

Radical Wholeness

How many of you have questioned what you were told about God and the Bible and what is true and what is right? I'm guessing, most of us! That's how we ended up at Unity. Most of us come to Unity from another tradition that just didn't resonate with us. Many people report that finding Unity felt like coming home. I know that's how I felt. I found my tribe. I found the teachings that articulated what I already knew in my heart—and it was different than what I heard in other churches.

How many of you have questioned what you are told in UNITY about God and the Bible and what is true and right? Most of you have heard me talk about divine paradox—two ideas that seem polar opposites and yet are equally true. The challenge in life is being able to hold the tension between the two and allow both to be true. We are human beings and we are divine beings. We talk about Jesus as embodying that as oneness while we tend to mostly ping-pong back and forth between the two poles. Another paradox that plays out in the life of organizations and our personal lives is that we need stability and we need change and growth. And I am seeing a close cousin to that playing out in our Unity Movement: Divine Truth is unchanging AND Our understanding of that truth is constantly evolving. In our Movement, we are seeing a tension around whether or not the unchanging nature of Divine Truth means we are locked into the words and perceptions of the Fillmores and other historical writers, including Eric Butterworth OR our understanding of the underlying Truth is evolving and perhaps there are new ideas seeking to break through. We aren't throwing out our historical perspective but including it as we move to a new perspective.

Today I may tip some sacred cows. I am not in support of actual cow tipping. It is mean and uncalled for. But sometimes, metaphorically, we have to tip over the sacred cows that might get in the way of a transformational experience. We have to challenge our own traditions and writings. So today I want to talk about Radical Wholeness in a way that hopefully is in alignment with divine truth but is definitely a different perspective than has been written about by Charles Fillmore and Eric Butterworth. One of the dangers of not questioning historical writings is that we are not questioning the consciousness out of which the writings arise. We are not questioning the consciousness that allowed segregation to continue at Unity Village, even though it was private property and clearly *could* have allowed integration before the law and social order promoted it.

We are not questioning the consciousness that prevented our Movement from publishing a stand in favor of marriage equality until it was legalized by the courts. And we are not questioning the consciousness of two men who felt uncomfortable with their own physical issues and wrote in ways that may be perceived as excluding people with physical, intellectual and emotional differences from our teachings on healing. I am clear that this is my opinion. I am not here to persuade anyone but to simply present the idea that *maybe* there is more than one way to perceive Truth and maybe even Unity doesn't have all the answers to our spiritual questions, once we start pondering. Today's sermon is based on an article I wrote published in the May/June issue of Unity Magazine. Which does prove that there are some spaces in our Unity Movement open to change.

Let me start with what I believe is an unchanging Truth—we are divine. Each one of us has within us the essence of the eternal Spiritual Being-ness. Made in the image and likeness of God, we carry that creativity in our DNA.

Now let me talk about how I believe this truth has been portrayed in the manifestation of wholeness. This is where the cow gets tipped but don't take this as a judgment or condemnation--just an observation. Humans have tended to allow our humanity to shape our perceptions of divinity. That human tendency is how we got centuries of a male, anthropomorphic God. We, as a society, valued maleness over femaleness, and so we made God male. What we *value* we attribute to our spirituality. It is our human tendency. Fast forward several thousand years and where are we? Not everyone is in the same place, but we are *beginning* to see the Divine as not a person but as energy—as Being-ness and under-lying all substance. We are beginning to embrace diversity so we are letting go of the idea that one skin color or hair texture is superior to another. Some of our world is allowing diversity in gender identity and sexual preferences so we let go of the idea that some individuals were created broken and need to be fixed. One place we still get stuck is diversity in our physical, intellectual and emotional appearances. As a society, we have a picture of the perfect human being as able bodied, at least average intelligence and without mental health issues. So even in Unity, we can look at a Hispanic, lesbian woman and say that she is manifesting spiritual wholeness UNLESS she is blind or deaf or unable to walk. THEN we see her as needing healing. And the destination of that healing journey or the proof of her healing work would be to be able to physically see or physically hear or physically get up and walk. Less than that outcome is spiritual failure.

Why would I say this is true of Unity? Not just because I've heard it taught. Not just because I've heard it preached. Because in the newly published Eric Butterworth book there are these lines: "You may not see yourself in relationship to the Allness, the wholeness, yet you are whether you know it or not. You will experience the degree to which you know it, so if you see yourself in part, then you have a partial experience. Even in the midst of that partial experience, which may be in terms of not enough money or not a good job or poor relationships **or physical difficulties or deformity**, in every case, this is a partial expression ... of the expression of the wholeness, of the Allness." So Reverend Butterworth says that so long as you have a physical difficulty or deformity—as defined and perceived by other humans-- you are a partial expression of wholeness. And he says this with the confidence that he **knows** what spiritual wholeness manifesting looks like. I know it is a specific line yet it reflects a general consciousness that appears in various teachings.

I titled this sermon and the article "Radical Wholeness". The definition of "radical" is "relating to or affecting the *fundamental* nature of something".

What if. I like to begin with curiosity. **What if** there is more than one picture of wholeness manifesting? **What if** we have misunderstood the fundamental nature of manifest wholeness? Does anyone else think it is odd that the creative design of humanity produces infinite variety—no two people alike—but there is only **one** picture of what manifest wholeness looks like? What if spiritual wholeness manifesting isn't always equipped with 5 senses or a certain height or 4 limbs that work? *Could that be possible?* I know Fillmore and Butterworth believe we are all divine. I want to challenge the idea that we humans can tell one another what individual wholeness **looks** like.

The trigger word in Butterworth's quote for me is deformity. When I was born in a small rural hospital in southwest Missouri, my parents were told I was too deformed to survive. They were cautioned against getting attached and I was put in the back of the nursery to pass quietly. On day 3 my daddy demanded to take his perfect baby girl home to love for as long as he could. Perfect or deformed was a human judgment. 30 years later I gave birth in a modern, metropolitan hospital. My family was cautioned to be prepared because the baby girl was very deformed. My mother went to see Sarah and declared, "Oh thank God! She looks just like her mother." Again, perfect or deformed was a human judgment. But Reverend Butterworth's quote, on the surface, indicates that I would be in need of some healing. I would need to get in touch with my spiritual wholeness and manifest a different body appearance before he would deem me manifesting my Allness.

I respectfully disagree. Every evidence he gives of the partial experience is a judgment of duality. Good job vs bad job, enough money vs lack, good relationship vs bad relationship, deformed vs whole.

I don't believe it is our job to judge what spiritual wholeness **manifesting** looks like for one another. If we want Unity to truly be an inclusive message for all people, we need to let go of the idea we know what the picture of wholeness manifesting looks like. We need to return to some basic ideas: we are all divine; we have divine life within and available; as we connect with our divine power we manifest wholeness in our lives—however that appears and however we choose to direct it with our thoughts.

In the 9th chapter of John is a lengthy story of healing. Jesus is first challenged by the idea of karma manifesting as disability. “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus responds, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.” So **is** Jesus saying only blind people reveal the works of God? Maybe not. Maybe he’s just saying we **all** come with a clean slate, and it is up to **all** of us to move beyond the circumstances of our birth to reveal the work of Spirit through our lives. The story goes on and says the man was able to see. It also says the neighbors did not recognize him. He no longer appeared as the beggar they had known. Traditionally we would teach this as a demonstration of healing that restored physical sight. In doing so, we would exclude those born blind, born without eyes or physically unable to see from the healing experience. The story says the man’s eyes were opened. **What if** the sight he gained was being able to see himself as whole? What if he carried himself with confidence and refused to **be** a beggar in life? Would that not be a *transformational* healing demonstrating that the man connected with his spiritual wholeness and manifest it in his outer life? Would that not be a **full**, not partial, expression of wholeness?

I would like to invite us, not just the people in this sanctuary, but our New Thought Movement, into moving beyond the consciousness and interpretations of our early leaders. As powerful as they were, the Fillmores, Emily Cady, Eric Butterworth and others, we must continue to evolve. We embrace our human diversity and recognize that the many aspects of our humanity that are not **our** experience are equally valid. I don't have to identify as gay to perceive that as wholeness. I don't have to identify as African-American to perceive that as wholeness.

I don't have to identify as being blind to perceive that as wholeness.

We respect the divinity within each one as *fully capable* of demonstrating the works of Spirit without imposing our measures and criteria upon what Spirit's work looks like in others. We must find a new language around healing that is more inclusive and empowering so that each one may **discover** the divine power within and **use it** to be the creative expression of Spirit we were all sent here to be. I invite us to continue to ask difficult questions, wait in the mystery and embrace new perspectives as we continue this human experience. Unity has a powerful message that has transformed the lives of millions. Let us continue to share our message in new and evolving ways so that an expanding audience has ears to hear and eyes to see the Truth.