

September 25, 2022

Sounding of the Shofar

Rosh HaShanah is the Jewish New Year. The biblical name for this holiday is Yom Teruah, literally "day of shouting or blasting." It is the first of the Jewish High Holy Days ("Days of Awe"), as specified by Leviticus 23:23–25. Rosh Hashanah customs include sounding the shofar (a cleaned-out ram's horn), as prescribed in the Torah, following the prescription of the Hebrew Bible to "raise a noise" on Yom Teruah. Its rabbinical customs include attending synagogue services and reciting special liturgy about teshuva, as well as enjoying festive meals. Eating symbolic foods is now a tradition, such as apples dipped in honey, hoping to evoke a sweet new year.

Centering Thought: “Covenant is a promise I keep to myself, about the kind of person I want to be, the kind of life I mean to have, together with other people, and with all other living things.”

- Rev. Victoria Stafford

Prelude

The Broken Saxophone

Hale Smith

Welcome and Announcements

A Historical Outline

Jr. Worship Associates

This year we are exploring the lives of our ministers in order to consider our portraits in the Church. Geoff Tegnell has written longer biographies of each of our ministers, which will be printed in the Parish Record and all-church email. Today we share with you just a bit about the founding minister of this church, of whom we do not have a picture.

The Reverend John Allin was the first minister of this church. The Allin Church across the street is named after him because at that time we were one church and he was also their first minister.

John Allin was born at Colby, Norfolk England in 1596. He was the eighth of 15 children. He studied and achieved both his bachelor's and master's degrees at Christ's Church and the University of Cambridge in England. He was a minister in England when his brand of "sweet Christian Love" came under persecution. He escaped England in disguise with a band of English Puritans. He arrived in Dedham in 1636 and began teaching and preaching to the people of the new world. After the church was founded in 1638, John Allin was given 30 acres of land in exchange for his preaching and teaching. His yearly salary was paid in chickens and cows and firewood. In his time as minister, he was known to be a kind and scholarly presence in the town. He helped form a Half-Way covenant with the other Puritan Ministers, which allowed more of the people who attended church to receive communion and get married. He also helped to start the first free public school on these grounds. The Rev. John Allin served First Church until 1671, the year of his death.

Introit *In the Quiet and the Stillness* Rosalyn Kalmer

Lighting the Chalice

Opening Words

"I Call That Church Free" James Luther Adams

#591 (Gray)

I call that church free which enters into covenant
with the ultimate source of existence,
That sustaining and transforming power
not made with human hands.

It binds together families and generations,
protecting against the idolatry of any human claim
to absolute truth or authority.

This covenant is the charter and responsibility and joy of worship
in the face of death as well as life.

I call that church free which brings
individuals into a caring, trusting fellowship,
That protects and nourishes their integrity and spiritual freedom;
that yearns to belong to the church universal;

It is open to insight and conscience from every source; it bursts
through rigid tradition, giving rise to new and living language, to
new and broader fellowship.

It is a pilgrim church, a servant church, on an adventure of the
spirit.

The goal is the prophethood and priesthood of all believers, the one
for the liberty of prophesying, the other for the ministry of healing.

It aims to find unity in diversity under the promptings of the spirit
"that bloweth where it listeth . . . and maketh all things new."

*Hymn

#295 (Gray)

Sing out Praises For The Journey

*Sing out praises for the journey,
pilgrims, we, who carry on,
searchers in the soul's deep yearnings,
like our forebears in their time.
We seek out the spirit's wholeness
in the endless human quest.*

*Look inside, your soul's the kindling
of the hearth fire pilgrims knew.
Find the spirit, always restless,
find it in each mind and heart.
Touch and hold that ancient yearning,
kindling for a newfound truth.*

*Stand we now upon the threshold,
facing futures yet unknown.
Hearth behind us, wayside hostel
built by those who knew wild roads.
Guard we e'er their sacred embers
carried in our minds and hearts.*

Unison Affirmation

Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law
To dwell together in peace,
To seek the truth in freedom
To serve humanity in love,
Is our covenant with each other and with God.

Offertory

An Asphodel for Marcel

Hale Smith

Centering Time

Intergenerational Message

What it was like in Church in 1638.
The Junior Worship Associates

First Person: Did you know that this church was founded in 1638?

Second Person: No way – that is over 380 years ago! The whole country was founded in 1776 and that is only 246 years ago!

Third Person: Well the first settlers landed on the river in Dedham in 1636, and it took them two years to build and organize the church and then build a church exactly 138 years before the Declaration of Independence was written.

First Person: Did the church look like this?

Second Person: It must have taken them more than two years to build this church.

Third Person: The church that was built in 1638 was much smaller and it had box pews.

First Person: What are box pews? Were people sitting in Boxes?

Second Person: This I know – they were rectangular pews with doors on them. And families could bring things with them like coals in a metal box to keep them warm.

Third Person: They also had wood stoves that helped to keep them warm in the winter.

First Person: Right now we don't have any heat . . . a wood-burning stove sure would be nice.

Second Person: Yeah, but who would fill the fireplace during the services?

Third Person: Probably the teenagers!

First Person: I know that services lasted almost the whole day back then and the ministers preached only from the bible.

Second Person: Wow, they must have gotten hungry!

Third Person: The minister's sermons must have been much longer!

First Person: And I am pretty sure the ministers were more focused on how to follow the footsteps of Jesus.

Second Person: And how to avoid the wages of hell!

Third Person: Did they have a good coffee hour?

First Person: No, but they did believe in eating meals together. The Puritans wanted to live closer to the ways that Jesus and his disciples lived.

Second Person: Are Puritans and Pilgrims the same thing?

Third Person: Not exactly. Both Puritans and Pilgrims followed the teachings of John Calvin who believed that only some people are good and deserve God's love. The Pilgrims wanted to separate from

the Anglican Church of England. They landed on Plymouth Rock around 1608. The Puritans came later and they just wanted to change the Anglican church but not separate from it.

First Person: The Puritans came to the New World almost 30 years later. That's when they landed in Dedham with The Rev. John Allin in 1636.

Second Person: Oh, so our church was very different in 1638 when John Allin was the minister. The services were longer, the pews were tall and closed in and you had to bring your own heat. And you would eat a meal with your friends after church.

Third Person: Pretty much. Our church has changed a lot in 384 years.

First Person: I wonder what it will be like in 384 more years!

Second Person: That would be the year 2406 - it is hard to imagine. Maybe that is something you guys can all think about. What do you want the church to be like in 2406?

Third Person: You can think about that while we sing you to your classes.

Singing the Children to Classes

May your mind be open to new learning
May your lips bring truth into the world
May your heart know love
And your hands do the work of justice
As you go your way in peace

Meditation

Reading an excerpt from a speech made by The Rev. Sue Phillips
at the 2015 General Assembly

“Believing that congregational polity is primarily concerned with supporting and protecting individual voices is nothing less than heresy.... Equating congregational polity with autonomy undermines our interconnectedness, erodes our covenant, and endangers our communities. It is flat-out ahistorical, not to mention wrong...Participation in our congregations and communities is “voluntary” in the sense that it is not strictly required by external authority. But are we not responsible to the call to manifest the interdependent web by co-creating beloved community? Does our faith not require us to help increase the sum of love and justice in the world? Our faith puts claims on us. Moral, ethical, and for some of us theological duty claims and compels us....Because we claim and are claimed by our faith, participation in Unitarian Universalist community is much richer than the notion of “voluntary participation” conveys.”

Anthem *Life Calls Us On* Jason Shelton

Reading “The Unitarian Controversy and Its Puritan Roots”
 by Alice Blair Wesley, Peter Hughes and Frank Carpenter

During the "Great Migration" of the 1630's some 20,000 English Puritans settled in New England and established independent parish (neighborhood) churches. They practiced congregational polity, that form of church governance in which members of the local church are united on an equal footing, not by assent to a creed, but by "entering the covenant." That is, by signing a promise. Each

church wrote its own covenant. Some were long. Most were very short. The covenant of the Salem Church, written in 1629, is a good example. "We Covenant with the Lord and one with an other; and doe bynd our selves in the presence of God, to walke together in all his waies, according as he is pleased to reveale himself unto us in his Blessed word of truth."

The revolutionary thrust of the Puritan covenant and polity is given voice especially in two words, "unto us." This is because the issue of the Puritan mind and heart was contained in a set of closely related questions: Where is authentically commanding religious authority to be found? How is it known? And what are the conditions of its appearing "unto us?" The Puritans' answer to those questions found expression in the covenant of the local church. They granted ultimate religious authority solely to that convincing power of truth evident in the understandings reached and tested over time by a body of loving individuals mutually pledged faithfully to seek and to heed truth together, in ongoing community, so long as their earthly life should last.

Therefore, the Puritans rejected, on deeply held theological principle, the authority of bishops or any ecclesiastical or civil body politic whatsoever other than the local church. Each church elected and ordained its own officers, ministerial and lay. So constituted, all their churches together formed "the Standing Order" of "the New England Way" community of independent churches, each governed solely by the decision of its own members, yet in "fellowship" with all other churches so constituted.

*Hymn

113 (Gray)

Where is Our Holy Church?

*Where is our holy church?
Where race and class unite
as equal persons in the search
for beauty, truth, and right.*

*Where is our holy writ?
Where'er a human heart
a sacred torch of truth has lit,
by inspiration taught.*

*Where is our holy One?
A mighty host respond;
the people rise in every land
to break the captive's bond.*

*Where is our holy land?
Within the human soul,
wherever free minds truly seek
with character the goal.*

*Where is our paradise?
In aspiration's sight,
wherein we hope to see
arise ten thousand years of right.*

Sermon

“Freedom of the Pulpit and the Pew:
The Rev John Allin and the Cambridge Platform”
Rev. Rali Weaver

It is interesting to consider how far our church has come since The Rev. John Allin was our minister and when we were one church - the Allin congregation across the street had not yet split off from this community. In 1638, people came to this church in search of the “Sweet Christian Love” that The Rev. John Allin offered. Puritans rejected the Catholic rituals the Anglican church retained because they saw such rituals as drawing people away from the genuine messages in the scriptures. How many of you left other faith traditions because you thought the practices or preaching or even the people you went to church with kept you feeling far away from -rather than closer and closer to - the love and fellowship you wanted in your life?

I know that I started going to a Unitarian Universalist Church in Portland, Maine because I did not feel the “love thy neighbors as thyself” in the Methodist Church in which I was raised. I felt the Methodist prayers of confession and descriptions of sin were too confining and unloving. I know not everyone that went to the Methodist Church I grew up in felt this way; even my father still attends that same church. In my 20s, I found the Unitarian Universalist Church with its seven principles and purposes more affirming for the life I wanted to live. At 25, after the unfulfilling funeral for my mother at the Methodist Church I grew up in, I cast aside the creedal religion of my childhood and joined a UU Church.

Being a non-creedal, non-doctrinal church means that we do not ask for any litmus test of belief. We do not draw uncrossable lines

between those who are accepted into this community and those who are not. But there is more to being a UU than what we reject.

To begin, our congregational system, which gives members, not religious leaders, all authority, is the sort of grassroots democracy I believe in. Our Congregational Polity comes directly from the 1648 Cambridge Platform. The Cambridge Platform was written by New England Puritans to outline the governance our church continues to follow to this day. Instead of singling out the Pope and Bishops as saints, the Puritans made the “Proprietors of the Pews” the saints. By design, this grassroots and democratic polity departed dramatically from the Anglican hierarchies.

In 1646 the Anglican Bishops in England outlined the Calvinist Theology of predestination in a document titled the Westminster Confession of Faith. It was in response to this document that the radical New England Puritans outlined the Cambridge Platform. The Authors of the Westminster Confession of Faith must have thought the Cambridge Platform was schmaltzy and insignificant by comparison. For the Puritans, though, the Cambridge Platform was a profound articulation of how their faith tradition would interact in and with this new world, and it led to the democracy that is the heart of our congregational polity today.

Our sixth and seventh UU Principles emerged directly from this new congregational form of government. The sixth principle is “The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large.” The seventh is “The goal of a world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.” In these, the Puritans’ intentional departure from the Westminster Confession of Faith is clear.

The Half-Way Covenant was the next significant organizing covenant in which The Rev. John Allin participated.

Allin recognized that the children of the original settlers were living in relative comfort compared with the lives their parents had endured; and as a result of this relative ease, they weren't experiencing the profound conversion experiences their parents had. You see their parents had crossed the Atlantic Ocean to come to Dedham's shores and through those rough waves and storms had felt the presence of God in their lives and could attest to the ways God had touched their lives, where their children who lived in New England without persecution, could not. The Rev. John Allin met with other New England Puritan Ministers in 1657 to address the concern of declining membership. Many of the Puritan Clergy must have felt the settlers' children were pipsqueaks who did not deserve the serious sacraments of the church. After six years of long and arduous debates in 1662, the Congregational Synod (which is where the Ministers gathered to discuss issues of the church) agreed that if those children who did not have conversion experiences would agree to live in covenant with the teachings of Jesus, they would be accepted into the church.

While the Halfway Covenant of 1662 did ask for a profession of faith it was still creedless. The Halfway Covenant is also the first evidence that our church respects the inherent worth and dignity of every person. While it did not stretch as far as respecting the indigenous peoples of Massachusetts Bay, the idea that everyone deserves God's love was even more radical in 1648 than it remains in some places today.

Over his years as our minister, The Rev. John Allin dealt with the changing needs of generations, and it was evident that even his

early church believed (at least in part) in our second and third principles: “Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations”; and “Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations.”

Shockingly, justice, equity, and compassion in our human relationships have not been and are not the focus of all faith traditions. Perhaps many of you are here precisely because Unitarian Universalism strives to build communities based on and working toward justice, equity, and compassion. For us to achieve this we must each make a promise to ourselves and to each other to be in an ever-evolving relationship with each other.

Acceptance of one another and encouragement for spiritual growth in our congregations means that we understand that faith is not a static end point but rather an ever-evolving process.

The Free Pulpit and the Free Pew traditions also emerged in response to the Cambridge Platform and the Halfway Covenantal decisions.

You give a Free Pulpit to me, your minister, in covenant in order to ensure our fourth principle: “The free search for truth and meaning.” When the religious community lends the pulpit, it does so with the knowledge that the speaker is free to present from personal knowledge and experience, even if differing from what others in attendance may believe. In reciprocation, the preacher is responsible for respecting the free and responsible search for truth and meaning of everyone in the pews.

A Free Pew affirms that the UU church does not dictate belief or require any confession of faith. The Free Pew requires you to

respect the free and responsible search for truth and meaning for yourself and for those sitting next to you.

Yet, as The Rev. Sue Phillips stated, ours is not an individual religious tradition. The final principle and purpose adopted at the 1969 General Assembly of the UUA is to “Respect the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.” Our search for truth and meaning is not for us alone; all of our principles support each individual’s spiritual growth while leading us to the interconnectedness of all life.

The Parish Committee's invitation for each of us to consider ourselves a part of the Membership Committee this year may be the first step in defining us as a church in 2023 and beyond.

*Hymn # 145 (Gray) As Tranquil Streams

As tranquil streams that meet and merge
and flow as one to seek the sea,
our kindred hearts and minds unite
to build a church that shall be free —

Free from the bonds that bind the mind
to narrow thought and lifeless creed;
free from a social code that fails
to serve the cause of human need:

A freedom that reveres the past,
but trusts the dawning future more;
and bids the soul, in search of truth,
adventure boldly and explore.

Prophetic church, the future waits
your liberating ministry;
go forward in the power of love,
proclaim the truth that makes us free

Benediction

Benediction Response

Hear Me

Horneck/Dubois

Postlude

Postlude in F

J.S. Bach