

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Vero Beach
Covenant Groups
Changing Values

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: What is most on your mind today?

Opening Reading:

The Ten Commandments, abridged and listed, from the Christian and Hebrew Bibles, Exodus 20:1-17, are often found engraved in stone on court building walls as evidence to their influence on our civil law:

- 1 Do not have any other gods before God
- 2 Do not make yourself an idol
- 3 Do not take the Lord's name in vain
- 4 Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy
- 5 Honor your Father and Mother
- 6 Do not kill
- 7 Do not commit adultery
- 8 Do not steal
- 9 Do not testify or bear false witness against your neighbor
- 10 Do not covet

Jesus was frequently accused by the Jewish religious leaders of failing to conform to their rigid and inflexible rules, instead judging each concrete situation individually by some overarching guidance they didn't understand. Trying to trick him into condemning himself, he was asked:

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

- Matthew 22:34-37, Christian Bible, NRSV

Topic Exploration:

Some believe there are moral absolutes while others say, no, the circumstances of life must always affect our value judgments. Though we live in a pluralistic society, the “ten commandments” of the Hebrew and the Christian Bibles provide a standard of morals that permeates not only our American culture, but that are reflected in large part in most of human society. Though conservative evangelicals would claim that Jesus is one of their own, his own words seem to question their rigid standards.

When asked by religious scholars, Jesus provided a simple standard for living of only two requirements, love God and love your neighbor. Many of the New Testament stories seem to reveal Jesus applying and teaching “Situational Ethics.” One such incident centers around a woman “caught in infidelity” (where was the man, we wonder) who was about to be stoned by crowd according to the “law of Moses.” Jesus shames them with the famous retort: “He who is without sin throw the first stone,” and the crowd slips away.

“Situational ethics” recognizes that it is very difficult to categorically apply any moral absolute in all situations, especially when the situation involves oneself or a loved one. Every situation has its own peculiar circumstances which makes even “thou shall not kill” a sometimes a difficult standard to live by, as in war time or in protecting the weak and vulnerable or oneself and family. Abortion is one of the moral issues which divide our nation by with the conservatives championing the **moral absolute** and the liberal's ethic based on a woman's right to choose – which, in concrete terms comes down to **situational ethics** for the woman choosing. Ending a pregnancy was once a totally unacceptable choice, according to societal norms, but the circumstances of individual women's lives meant it still happened, often with unnecessary tragic results.

Deeply held moral principles help to guide us in a world that requires us to make difficult decisions which may bring good or ill to ourselves and/or others. Each decision, however, faces a new, peculiar set of circumstances which can sometimes challenge even the most sacrosanct and beloved principle.

Questions/Sharing:

1. Do you believe that there exist indelible ethical standards that never change? What are those, and what are their bases? From where do they come?
2. Do you believe that moral judgments must necessarily depend upon the circumstances of any situation? If so, upon what standards are those judgments made?
3. Many commonly accepted moral standards have arisen from the world's major religions, the Ten Commandments, for example. If one is not a believer, perhaps an atheist, agnostic, humanist, etc., upon what does one base their moral principles?
4. Cultures change and with them, values change. Marijuana is soon to be an acceptable recreational drug in most of our country. Gender designations are extremely fluid today with many young people choosing to reject any label and using the pronoun “they” rather than “he” or “she.” Diversity seems to be valued more today than 50 years ago, though not by all. Do you agree with the changes? Why or why not?
5. Psychological studies reveal that a person's values often change through the different stages of life. Is this true for you? How have they changed for you?
6. Are your values and moral standards still open to change? Why or why not?

Closing Reading:

“Everything I need to know... I learned in kindergarten...”

1. Share everything. 2. Play fair. 3. Don't hit people. 4. Put things back where you found them.
5. CLEAN UP YOUR OWN MESS. 6. Don't take things that aren't yours. 7. Say you're SORRY when you
HURT somebody...

— Robert Fulghum, **All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten**

Checkout and reflections on today's session: Please take a moment to express your closing thoughts on the content or process of today's session

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

UUFVB covenant groups program/c.m.