

What does it mean to be a people of *Truth*?



The Quest for Truth

As 2016 unfolds, we return to reflecting on the meaning of the covenant that we say every week and what it means to be a people that live out love, truth, service and peace.

We begin in January with truth. I can't help but think of comedian Stephen Colbert's coining of the word "Truthiness." According to Colbert, "truthiness" is a kind of truth a person asserts or argues which one claims to know intuitively, or "from the gut," without any regard to evidence, logic, intellectual examination or facts.

Truth feels like an especially relevant and difficult topic in a time when there is so much division between people. Whether we are talking about global climate change, policing in the US, the impacts of migration and immigration, the response needed in the face of the refugee crisis, or the best ways to respond to terrorism, there is a gulf in perspectives and all sides seem to have facts they can quote to bolster their arguments. Where is truth in all of this division?

Perhaps the challenge is really one of truthiness. In other words, the differences may not really be about the facts, but about fundamental moral differences in how people see the world, what they hold sacred, how they see themselves in relationship to others, to God, to creation. For all of these have a profound effect on how we see and respond to the world and the trials of living.

As Unitarian Universalists, this is especially interesting, because we don't covenant to promote or protect or instill the truth. Rather, we covenant to make the quest for truth our sacrament. Sacrament is not a word we use very often. It means sacred act. So, with these words, we are saying that to always seek truth is our religious practice.

Fortunately or unfortunately, there is a paradox that comes with always seeking truth. It encourages creativity, curiosity and a willingness to question and look more deeply and critically at what we are told. However, if taken seriously, it also leads to the discovery that there may not be any one capital "T" truth. Experience, perspective, context impact one's truth. As the Nobel Prize winning physicist Niels Bohr said, "The opposite of a correct statement is a false statement. But the opposite of a profound truth may well be another profound truth." It is these profound truths that we are in search of as Unitarian Universalists.

When it comes to the challenges of our day, we are at a critical junction. How we choose to proceed and respond to these crises matters. However, simply debating the "facts" or looking only at the surface issues will not suffice. What is needed is to engage and share the deep profound truths we hold most dear. For these are the values and principles that become the foundation for how we view the world, how we respond to fear or despair. These profound truths are a bedrock that shape how we live, how we see the world and one another. They shape how we share and what we give. This is where we must engage the questions and trials of today.

This month, we will dive into issues that are at the surface, but we will also explore and share the more profound truths that guide our living. It is incredibly valuable, when confronted with so much tragedy, that we move beyond the surface arguments to really engage the deep profound truths so that we may be clear on which truths we wish to build our communities and societies upon.

Rev. Susan

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Living the Theme: Truth

Choose one of the exercises below to engage the theme. Come to the meeting prepared to share how you tried to experience the theme and what you learned from the practice.

1 Cultivate an Inquiring Mind

from *Raising Freethinkers: a practical guide for parenting beyond belief*, Dale McGowan, et.al., 2009

The search for truth begins with assessment of facts and open inquiry. This month, encourage your family (and yourself) to cultivate an inquiring mind. There are three main requirements for an inquiring mind: (1) self-confidence, (2) curiosity, and (3) an unconditional love of reality.

1. Self-confidence. The best way to instill confidence is to encourage autonomy. ...Inquiry is the act of a confident, autonomous mind. It's the act of someone who believes she can break through the walls between ignorance and knowledge. If you want inquiring kids, work on confidence—and confidence starts with autonomy.

2. Curiosity. ...No one asks questions if he isn't curious about the answers. The parent of a ravenously curious little boy once told me that the boy's grandmother, exasperated at the child's endless questions, once said, "You don't have to know everything!" Yes, it's sometimes hard to stay patient and engaged.... Indifference overtakes us soon enough. Nurture curiosity while it's natural and wild.

3. The unconditional love of reality. ...I want my kids to see the universe as an astonishing, thrilling place to be no matter what.... I want them to feel unconditional love and joy at being alive, conscious, and wondering. Like the passionate love of anything, an unconditional love of reality breeds a voracious hunger to experience it directly, to embrace it, whatever form it might take. Children with that exciting combination of love and hunger will not stand for anything that gets in the way of clarity. Their minds become thirsty for genuine understanding, and the best that we can do is stand back.

2 Watch a Documentary to Discover the Truth

Documentaries often shed light on an issue that has been widely ignored, and filmmakers are able to uncover truths that some would prefer to hide. Check out Kickstarter.com, Gofundme.com or Indiegogo.com to discover upcoming documentaries that need funding and make a donation. Some recommended local documentaries are:

Salud Sin Papeles: Health Undocumented: <http://tinyurl.com/health-undocumented>

Borders and Climate Change Documentary: <https://www.gofundme.com/bordersclimate>

See "Recommended Resources" at the end of this packet for more films.

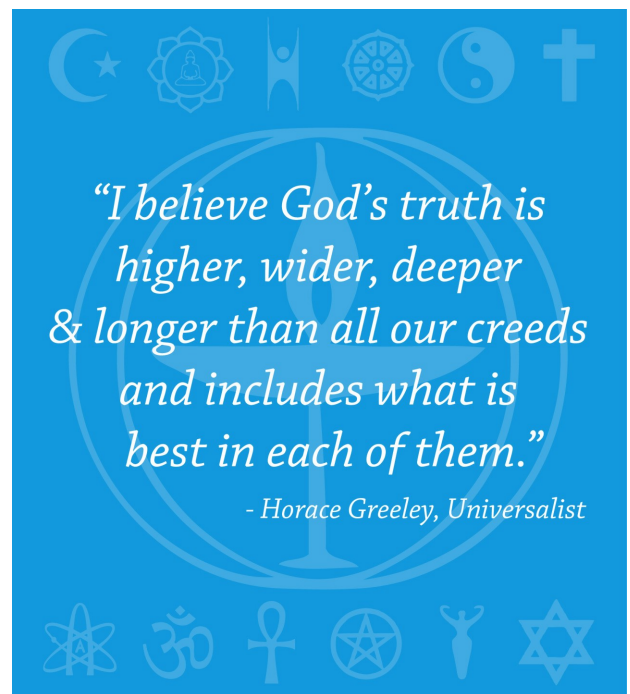


Image credit Jessica Ferguson via UUmediaworks.tumblr.com

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Questions to Live With

Simply look over these questions and find one that “hooks” you. Live with it for a while. Allow it to regularly break into – and break open – your ordinary thoughts. Then come to your group prepared to share the journey.

1. **Have you ever changed your mind about a truth you once held?** When did you change your mind and why? Did any new truth(s) emerge in its place?
2. **Are there any truths you held in childhood that you no longer hold?** What was it like to let go of older truths?
3. In your own search for truth, what have been lasting discoveries that you have found? In other words, **what truths have you discovered in your own life?**
4. **Have you ever been untrue to yourself?** What did this feel like? How did you – or are you still working on – being true to yourself?
5. The words “know thyself” were inscribed on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. **How do you “know” yourself? What things have you learned about yourself that you did not know and that surprised you when you learned them?**
6. **Think about a few things you hold to be true. What role do these truths play in your life?** Are they a source of comfort in times of difficulty? Are they a reminder to you in times of discouragement or despair? Do they give you strength?
7. Otto Rank wrote, “With the truth, one cannot live. To be able to live, one needs illusions.” **Do you agree? Have you cultivated illusions? When? Why? How?**
8. **Sometimes denial or illusions stem from hidden assumptions or blindspots. Have you ever seen these at play in yourself or others?** What was the reward for self-deception? What was the cost?
9. **Has your own search for truth, led you to feel there is no capital T “Truth”?** If so, what does that mean for you? Is it freeing, unsettling?
10. **When was a time when you felt like you discovered some important truth?** How did you discover it? On your own, or listening to someone else? How did learning/discovering this change your outlook on your life?
11. **To what extent does our society value the truth and truth telling?** How do groups/organizations respond to truth-tellers and whistle-blowers?
12. **Is it possible to find the truth about what is happening in the world today?** How do we best vet the sources of news?
13. **Is truth always the best policy?** When is a lie a better option, or is it ever?
14. **Is omission of a fact the same as not telling the truth?**
15. **When have you really tried to tell the truth, and no one believed you?**
16. **When have you been accused of lying?** What was that experience like?
17. **What is an example of a truth that has changed society?**
18. **What truths are hardest to tell? Or hardest to hear?**



Image credit Kristina Benner, via www.canva.com

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Wise Words

Truth:

- The true or actual state of a matter: *to tell the truth*.
- Conformity with fact or reality; verify: *to check the truth of a statement*.
- A verified or undisputable fact, proposition, principle: *mathematical truth*
- The state or character of being true.
- Actuality or actual existence.
- An obvious or accepted fact; truism; platitude.
- Honesty; integrity; truthfulness.

The moment we begin to fear the opinions of others and hesitate to tell the truth that is in us, and from motives of policy are silent when we should speak, the divine floods of light and life no longer flow into our souls.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

People who shut their eyes to reality simply invite their own destruction, and anyone who insists on remaining in a state of innocence long after that innocence is dead turns himself into a monster.

James Baldwin

Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth.

Henry David Thoreau

Believe those who are seeking the truth. Doubt those who find it.

André Gide

The truth may be puzzling. It may take some work to grapple with. It may be counterintuitive. It may contradict deeply held prejudices. It may not be consonant with what we desperately want to be true. But our preferences do not determine what's true.

Carl Sagan

The day we see the truth and cease to speak is the day we begin to die.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

There is a world of difference between truth and facts. Facts can obscure truth.

Maya Angelou

In a time of universal deceit - telling the truth is a revolutionary act.

George Orwell

All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third it is accepted as self-evident.

Arthur Schopenhauer

Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed. If people all over the world...would do this, it could change the earth.

William Faulkner

If you had free reign over classified networks and you saw incredible things, awful things... things that belonged in the public domain -- what would you do? God knows what happens now. Hopefully worldwide discussion, debates, and reforms... I want people to see the truth. Because without information, you cannot make informed decisions as a public.

Chelsea (Bradley) Manning, US Army Intelligence Analyst, Whistleblower

The truth is rarely pure and simple.

Oscar Wilde, The Importance of Being Earnest

The most exhausting thing in life, I have discovered, is being insincere.

Anne Morrow Lindburgh

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Wise Words

“Loaves and Fishes”

This is not
the age of information.

This is *not*
the age of information.

Forget the news,
and the radio,
and the blurred screen.

This is the time
of loaves
and fishes.

People are hungry
and one good word is bread
for a thousand.

David Whyte

The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.

F. Scott Fitzgerald

...the wounded child inside many males is a boy who, when he first spoke his truths, was silenced by paternal sadism, by a patriarchal world that did not want him to claim his true feelings. The wounded child inside many females is a girl who was taught from early childhood that she must become something other than herself, deny her true feelings, in order to attract and please others. When men and women punish each other for truth telling, we reinforce the notion that lies are better. To be loving we willingly hear the other's truth, and most important, we affirm the value of truth telling. Lies may make people feel better, but they do not help them to know love.

bell hooks, All About Love: New Visions

The truth will set you free, but first it will piss you off.

Gloria Steinem

I began to ask each time: "What's the worst that could happen to me if I tell this truth?" Unlike women in other countries, our breaking silence is unlikely to have us jailed, "disappeared" or run off the road at night. Our speaking out will irritate some people, get us called bitchy or hypersensitive and disrupt some dinner parties. And then our speaking out will permit other women to speak, until laws are changed and lives are saved and the world is altered forever.

Audre Lorde

The truth about injustice always sounds outrageous.

James H. Cone

There is only one important point you must keep in your mind and let it be your guide. No matter what people call you, you are just who you are. Keep to this truth. You must ask yourself how is it you want to live your life. We live and we die, this is the truth that we can only face alone. No one can help us, not even the Buddha. So consider carefully, what prevents you from living the way you want to live your life?

Dalai Lama

It ain't what they call you, it's what you answer to.

W. C. Fields

Out of the Indian approach to life there came a great freedom, an intense and absorbing respect for life, enriching faith in a Supreme Power, and principles of truth, honesty, generosity, equity, and brotherhood as a guide to mundane relations.

Black Elk, Oglala Lakota Sioux

The saddest aspect of life right now is that science gathers knowledge faster than society gathers wisdom.

Isaac Asimov

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Wise Words

Whenever people are debating a topic that cannot be proved one way or the other, one thought comes to my mind – Truth is. It doesn't matter what we believe will happen once we die. The fact is it will be what it will be. Truth is. People can argue all they want about the existence of God. We may never be able to prove it one way or the other, but – Truth is. We can argue against global warming reality, but – Truth is. All of these issues and many, many more come down to the reality that the truth is what it is, and we cannot change that truth... It doesn't matter in the end what the "truth is." It does matter what side of the argument we choose to live on.

Small Group Facilitator

It always comes back to the same necessity: go deep enough and there is a bedrock of truth, however hard.

May Sarton

When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love has always won. There have been tyrants and murderers and for a long time they seem invincible, but in the end, they always fall – think of it always.

Mohandas K Gandhi

Education is the attempt to "lead out" from the self a core of wisdom, that has the power to resist falsehood and live in the light of truth, not by external norms but by reasoned and reflective self-determination.

Parker J. Palmer

If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.

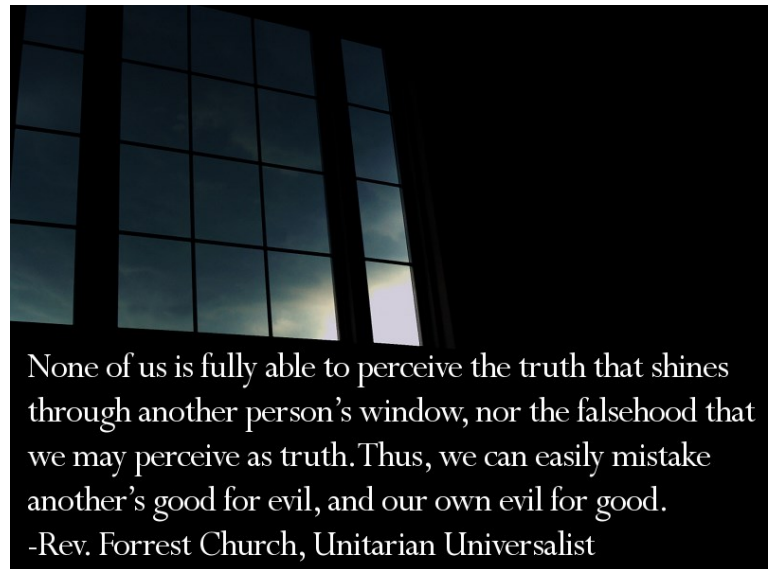
Gospel of Thomas

It does not require many words to speak the truth.

Chief Joseph, Nez Perce

I'm for truth, no matter who tells it. I'm for justice, no matter who it's for or against.

Malcolm X



None of us is fully able to perceive the truth that shines through another person's window, nor the falsehood that we may perceive as truth. Thus, we can easily mistake another's good for evil, and our own evil for good.

-Rev. Forrest Church, Unitarian Universalist

Image credit Tim Atkins, via UUmediaworks.tumblr.com

For me, as a UU, "the quest for truth" means following the evidence as it emerges, and trusting my own experiences. It also means sifting through older ideas of truth and looking for what is universally true, and letting go of that which was only cultural opinion at one time (but being careful not to "throw out the baby with the bathwater").

All people are a people of truth as they see it: but unlike beauty, truth, with a capital T, cannot be just "in the eye of the beholder." I like to think that we UU's are seeking truths that are based on reality, in the same sense that science is a quest for truth based on reality.

Small Group Facilitator

If you would be a real seeker after truth, it is necessary that at least once in your life you doubt, as far as possible, all things.

René Descartes

Fear is a natural reaction to moving closer to the truth.

Pema Chödrön

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Wise Words

It's in literature that true life can be found. It's under the mask of fiction that you can tell the truth.

Gao Xingjian

It is dangerous when too many men in the same armor think they're right.

Cole, fictional character in video game Dragon Age, Inquisition

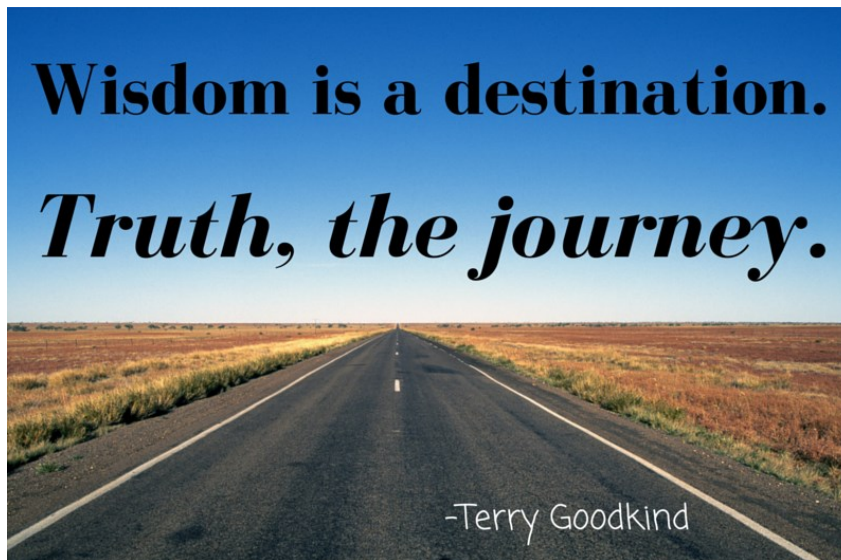
I have no right to call myself one who knows. I was one who seeks, and I still am, but I no longer seek in the stars or in books; I'm beginning to hear the teachings of my blood pulsing within me. My story isn't pleasant, it's not sweet and harmonious like the invented stories; it tastes of folly and bewilderment, of madness and dream, like the life of all people who no longer want to lie to themselves.

Hermann Hesse

"The truth." Dumbledore sighed. "It is a beautiful and terrible thing, and should therefore be treated with great caution."

J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

Wisdom is a destination.
Truth, the journey.



-Terry Goodkind

Image credit Kristina Benner via www.canva.com

The most common form of despair is not being who you are.

Søren Kierkegaard

There's more beauty in truth, even if it is dreadful beauty.

John Steinbeck

Either you repeat the same conventional doctrines everybody is saying, or else you say something true, and it will sound like it's from Neptune.

Noam Chomsky

When two opposite points of view are expressed with equal intensity, the truth does not necessarily lie exactly halfway between them. It is possible for one side to be simply wrong.

Richard Dawkins

When truth is replaced by silence, the silence is a lie.

Yevgeny Yevtushenko

A lie can travel half way around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes.

Mark Twain

There is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come.

Victor Hugo

Truth never lost ground by inquiry.

William Penn

My uniform experience has convince me that there is no other God than Truth.

Mahatma Gandhi

If I hear the way of truth in the morning, I am content to die in the evening.

Confucius

If you do not tell the truth about yourself you cannot tell it about other people.

Virginia Woolf

The truth will set you free. But not until it is finished with you.

David Foster Wallace

You can be standing right in front of the truth and not necessarily see it. People only get it when they are ready to get it.

George Harrison

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Recommended Resources

Books:

Waking Up White, and Finding Myself in the Story of Race by Debby Irving

The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander

Films:

Selma
<http://tinyurl.com/selma-trailer>

I Am, documentary
<http://tinyurl.com/i-am-trailer>

Spotlight
<http://tinyurl.com/spotlight-trailer>

The Big Short
<http://tinyurl.com/the-big-short-trailer>

An Inconvenient Truth, documentary by Al Gore
<http://tinyurl.com/gore-truth>



Articles:

Robert Shetterly's Americans Who Tell the Truth portraits and narratives highlight citizens who courageously address issues of social, environmental, and economic fairness.
<http://www.americanswhotellthetruth.org>

A good parable to read with children is the story of "Six Blind Men and an Elephant." It is possible to know a partial truth without having the full picture:
<http://tinyurl.com/elephant-blind-men>

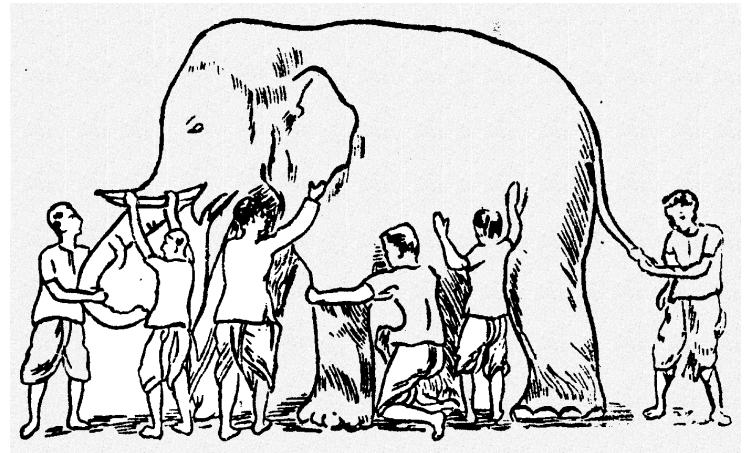


Image credit www.jainworld.com

Videos and Music:

Patty Griffin's song "Truth #2"
<http://tinyurl.com/patty-griffin-truth>

Peter Mayer's song "World of Dreams"
<http://tinyurl.com/peter-mayer-dreams>

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