

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
SMALL GROUP SESSION
POLITICAL AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF DIFFERING CONSERVATIVE &
LIBERAL > VIEWPOINTS ON HUMAN NATURE
First Universalist Church UU, Auburn ME, Rev. Glenn Turner

OPENING WORDS & CHALICE LIGHTING

“If change and growth are not programmed into your spirituality, if there are not serious warnings about the blinding nature of fear and fanaticism, your religion will always end up worshipping the status quo and protecting your present ego position and personal advantage as if it were God.”

- Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*

SILENT REFLECTION

CHECK-IN: (40-50 minutes)

FOCUS: "POLITICAL AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF DIFFERING CONSERVATIVE & LIBERAL VIEWPOINTS ON HUMAN NATURE"

Three or four people sent me an article by Robert Leonard that appeared in the New York Times last week. It zeroes in on a topic we've discussed before: human nature. It's about the divide in theology with respect to what we believe about human nature. Are we born in sin or are we essentially good? Leonard tried to show how this played out in how people voted in November's election.

"Knoxville, Iowa — One recent morning, I sat near two young men at a coffee shop here whom I've known since they were little boys. Now about 18, they pushed away from the table, and one said: "Let's go to work. Let the liberals sleep in." The other nodded.

They're hard workers. As a kid, one washed dishes, took orders and swept the floor at a restaurant. Every summer, the other picked sweet corn by hand at dawn for a farm stand and for grocery stores, and then went to work all day on his parents' farm. Now one is a welder, and the other is in his first year at a state university on an academic scholarship. They are conservative, believe in hard work, family, the military and cops, and they know that abortion and socialism are evil, that Jesus Christ is our savior, and that Donald J. Trump will be good for America.

They are part of a growing movement in rural America that immerses many young people in a culture — not just conservative news outlets but also home and church environments — that emphasizes contemporary conservative values. It views liberals as loathsome, misinformed and weak, even dangerous."

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“The difference between Republicans and Democrats is that Republicans believe people are fundamentally bad, while Democrats see people as fundamentally good,” said Mr. Watts, who was in the area to campaign for Senator Rand Paul. “We are born bad,” he said and added that children did not need to be taught to behave badly — they are born knowing how to do that.

“We teach them how to be good,” he said. “We become good by being reborn — born again.”

He continued: “Democrats believe that we are born good, that we create God, not that he created us. If we are our own God, as the Democrats say, then we need to look at something else to blame when things go wrong — not us.”

Mr. Watts talked about the 2015 movie theater shooting in Lafayette, La., in which two people were killed. Mr. Watts said that Republicans knew that the gunman was a bad man, doing a bad thing. Democrats, he added, “would look for other causes — that the man was basically good, but that it was the guns, society or some other place where the blame lies and then they will want to control the guns, or something else — not the man.”

“Republicans, he said, don’t need to look anywhere else for the blame.”

I came across the opposite viewpoint expressed by John D. Caputo.

“The Right thinks that the breakdown of the family is the source of crime and poverty, and this they very insightfully blame on the homosexuals, which would be amusing were it not so tragic. Families and ‘family values’ are crushed by grinding poverty, which also makes violent crime and drugs attractive alternatives to desperate young men and sends young women into prostitution. Family values are no less corrupted by the corrosive effects of individualism, consumerism, and the accumulation of wealth. Instead of shouting this from the mountain tops, the get-me-to-heaven-and-the-rest-be-damned Christianity the Christian Right preaches is itself a version of selfish spiritual capitalism aimed at netting major and eternal dividends, and it fits hand in glove with American materialism and greed.”

- John D. Caputo, “What Would Jesus Deconstruct?: The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church”

DISCUSSION:

1. If you had to be pinned down to one or the other, are we essentially “good” or “bad?” Try a scale from 1 to 10 with 1 being “good.”
2. Would we be any better or worse if everyone in the country was white and Christian? Why or why not?
3. Does government exist to keep us in line or help us live a good life?
4. How can we co-exist with people who hold opposing philosophical views?
5. What in human history can help us understand our dilemma?

LIKES AND WISHES

CLOSING WORDS:

“Community is a sign that love is possible in a materialistic world where people so often either ignore or fight each other. It is a sign that we don’t need a lot of money to be happy--in fact, the opposite.”

- Jean Vanier, Community And Growth