

**“The Dream of a World Community”**

Sunday Service, Oct. 18, 2009

Rev. Chip Wright

G

When I get older losing my hair,

D7

Many years from now,

D

Will you still be sending me a valentine,

G

Birthday greetings, bottle of wine?

G

If I'd been out till quarter to three

G7

C

Would you lock the door?

G

E7

Will you still need me, will you still feed me,

A

D7 G

When I'm sixty-four?

Em

Bm

You'll be older too--

Em

Am

And if you say the word,

C

D

G

I will stay with you .....

I imagine there are some of you thinking just what in the world does a Beatles' song have to do with a dream of a world community?

Well, when I was asked to do a service focused on this theme in September, I headed off to do some research and then right in the middle of it wham, like an old record that song started off in my head?

You remember what records are?—those round grooved things that spin under a needle? Well, as I was reading, that old Beatles' song started up in my head with all the scratches and clicks from my old worn out record. What brought this song up for me was a real connection to today's topic.

Just like in the song, next week on Saturday we celebrate a 64<sup>th</sup> birthday. A birthday we all should remember. Why? Because it is the birthday of a symbol, an institution, that may be the best hope for world community that we have ever had. 64 years ago next Saturday an organization was born which has become, through its ongoing evolution -- a hope, a possibility, a window, through which one can perceive world community, gathered under a common ethical intent and economy. An institution that we

created to give focus to our intention to help create a world working for the betterment of the whole earth, unencumbered by national borders, and considerate and caring of its rich diversity. Thought shrouded under many layers this organization holds in its conception the possibility of a joyful sense of a growing life, of a set of values that may well be the last best hope we will ever have to shift this ever more crowded world of ours. So on this coming Saturday Oct 24<sup>th</sup>, 2009 we will toast the 64<sup>th</sup> birthday of the United Nations.

But before we raise our glasses too fast, is the UN, like in the song says, loosing its hair and staying out late, and maybe at risk of loosing its partners? I suppose in some ways it is, and certainly through some eyes. We all know there are many people who would like to see the demise of this institution. It's true it has had a checkered history and a questionable motivation for its beginnings. This has had an effect on it true, but it is still in the least a start, if not having grown at this point into a beginning.

The United Nations was first conceived many years ago as the League of Nations which was formed at the end of WWI at the Treaty of Versailles. It was signed into being by twenty some nations on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1919 six months after the official end of

World War 1. It was a product of its times, and truly a good idea. But context is a powerful thing and the effect on the league coming to be right at that peak of the industrial revolution and the rise of monopolies which grew like wildfire in it was real.

These dynamics in turn led to such things as unions, consistent work hours for laborers, child labor laws, days off, and all underpinned by women getting to vote. Like all times such as these, it was vibrant flush with oppositions and polarization, very much like we see today. Under it all there was a basic core conflict between the obscenely wealthy and all the others. It was a time of great forward movement and of devastation, war and sickness.

It was the beginning of the roaring twenties, prohibition, the world deeply scared by the great flu epidemic, which had killed thousands upon thousands, and it was all capped off by the Great Depression. That time which still rings in the hearts and minds of many, and which left deep scars on our people and this culture.

The League of Nations itself was fairly ineffective even at its height in 1936 when it had 56 nations signed on. But when it failed at stopping WW2, it failed its mandate to prevent another world

war and lost support. For all intent and purposes the organization ended then.

But the idea of a peaceful community of nations was not totally forsaken, having strong roots that go back much further than the League's birth.

This idea had its beginnings in the writings of Immanuel Kant, one of the strongest voices in the liberal religious enlightenment of the eighteenth century. In his 1795 work, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*, Kant goes into depth about this idea of a '*league of nations*' with a focus on controlling escalation of conflicts between nation states with the intent of promoting peace. He believed that there can be a world community without there being a need for a global government. Kant argues in his work for establishment of a peaceful world community, not in a sense that there is a global government but that each nation state would declare themselves free along with their citizens, and then welcome all foreign visitors as other rational beings. He goes on to say "It is in this rationalization that a union of free states would promote peaceful society worldwide, therefore there can be a perpetual peace bound by the international community. [There can be] international cooperation to promote collective security."

Franklin Roosevelt recognized the potency of such ideas and was able to convince 26 heads of governments to sign on to the Atlantic Charter in January 1942. Gathered to fight the axis nations of Germany, Italy and Japan, these players were called by Roosevelt the 'United Nations'. Then in 1945, at the close of World War 2, in response to the human costs, the United Nations Charter was drawn up and officially signed by 46 of the 50 founding nations here in San Francisco at the Hearst Theater. A few months later in January 1946 the first meeting of the General Assembly was held at Westminster Hall in London. By then 51 nations had signed on to the Charter.

Up and through its history members have increased to currently number 192 nations and there are many associated NGO's, or non government organizations. It is difficult to see how we can become unified enough to tackle the overwhelming conflicts and issues of our times. When I look at the UN these days I often see this institution as a symbol of the end game of western culture, and the myth of the value of industrialization. It certainly carries that shadow. And I suppose it must, given the political and economic climate.

It is in the end like all large institutions, its systems prone to operate in the status quo. This in turn makes it more difficult to be responsive to all the important and current challenges. I become dismayed often by its actions, by its history and so much of these inner workings. Still I know it must not go the way of the League of Nations, and I continue to support the efforts and certainly the charter of the United Nations. The charter which is not that unlike our own UUA purposes and principles statements.

Like democracy I see the United Nations at this time in its life as the best bad system we have, to do much of this work of human rights and justice globally. I say this because the United Nations at its core can be seen as a tremendous possibility for such good; that it cannot, and should not be lost or ignored. A possibility has always been embedded within the corners of its other negative history.

The United Nations has grown into something more in many ways and that gives me at least the hope of its continued evolution. Within these changes are the seeds of what the institution can become tomorrow and in the distant future. Never underestimate that the United Nations, based on time-transcending values, has in it the ability to become more than it is and remains a representation

of a possibility, to bring its hidden hopes forward. Even beyond wishful thinking, the United Nations has proven that the idea of a world community can come to pass and that it will grow if we can remain committed to that ideal.

If we can keep from destroying the species before it wakes up to its responsibility, I truly believe that we will see a new form of care expressed throughout the world, one that does not judge before it understands and that works to sustain and better the whole as opposed to self and tribe. A world where once again the value of self, is not defined by how much you can hoard, keep for yourself but by how much you can give away.

Certainly the United Nations has its limits, as we all do. And it is easy enough to become drawn into the negative side of the history and institutionalization of this organization. But I will not buy into believing that the idea of world community of care and hope is not achievable.

Our whole planet's destiny relies on our human capacity to find a balance that works for us all. We hold a unique responsibility as the stewards of this very fragile and vital earth. For all its life and

matter, we are the keepers of tomorrow. And it begins with learning how to live as one human family.

Therefore it is incumbent on us representative humanity to stand true and clear in the face of those who would crush this opportunity for a world community, to further their own avarice and thirst for power. We cannot capitulate to the transient and illusionary arguments they bring, when there is a greater truth waiting to reach through our attempts, feeble as they may have been, to come together and create a true world community.

Certainly this hope has a sustaining power written into its bones. We can make it happen. Every little step we take is a step towards realizing it. We may never see it but we can be sure the road to it is not blocked.

Today we stand at the cross-roads, where we can look back to where we have stumbled, or become fearful of what might lurk in the shadows or even bury our heads in the sand. Or we can look forward into the work ahead.

As a religious people, we Unitarian Universalists have a tradition of counting on the future and the change which will come through

it. Likewise, we have understood the United Nations as another step in the ongoing growth and changes that accompany all things. This United Nations is one place where we can stand in support and help to move the world forward.

So as one of the few, if not the only religious institution that does, the Unitarian Universalists have maintained a UN office and a representative to the United Nations. Instead of being frightened or threatened by it, we remain excited about that which can come to pass out of this kind of effort.

We must keep this dream of world community alive. That starts with working towards nations talking with one and the other. If there is to ever be a hope of developing compassion and care across economic, cultural and national lines: The United Nations is the best tool we have to work with.

And like in the song asks, can the UN count on us, count on our trust—Can we trust that it has not gone away and will stay the course? After all the United Nations has continued to be here with us this last 64 years. And it has continued to grow around the world connected to over 192 member states. It remains committed to actually working on the things it can, to help move the world

ahead and towards a brighter future for all. Yes, little steps at a time, true; but forward none the less. And in the face of constant interference and dismissal from all sides, the United Nations has not gone away, and with our help will be around ‘many years from now.’ So as we honor and celebrate 64 years of the United Nations existence next Saturday, the question for all of us is still:

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