuller is a vivid example of Unitarian Universalism ideas in our history. Reverend Fuller’s served at the Manchester Unitarian Association and joined the US Army when the Civil War was declared. As a Unitarian chaplain in the US Army, Reverend Fuller was forbidden by law and tradition to bear arms. His desire for justice and humanity were paramount. As a result, he resigned his commission and joined the Massachusetts Regiment. He was killed in Fredericksburg VA during the Union siege in 1862.

Military service, military chaplaincy and the last-resort need for the use of force have been very much a part of the history of Unitarian Universalism since its beginning. And as well, represented the history of our people in search of spiritual meaning and supporting transcendental moral values.

Our second point, seeking peace and military service are not mutually exclusive. There is room within our faith for both.

The primary, and oftentimes, a non-negotiable objection to military service from many UUs stem from a large pacifist movement within our faith. I agree with much of it. Using our Unitarian Universalist Principles, and our personal example, we can and must work with members of our society at large to change minds and win hearts and mold human behavior so conflict and war ceases to happen. Within our Unitarian Universalist principles, there is no prohibition to military service.

The nexus between religion and military service are found in most worldwide denominations. There is a long history of Buddhism and martial service even when it affronts its tenets of pacifism and non-harm, or ahmisa. These go from protecting temples to maintaining modern standing armies. Within Western Civilization, the concept of the Just War is an integral part of its values from the days of St Augustine. It behooves Liberal Theology to be a part of the process to ensure the use of conflict as a last resort and even more, to ensure that, when necessary, conflict is proportional and necessary. To do otherwise is to abandon our world to despondency and cruelty.

If I have a criticism of the Unitarian Universalist theological world in the post-Vietnam timeframe, is the retreat of UUs from a significant part of the population we serve, when in fact, it is UUs who are more in sync with our young people in uniform today.

We live in an increasingly pluralistic, secular, and diverse society where younger people are alienated by the orthodoxy and rigidness of evangelic doctrine. Yet, they have a vital and unmet need for spiritual fulfillment and spiritual resiliency.

As Reverend Sarah Lammert, Co-Director of Ministries and Faith Development, of the Unitarian Universalist Association, eloquently stated, “We, as Unitarian Universalists, have largely abandoned this important arena to the Christian Right, who took over the military chaplaincy when we abandoned it after the Vietnam War”. And she points out that while the growth of UU chaplaincies in the military has been exponential, “We are stretched thin on the ground, trying to provide an open and welcoming approach to these young men and women who often lose their faith with the ugliness of war”.

The need for Unitarian Universalist presence in the rank and file of our US military is no different than the need for our values to be represented at the officer and command levels. If we are committed to changing the world to one with less conflict and more justice and equality, we need to work within the ranks of the structure or else, risking being a group of people who make a statement from far away.

And in the same way, there is a connection between our values of supporting the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and the need for justice and compassion in our human relations, and the values and needs of military families. Wives, husbands, sons and daughters, mothers and fathers who have suffered in silence the absence of their dear ones, have seen the unspeakable pain of reading the dreaded Western Union telegram, or watching the arrival of an entourage with a military chaplain and the casualty officer to give them some horrible news.  Families who have received the folded flags at the burial ceremonies.  That’s where we need to be and I’m ecstatic at a new way of looking at this issue within our chosen faith.

Our third point is our support for spiritual fulfillment among our military folks and families.

Our military people come from a pluralistic society which is increasingly secular, technologically dependent, humanistic, challenging, and science based. Yet, devoid of close social contact or emphasis on the mystic and spiritual. There is a deep chasm among our military people between the spiritual and the transcendental.

At the same time, the traditional avenues for spiritual well-being no longer respond to their needs. The orthodox Christian or Islamic faiths tend to be as judgmentally binary as the world becomes increasingly nonbinary.

And the orthodox constructs of sex, family life, the role of women, diversity and inclusion, general lifestyles and even personal epistemology are not acceptable for new generations. And because our society does not prepare young men and women with a strong spiritual core, their spiritual resilience is lacking.

The result is that our military has an increasing chasm between the structure and its members, particularly in spiritual formation. And that’s even in the absence of conflict.

We then send our people to do battle for us. And their sense of order is completely altered. They return to their homes with their moral and values paradigms altered and in need of non-material fulfillment.

Returning service personnel, particularly from the last undeclared conflict which again, was the longest in US history, return with post-combat trauma that can last a lifetime. What they have seen and experienced, was asymmetrical conflict for which textbooks are still being prepared. Vietnam was perhaps the first of these types of conflicts. And on a smaller yet no more important scale, we saw the rates of drug dependency, family breakups and suicide skyrocket.

While the suicide rate among Americans is around 19 cases per hundred thousand people, the rate among male veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan is 41% higher.

The Defense Department has taken notice that the despair of many troops returning from conflict is an indication of a spiritual vacuum. And as a result, there has been a plethora of studies and concerted action on the part of both military leaders and ecumenical organizations to develop a spiritual core among new recruits.

Dr. Lisa Miller, Professor of Psychology and Education at Columbia University, has chaired several of the ongoing efforts at the US Army Training and Doctrine Command. She states that “When it comes to resilience, the deepest source of renewal, revival and persistence is the spiritual core”. She also added “Science can never define spirituality,” she stated, “but it can look at the positive impact of spirituality on a person’s life.”

All services have now taken notice that a broken human being, religious or not, military or not, will find it hard to undertake the challenges of workaday life. The Army’s new Holistic Health and Fitness Initiative is designed to develop, improve and build the spiritual resilience of new recruits, current members and veterans. The Veterans Administration has formed a National Center for PTSD with spiritual resilience as its center core.

Whether together with religion or apart from it, spirituality is at the center of our existence. All of us.

This new emphasis on spiritual being in our military is 250 years too late, but welcome no less. And perhaps should be adapted to other situations in our life, whether post-disaster, or a part of family law. And for UUs, the challenge to be part of this new dimension is a part of the genesis of our faith. What’s more, we have a chance to touch and to teach others that our basic principles have been, are, and will be at the root of humanity and human perfectibility.

**Closing Hymn** –#144 “*Now is the Time Approaching*”

**Extinguishing the Chalice–**All Recite

**Postlude –**#110 “*Come, Children of Tomorrow, Come*!”

**Closing Words** – *From Creating Peace UUA Statement of Conscience:*

For Unitarian Universalists, the exercise of individual conscience is holy work. Conscientious discernment leads us to engage in the creation of peace in different ways. We affirm a range of individual choices, including military service and conscientious objection (whether to all wars or particular wars), as fully compatible with Unitarian Universalism. For those among us who make a formal commitment to military service, we will honor their commitment, welcome them home, and offer pastoral support. For those among us who make a formal commitment as conscientious objectors, we will offer documented certification, honor their commitment, and offer pastoral support.

Our faith calls us to create peace, yet we confess that we have not done all we could to prevent the spread of armed conflict throughout the world. At times we have lacked the courage to speak and act against violence and injustice; at times we have lacked the creativity to speak and act in constructive ways; at times we have condemned the violence of others without acknowledging our own complicity in violence. We affirm a responsibility to speak truth to power, especially when unjust power is exercised by our own nation. Too often we have allowed our disagreements to distract us from all that we can do together. This Statement of Conscience challenges individual Unitarian Universalists, as well as our congregations and Association, to engage with more depth, persistence, and creativity in the complex task of creating peace.