

## “Authenticity”

### “Authenticity” A Sermon by

**The Reverend Bill Clark**

“*Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain,*” the perfect example of in-authenticity. Trying to be something you are not!!

Still it is never a good idea to define something by what it is not.

“Authenticity, from an existentialist perspective, is the degree to which one is true to one's own personality, spirit, or character, despite external pressures; the **conscious self** is seen as coming to terms with being in a material world and with encountering external forces, pressures, and influences which are very different from, and **other** than, itself. A lack of authenticity in existentialism is considered to be *bad faith*.” (*Internet: Authenticity; Wikipedia*)

Two existential thinkers, Soren Kierkegaard, and Fredrick Nietzsche's, had very differing viewpoints on this idea of authenticity. For Kierkegaard Authenticity, is reliant on an individual finding **authentic faith** and becoming true to oneself. Similarly, he interprets religion as a tradition that

is passively accepted by individuals, without the inclusion of authentic thought. (*Internet: Authenticity; Wikipedia*)

Nietzsche's view of authenticity is an atheist interpretation of Kierkegaard. He rejects the role of religion in finding authenticity because he believes in finding truth without the use of virtues. Nietzsche believes of the authentic man as the following: Someone who elevates himself over others in order to transcend the limits of conventional morality in an attempt to decide for oneself about good and evil, without regard for the virtues "on account of which we hold our grandfathers in esteem." Nietzsche rejects the idea of religious virtues due to the lack of questioning by the individual. (*Internet: Authenticity; Wikipedia*)

I believe this is where we come upon those who follow a religious value or teaching in what the philosopher calls a herd mentality – or as Kierkegaard states it without the inclusion of authentic thought.

Yet clearly this is not who we are as a religious movement. The questioning of our faith is not considered "bad faith" rather it is a journey to find our authentic self in relation to this faith. This is based on the inclusion of authentic thought.

It was not until I entered seminary where the question of authenticity continually came into play.

As seminarians we were constantly encouraged to find our authentic voice and speak with authentic truth. In this way I guess I fall more under the Kierkegaard philosophy of authenticity in that as a minister by authenticity is based on our religious values of Unitarian-Universalism – a religious movement devoid of any herd mentality. We UU's are taught to question, doubt, examine and explore these values to see if they fit our authentic selves.

An example in 1995 when I first entered seminary I was still a practicing Christian Scientist. I loved the fact that I could be a practicing Christian Scientist and a Unitarian Universalist at the same time. Yet, as I began to learn and absorb more the UU mind of reason and rationality slowly the Christian Science way of being in the world did not fit this new faith of UU. I could no longer speak with an authentic voice of my belief in the teachings of Mary Baker Eddy. Truth be told it was a time of great confusion, anxiety and deep soul searching to find my authentic voice again.

Every minister must go through what Emerson called the “fire of thought” to come to terms with their authentic self. This is one of the challenges to our faith of Unitarian-Universalism. Depending on what church/society or

congregation you visit and what ministerial presence is there – it all may be completely different from what you are used to experiencing. I know ministers who would be absolutely shocked and appalled by the emotion I demonstrate in the pulpit. But this is who I am. It is not planned or calculated. It is my authentic voice coming through – all right it comes through a little shaky sometimes – but it is all me!!!

I resonate with May Sarton when she states; “We have to dare to be ourselves, however frightening or strange that self may prove to be.” It is never easy to be your authentic self and speak your authentic truth. I am not sure why this has to be. But in a world where image and versions of one self seemed to be acceptable – when you can say one thing and then go out and do just the opposite becomes the norm – you could say we have lost the standard of authenticity. Such actions, I know firsthand, rile up the GLBT community. When some of our elected leaders vote against equal rights for the GLBT community and are later outed via a scandal you are left wondering what has happened to authenticity. And the saddest part of this is most are Republicans!

Senators Larry Craig, Carl Krueger, and Roy Ashburn, Governor McGreevey, Alabama’s Attorney General Troy King just to name a few. If

the national standard states that being gay is somehow detrimental to becoming an effective leader such closeted responses would be valid. But there is nothing like that in existence. It is a personal matter. If for example you are Senator Roy Ashburn, co-founder of the Family Research Council, an anti-gay lobbying group, and are arrested for a DUI after coming out of a gay bar, this presents a major problem to one's authenticity. It is like the ole wives tale; 'do as I say, not as I do.'

But Thomas Jefferson said it best we he stated; "It is in our lives and not our words where religion must be met." Unitarian Universalist asks of us nothing more or less. Our lives, our values and beliefs grant us the path to authentic living.

Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain; because the privilege of a lifetime is to become who truly are. To thine own self be true!!

Amen and Blessed Be.