

Goodness Without God—December 2014

UUFVB Covenant Groups

Chalice Lighting

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings,
but connected, in mystery and miracle,
to the universe, to this community and to each other.

Check-in: How is your spirit right now?

Opening Reading

Opening words: Is something good because "God" wills it, or is it good independent of God's will? Plato asked 'Is what is holy 'holy' because the gods approve it, or do they approve it because it is holy?' The first view, that God determines or decides what is good, makes divine approval arbitrary ... if something must be good in order for God to approve it, then it is good independently of God's approval and therefore it is not God's approval that makes it good."
(Rev. William Murry, *Reason and Reverence*)

Topic Exploration

Nearly all societies in written history believe that murder and incest, lying and breaking promises are wrong....family loyalty and caring for children are morally important. Versions of the Golden Rule have been around with one of the earliest known written ones being from Confucius in 400 BCE when he said "What you do not want others to do to you, do not do to others." These statements relate to human goodness, but do not necessarily relate to following a God.

Questions/sharing:

1. If morality is not grounded in a divinity, what then is the source or foundation of ethics and moral value?
2. Is the prohibition against stealing, God's law or human law? If human, why does it exist? Why is it good to not steal another person's belongings? Is stealing ever justified?
3. Is "goodness" an absolute for all peoples in some respects, or is it purely a matter of culture? Thou Shalt Not Kill, seems to be a common theme of "goodness," yet it is commonly violated in all cultures. How do we draw the line in what is really good?"
4. Being charitable is an act of goodness....or is it? Charity IS simply an expression of selfishness. I give because it makes me feel good." (Murry) By that definition charity is Godless, but is it "being good"?
5. The person who expresses an obligation to give back to their community. Good, or egotistical?

6. Rev. Alexander asked in a recent sermon if it was the moral and right thing to do to follow all of the dictates of the Bible....what about the one that says Honor thy Mother and thy Father? What if the father was a pedophile who raped his child, the mother a person who constantly belittles or beats her child?

7. So, by whatever definition of "good" we arrive at, can we be or are we good without reference to some supernatural deity?

Closing Reading

"Moral thinking requires the ability to transcend ourselves, to put ourselves in the place of others and to ask how we would feel if we were in their situation. This capacity for empathy and self-transcendence, so essential to the moral process, develops gradually in children, as it must also have done in the history of the human race." (Rev. William Murry, *Reason and Reverence*)

Extinguish the Chalice

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth,
the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.
These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Housekeeping