Truth Telling
The 2002 Gould Discourse
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I come before you this evening having set myself a simple but daunting task -- to tell the truth. This, it seems to me, is the quintessential goal of the minister as preacher. We must approach the pulpits and rostrums of our vocation as if they were pumps, channeling the clear and refreshing water of truth, extracted from the deepest wells of our experience, to a thirsting world; and we must approach the pulpit as if it were a lightning rod, ready to bring down upon our heads devastating bolts from the heavens were we to violate the preacher's commandment of truth telling.

Yet for Unitarian Universalists, finding the truth to tell can be a bit like hunting the elusive unicorn. Or it can be marvelously simple, finding the lost treasure buried under your own home all the time. Our liberal religious movement has made the truth both much closer than in other religions -- everyone's personal experiences are now primary sources of revelation; and much further away -- no single book contains all the transcendent truths a serious soul needs to know.

But I know enough of truth to be ready when the missionaries come knocking on my door. (And ours is a tough block -- with two ministers in our house, the UU minister emeritus at the end of the block, and at one time, four other houses on the street containing active members of our church.) When I open the door and see their smiling, earnest faces, my pulse quickens, my mind leaps to The Plan, and I get ready to invite them in. Now, in truth, I've never gotten to fully implement the plan -- one of the team members usually gets nervous after a couple of minutes and says they have to go when it becomes clear I plan to put the missionary shoe on the other foot and give much better than I'll get. But let's pretend <u>you</u> folks are the missionaries at the door.

"Oh, so you want to share with me the truth of Blah Blah Blah? How do you know it's the truth? Because the book Blah Blah says so? It says that this is "God's Word" and you believe it? Why?

"You know, of course, that there are a lot of other religious scriptures in the world that also claim to be God's word. As a former professor of comparative religions, I just happen to have some examples right here. Here's a small sampling of scriptures from Hinduism that all claim to be revelation. One of the many from Buddhism. A couple from China and Japan. Let's not forget Islam. And some additional material from Judaism with which I bet you're not familiar. That's a pretty big stack already. So, have you read all of these to decide that your book is superior, more convincing in its claim of truth to all of these? No? Well, you've got a lot of work to do yet before you can become an effective missionary!

"But I'm not done yet. There are other folks out there claiming to have the truth -- like scientists. Here's some physics, chemistry, and so on. Even social scientists saying they know the truth about people, here's some psychology, economics. (No. Everyone realizes economists don't really know the truth. I'll take that one off.) There are ways besides sciences to discover truth -- like literature, art, and music.

So you still think your one book has the essential truth in it, and not all of these? OK. I'm sure you reached that conclusion the same way I reach mine about truth. I'll bet you folks, at bottom, are good Unitarian Universalists because you relied on your own individual heart and mind to decide what sounded like truth to you. The individual conscience is the ultimate authority in Unitarian Universalism, and it sounds like you understand that bedrock principle of our faith. Our services are at 10:45am Sundays and I look forward to seeing you there!"

Well, if you folks had been the missionaries from the Blah Blah Blah Church, would I have convinced you? Probably not. But perhaps I managed to sow some seeds of doubt and renewed thinking about the presumption of the simple and exclusive truth being conveniently packaged in one single book.

Yet we preachers hope to accomplish more than mounting an occasional witty counterattack against competing doctrines. We aspire to real truth telling.

So I want to thank the selection committee for this year's Gould Discourse, and thank the continuing legacy of Josephine Gould herself, for giving me this opportunity to reflect with you on truth telling in ministry. The Gould Discourse is to be about ministry, in its broadest sense, but this has never meant that it was to be a topic of primary interest only to ministers. And such is certainly not the intent this evening, either.

Can there be a preacher without a congregation? The high ideal of the preacher's truth telling is balanced by the equally demanding call to be truth hearers. As Theodore Parker said to the congregation of a new minister upon his ordination:

> You may prevent the freedom of speech in this pulpit if you will. You may hire your servants to preach as you bid; to spare your vices and flatter your follies; to prophecy smooth things, and say, It is peace, when there is not peace. Yet in so doing you weaken and enthrall yourselves....But, on the other hand, you may encourage your brother to tell you the truth. Your affection will then be precious to him; your prayers of great price. Every evidence of your sympathy will go to baptize him anew to Holiness and Truth. You will then have his best words, his brightest thoughts, and his most hearty prayers. (In Three Prophets of Religious Liberalism [Boston: Beacon Press, 1964], p. 149.)

So whichever side of the pulpit you normally find yourself on, I invite you to join with me as I examine and honor the creative exchange between preacher and congregation whose currency is truth telling.

And while I want to focus on that enterprise that takes place when the minister stands at the pulpit before the assembly, know, too, that my review of the hows and whys of truth telling has implications beyond that setting, even into this weekend's events at our district annual meeting. For truth telling, with all its difficulties, limits, constraints, and promises, will be at the heart of what will generate a meaningful and fruitful conclave about the past, present, and future relationships of the Canadian and U. S. congregations represented here. Truth telling across boundaries -- of nations, or of individual hearts -- is one of the most difficult, yet imperative duties we face.

I doubt I have much, if anything, new to say about truth telling. Yet it can be worthwhile from time to time to revisit and reconnect with the universal themes of our religion. Towards the end, I will make a stab at something perhaps controversial and innovative, something to do with the problem this big stack of truth options may pose for us.

Let me begin by saying that truth is important. This may sound like a truism, something obviously the case which needs no one to say it. But it does need saying. Truth is important. For some of us, like myself, the quest to know truth is a life-long, life-defining career. I chose Unitarian Universalism and chose to become a minister precisely because I wanted this commitment to truth and this opportunity for truth telling. In my prior career as a college professor of comparative religions, I felt increasingly hemmed in and stultified by the academic demands of absolute objective neutrality. I at first prided myself on reaching the end of the semester in my religions of the world class without any student being able to tell what religion I was or even preferred. Then I started more and more to want to be able to shout, "This part here, of this religion, is a bunch of nonsense!" Or, "Pay close attention, now; this idea in this religion has really hit the nail on the head!" Within six weeks of discovering Unitarian Universalism and being involved in a start-up fellowship, I was determined to enter the UU ministry where I felt sure my yearning for truth telling could be set free.

Truth, I have come to realize, is my air. I gasp in pain and panic when I feel it slipping away. There is no savor to living unless it partakes of the salt of truth.

Yet others will tell us blithely that truth is all relative to time and culture; or worse, a completely individual taste. Or we are told that questions and the search are the substance of life, not answers. And we are encouraged to applaud all diversity as more sources for truth, without being forced to pick the wheat from the chaff. No meat there for me; not even complete protein legumes or complex carbohydrates. Not enough nourishment to sustain me.

Truth is the foundation beneath my feet, the reality in which I move. It is universal and whole, dependable -- even if not yet, or ever, fully known or knowable. I remember someone from a Christian church a few years ago expressing her disappointment at attending a UU memorial service. It was all about the life of the deceased, without any optimism and happiness for the "sure and certain hope of resurrection to life everlasting." How could we find any solace, why did we believe, in such a, to her mind, pessimistic religion?

Let me borrow the words of Unitarian minister Minot Simons, who preached in Cleveland in the early 1900's, to paraphrase my response. He said, Unitarians are religious people who "are privileged to believe what is believable." (Cited in the sermon by Jane Rzepka in the CLF "Quest" for Nov., 2001, p. 3.) A religious doctrine offers no solace if you don't think it's true. I am among those who feel constrained to live in reality, whose borders are defined by truth as best we can discern it. And so are we Unitarian Universalists. That is our tradition, where reason must triumph over wishful thinking, conscience over tradition.

In my nine years in ministry, I have found that the freedom for truth telling I yearned for is neither total nor simply exercised. But I'm still glad I've made the career switch and do feel that our religious movement gives greatest scope for telling important truths. Let me try to recapture and then recreate for you some of that grand allure of Unitarian Universalism, reminding us of its history of bold truth telling, and thereby, perhaps, recalling us to greater commitments to this noble enterprise.

Step one in truth telling is discerning the truth. And our tradition has affirmed that we can do that. We are not mere passive recipients of some purported prophet's visions of the divine, nor helpless observers unable to choose among all of today's clamoring creeds. We each have or own capacities for unearthing the truth. That faith is the core value of our liberal religious movement.

Unitarian Universalists have oscillated between two poles in this process of truth discernment: winnowing out the falsehoods from the received canons of truth; and cultivating new fields of potential truth. We have, in similar fashion, alternated between extremes of utilizing broad learning within communities of dialog, and reliance on the inner light within our own selves.

As historians of Unitarian Universalism have pointed out, our forebears first distinguished themselves by insisting that interpretations of the Bible and Christian beliefs make sense. As William Ellery Channing put it, "God has given us a rational nature, and will call us to account for it....Revelation is addressed to us as rational beings." (Cited in David Robinson, The Unitarian and the Universalists [Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1985], p.14.) Our ancestors were willing to winnow out the contradictory, the illogical, and eventually, the supernatural from their Christian inheritance. Thomas Jefferson's Bible, for example, was a lighter volume because he edited out all the miracles.

By the mid-19th century, our religious ancestors were starting to embrace sources of truth other than Christian scripture, widening the fields of truth. For example, Ralph Waldo Emerson valued all of nature as a revelation of the divine, and felt the intuitions of his innermost self to be true reflections of the mind of God. Throughout the 19th century, Unitarians and Universalists, emboldened by this vision of religious truth, kept welcoming new domains of knowledge and human experience into their tabernacles. We were building that inventory of "sources of our living tradition" now listed along with our seven purposes and principles -- direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, words and deeds of prophetic men and women, wisdom from the world's religions, Jewish and Christian teachings, humanist teachings, and spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions.

Our movement, however, was rightly challenged throughout the previous two centuries for listening to only a restricted range of voices in its search for truth. Smooth talking white men have for most of our history held a monopoly in this regard. Slowly, and always at first grudgingly, we've decided that the experiences of women, Blacks, the physically challenged, gay/lesbian/bi-sexual/transgender people, Latinos, Native American/First Nations people, residents of other nations on this continent, people of other continents, were legitimate and necessary sources of truth, as well. More recently, we've begun to pay attention to what the non-human beings and our environment have to teach us. And we're far from finished in working on that list. Until we can grow Unitarian Universalism to be in size and diversity something approaching a representative sampling of humanity, the truths we can produce will be less sound and sure than they ought to be for a world class religion.

This analysis of truth also implies that the coming split of the UUA and the CUC into totally separate and independent administrative units could have a deleterious effect on our ability as a religious movement to produce truth to speak. Our capacity for truth telling and for truth hearing will be signally diminished to the extent we have lost the wisdom-culling eyes, ears, and hearts of our fellow UUs across this nearby border. We must not allow our

administrative separation to prevent the free flow of religious ideas back and forth between our two countries.

Our tradition, then, has laid claim to the possibility of discerning truth, challenging though that may be. Not as one, immutable formula; not as an unchallengeable divine revelation. But as the fallible yet firm, limited yet dependable co-discovery, co-creation of many human minds and hearts.

Truth seeing leads inexorably to truth telling. As Emerson said, "Always the seer is a sayer." (In Three Prophet, p. 100.) Our tradition gives us plenty of examples of preachers, great and modest, stepping forward to pulpit after pulpit, week after week, in response to this noble compulsion.

There are versions of the truth that everyone operates with; to some extent it is a commonplace that takes care of itself in the everyday interchanges of people's activities. Yet the fullness of truth, its widest extent and furthest implications, are sufficiently complex that most people wouldn't mind a little help keeping their bearings.

That's where the minister as preacher comes in. Now in our tradition, we correctly acknowledge that no special, other-worldly dispensation has been given to our ordained ministers. Have any of you ever felt an uncanny tingle when a UU minister enters the room? Or an uncontrollable urge to touch a minister's cloak, kiss her hand, or prostrate yourself at his feet? Our authority as truth tellers is no different from that we would accord to any speaker, respected for wide learning or deep compassion. So why, in our religious quest for truth, do we even need ministers?

We don't. We're just a handy tool. Think of the minister as a full-time research assistant hired by the congregation for the members' consciences; or as a spiritual palm pilot that reminds you to put care of your soul and care of the world on your weekly schedule; or as a global positioning device who tries to keep us oriented in the right direction for life's journey, despite the fog of mundane concerns that frequently blocks our vision of ultimate goals.

Truth telling is not merely the blurting out of the first thing that comes to mind. That kind of undisciplined venting of one's deep seated prejudices and shallow ignorances is not worthy of the preacher. Emerson's standard is still apt: "The true preacher[s] can be known by this, that [they] deal out to the people [their lives...lives] passed through the fire of thought." (In Three Prophets, p.103.) We UUs have always been called to think about, analyze our life experiences to refine them into the precious metals of truth. The minister spends hours rewriting his or her sermon not just to squeeze in one more moving anecdote or funny story or witty turn of phrase, but to make sure what it says is right -- the facts straight, the conclusions sound, the lesson matched to life experience.

I hope ministers prove helpful and function as truth tellers more than just Sunday mornings. Doses of truth can be salubrious in counseling, religious education, board meetings, community service work, and so on -- though we need to always consider what the proper dosage is that would be the most beneficial. Yet I want to continue my focus on truth telling from the pulpit as the paradigm for the preacher, as the place where truth telling should be and can be developed into the highest art.

Here, our UU tradition gives us great examples of refined oratory used to its best purpose. But of most interest to me is the pulpit as scene of bold and courageous truth telling. I

think of our earliest Unitarian and Universalist forebears who might literally be risking their lives to step forward to proclaim their heretical doctrines. Perhaps the most courageous example of truth telling from our classical period was Theodore Parker, whose uncompromising abolitionist stand against American slavery, coupled with his embrace of Transcendentalism, almost totally deprived him of collegial support. Yet he persisted.

But courageous truth telling took on many faces. There were the pioneering women who entered our ministry from Olympia Brown and Fidelia Gillette on, daring to assert their different perspectives as valid forms of truth telling and calling for equal rights. John Haynes Holmes, Unitarian minister in New York City, whose principled pacifism caused him to oppose U.S. involvement in WW I, faced wholesale ostracism from the denomination for his stand. There were the early Humanist preachers in our movement, breaking new and controversial ground; the Universalists who led their tradition beyond Christianity; the brave souls who fought to keep a place for Christianity; and the pragmatic visionaries, such as Frederick May Elliot, who said there needed to be a place at our common table for all these truth tellers.

There were the Black pioneers, such as Egbert Ethelred Brown and Lewis McGee, whose inner call to truth telling led them to the predominantly white Unitarian denomination. And the voices of Black empowerment and equality in the 1960's, that spoke hard truths before a divided Unitarian Universalist denomination. There has been the return of women preachers, in ever growing numbers and strength. And the wonderful though difficult coming out of g/l/b/t preachers and allies, whose truth telling heroics continue. And still there are more stories of bold preaching -- from pro-Civil Rights and pro-environment, to anti-war and anti-greed.

How compelling are the truths that are being told today in UU pulpits? How courageously do the ministers preach? How receptively and audaciously do the congregations listen? Is there a seething, passionate encouragement and commitment to truth telling at its most forthright? How do we measure up to the best representatives of our past in bringing forth the life giving and life transforming words of truth for our time?

I confess that I blanch in embarrassment at the prospect of bringing my own modest and tentative efforts before such a bar. I know some of the stories of how my ministerial colleagues here in this district have stepped forward to say challenging words of truth in the face of controversy: in favor of forthright discussion of birth control, against movie posters featuring violence after Columbine, as a reminder of racial injustice within our own denomination, as a call to overcome social justice inertia, for keeping birth control options available at a hospital taken over by a conservative religious group, in opposition to a religiously sectarian funeral for a former government leader. And there are surely many more examples.

I, myself, have tried to say what I thought was true on some potentially controversial and challenging topics. But never to a mostly hostile audience; never at any great risk to myself. Some parts of me, to be sure, are quite glad that my home congregation hasn't jeered at me on Sunday, or threatened to run me out of town. And only once did they hold up signs to give my sermon a numerical rating -- I got mostly 9's and 10's (a little planted humor from the Ministerial Relations Committee about the annual evaluation process). There is definitely something to be said for an appreciative audience, and also for knowing how to treat your audience so that truth telling isn't rock throwing, but a tossing out of ropes we can all use together to scale greater heights.

But let me bring up one final topic that I intend to continue addressing in my preaching, and which I hope our denomination will begin to tackle more directly and boldly; a topic that will require careful thought and courageous speaking, and that is the issue of religious pluralism.

Religious pluralism -- the availability of a great variety of religious options today, and here I would include several comprehensive secular world views -- is an inescapable and distinguishing mark of the modern world. We liberals have been the main driving force in bringing this condition about. We've done this, over the course of the last 500 years or so, by raising the banner of religious tolerance until it has become a nearly universally acknowledged principle of fundamental human rights. We have also done this by promulgating the widely held, though also widely challenged, belief that all religious viewpoints contain some, if not equal amounts of, truth. Our liberal religious movement has gone further to declare that we ourselves will and do seek out insight and inspiration from a wide variety of sources. We have created this great stack of "scriptures" I used to scare off, or convert, the more narrow minded missionaries with whom I opened.

My challenging suggestion, however, is that there is good reason now to consider ways we might winnow this stack down. It is, perhaps, time for the pendulum to swing away from the opening up new horizons end of our religious movement's proclivities and back toward the critical appraisal posture. We need to replace this large, and growing, stack with a loose-leaf notebook. We don't throw away the unused portions of these scriptures, nor rule them out of bounds for study. But we do say that, for now, we endorse only this more limited, selected edition of ideas as offering the best current distillation of truth.

Are we willing to be critical of some religious options? In our current mood, that sounds like a decidedly un-liberal attitude to take. But let me offer you two examples of contemporary religious orientation, and then gauge your own instinctive and reflective responses.

The Raelians have a mere 55,000 or so members, centered primarily in Quebec. The group was founded in 1973 by Rael, a French race-car journalist formerly known as Claude. Rael claims that in December of 1973 he was taken into a flying saucer from a remote location in France. There he was greeted by a short humanoid creature with olive-colored skin, whose first words to him, in fluent French, were, "You regret not having brought your camera?"

The little extraterrestrial went on to explain to Rael that humans were actually created by beings from beyond the earth called "Elohim," a word mistranslated in the bible as "God" but actually meaning "those who came from the sky." Past earth prophets, from Moses to Muhammed, were trained by the Elohim. Raelians are raising money to build an embassy where they can welcome these people from space who now want open contacts with their creations.

Take one more example. In the area of morality, we would be among the first to denounce any forms of racist bigotry, such as that espoused by white supremacist movements (of which there are all too many throughout North America and Europe). So one of my church members was rightly shocked when she was teaching a diversity workshop at a local public school and a boy brazenly spoke up to say his father taught him to hold such racist beliefs. But what gave her real pause from simply presenting the strong moral case against such a view was when the boy went on to say that this white supremacist belief was at the core of his father's religion, a doctrine somehow pulled from the Bible.

If you chuckle over the Raelians or are outraged by a white supremacist religion, your reaction is, to my way of thinking, quite reasonable and legitimate. You demonstrate our

human willingness and capacity for making judgements of other religious views. And not just knee-jerk prejudices, but judgements that I believe could be sustained even after closer scrutiny and explained by appeal to rational standards. It would seem from these examples that not all religions have equally valid claims upon our respect and affirmation.

Yet today the most popular stance among religious liberals says that all religions are pieces of truth, and all more or less equal paths to salvation. It dovetails nicely with the reigning secular, academic attitude towards pluralism, namely, cultural relativism. Cultural relativism holds that each culture is sovereign unto itself in matters of truth and right. Reality and goodness are defined by each particular culture and no one from an outside culture can fully understand, and certainly has no basis for offering criticism of, another, since that would be using alien criteria.

Well, that reminds me of how I feel when people back in rural northern NY (like most small town regions) sometimes express the opinion that only "native," multi-generation folks from the area have a legitimate say in social and political issues. "Newcomers," no matter how many years you've lived there or how diligently you've studied the issues and paid your dues working on them, have no right to speak up. To which I've always wanted the opening to reply: "All of my ancestors, every single one of them, has been born right here, on this very planet." That, I firmly believe, qualifies me as a native. I would assert that we are, in fact, capable of adequately understanding the religious views of others, fellow humans with whom we share the history of this globe. We are fully able to translate the languages of Hinduism, Judaism, contemporary Liberal, science, or whatever, into the common language of Humanness. And that gives us a standing for assessing those religious and world views, views which are a part of our environment, which affect our lives, too.

Regarding ourselves as world natives, experienced in discerning the meaning and value of life, I think it's possible to chart a new course through the thicket of religious pluralism, other than just either saying my religion is the only right one; or all religions are equally valid. And that is using broad-based learning, thinking, and talking to come up with new and improved models of truth and goodness. This, it seems to me, is an enterprise in which all of us may join -- as world citizens, drawing on the global spiritual inheritance which is a legacy shared by everyone of us. Religions are not exclusively owned by a set of adherents. The traditional religions, as well as the modern secular world views, are also not fixed and intractable truth competitors, but the fluid and dynamic materials out of which we are called to create the next generation of truth for a wider, more integrated world.

The idea of "new and improved" religion sounds very UU. And it is at the heart of who we are to believe in the possibility of progress. But it is also the central premise and value of that larger movement which nurtured us, modern Liberalism. This approximately five hundred year old Western ideal of commitment to progress, through expanding knowledge and expanding rights for all people, offers some standards by which we might evaluate the religions and world views and suggest directions for their betterment (and here I have been much tutored by our own great UU theologian and expositor or the meaning of liberalism, James Luther Adams).

The first set of criteria are in the area of determining what is true. We should not be hesitant in insisting that all religions and world views acknowledge that their versions of "truth" are limited and fallible human interpretations. We should say bluntly, because it is true, that no single purported "revelation" is the exclusive and final word. We can make progress in

glimpsing the truth, if we are willing to join together as many bits and pieces of scattered wisdom as we can find around the world, drawn from a broad representative sampling, and then to apply reasonable standards of evidence, logical and compelling argument, and consonance with common-sense life experience in constructing our conceptions of reality.

The second set of criteria are in the area of determining what is right. The liberal tradition began with the great and noble assumption of the inherent worth and dignity of every individual. That is a worthwhile standard to keep before the religious traditions of today's world. Full equality for women, all racial, ethnic, and religious minorities, gay people, people of differing physical and mental abilities, all social classes, is a non-negotiable criterion for endorsement of a religion or world view by the citizens of today's world.

Finally, the above set of moral criteria provide the undergirding, as well, for a most important theological standard. No religious system is worthy of full endorsement unless it is comprehensive -- in its vision of the world, in its compassion for all beings. There must be acknowledgement of the values of meditative calm, as well as passionate commitment to social action; recognition of the world's beauty and its suffering; understanding of the human potential for both good and evil. And no system can achieve such comprehensiveness without hearing, valuing, and caring for all people, including those who have been shunted to the side for so long.

Out of the plurality of ways available to us today for envisioning and carrying out our lives, may we draw forth threads of new garments -- garments of greater beauty, more profound comfort, available to ever increasing numbers of our needy neighbors, as well as ourselves. We do this not by sending missionaries out to knock on people's doors, but by finding appropriate public outlets where writers and speakers representing various religious viewpoints can put forth the best thinking and the deepest caring for wide consideration. All the world can sample freely and decide for themselves where truth lies. We do this not to create a unity, especially not <u>our</u> unity. But we could aim for a <u>progressive and critical</u> pluralism.

Let us be willing to join with others in doings so persuasively, but not coercively. Let us do so gently, gently, in honor of the treasured hopes so many pin to the well worn clothes of their religious inheritance. Let us do so firmly, firmly, in honor of the spirit of truth and goodness that leads us forward to a still better world.

In this ambitious mission to the world, the pulpits of our own houses of worship can serve as the incubators of truth telling. Right here, in these sacred halls where UUs gather to speak intently, to listen intently, is where the craft of truth telling is perfected.

Yet truth telling, I will now observe in conclusion, for all I have built it up to be, is not everything. The case is similar to what the poet Edna St. Vincent Milay said about love: "Love is not all: it is not meat nor drink/ Nor slumber nor a roof against the rain...." There are other values to be raised up by our religion. There is the action that speaks louder than words, the walk to match the talk. There is the love that must embrace the world, a love that will at times constrain our truth telling within the confines of diplomacy. There is humility, the hallmark of valid truth, for it shows recognition of truth's birth out of the human condition.

There is, finally, faith. No arcane calculus can deduce from the data of life experiences the indelible value of Being. That is a faith we must bring to our lives. Faith -- in life's inherent worth, in the possibility of leading meaningful existences -- undergirds all truth telling. Without

faith, there would be no conviction in our encounters with the world, no truth to tell. Only an appalling silence.

So while truth may not be everything, I say once again, it is important. Edna St. Vincent Milay continues her poem on love this way: "Love can not fill the thickened lung with breath,/ Nor clean the blood, nor set the fractured bone;/ Yet many a [person] is making friends with death/ Even as I speak, for lack of love alone....I might be driven to sell your love for peace/ Or trade the memory of this night for food./ It well may be. I do not think I would."

Let us not trade away truth too easily, either. May our religious movement remain committed to being a source of bold and brazen truth -- our congregations truth hearing green houses, our ministers dedicated truth telling gardeners, who together bring forth the new and vital growths needed to keep our world alive. So may it be.