

Women with a Vision:
The Lives and Influence
of Three 19th Century New England Women



Unitarian Universalist Church
Concord, New Hampshire
Sunday, July 17, 2011

Opening Words

Attributed to Kalidasa

Look to this day !
For it is life, the very life of life.
In its brief course lie all the verities
and realities of your existence:
 The bliss of growth,
 The glory of action,
 The splendor of beauty;
For yesterday is but a dream,
And tomorrow is only a vision;
But today, well lived, makes every yesterday
 A dream of happiness
And every tomorrow
 A vision of hope.
Look well, therefore, to this day.

Reading: A New Manifestation

by Margaret Fuller

from *Woman of the Nineteenth Century*

A new manifestation is at hand,
A new hour is come.

When Man and Woman may regard one another as brother and sister, able both to appreciate and to prophesy to one another.

A new manifestation is at hand,
A new hour is come.

What Woman needs is not as a woman to act or rule, but as a nature to grow, as an intelligence to discern, as a soul to live freely and unimpeded, to unfold such powers as were given her.

A new manifestation is at hand,
A new hour is come.

Man does not have his fair share either; his energies are repressed and distorted by the interposition of artificial obstacles.

A new manifestation is at hand,
A new hour is come.

We would have every arbitrary barrier thrown down. We would have every path laid open to Woman as freely as to Man.

Were this done, we believe a divine energy would pervade nature to a degree unknown in the history of former ages.

A new manifestation is at hand,
A new hour is come.

Sermon

Women with a Vision:

The Lives and Influence of Three 19th Century New England Women.

Laurel Horne and Wayne Frey

Introduction

Today we are taking a brief look at three fascinating, remarkable and inspirational New England women of the 19th century. There is far more information about them that we would like to share with you than time will allow, unless you'd like to be here until 3pm? No? Well then we encourage you to ask us questions following the service, and to view additional materials about these women in the parlor. We'd also like to point out the items representing each of these women: my father's Sunday school copies of the King James bible and Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures by Mary Baker Eddy, the two together are ordained the Pastor of the Church of Christ, Scientist. Closest to me is a portrait of Armenia White, normally found in the church library since it's rescue by Rev. Charles Stevens during the transformation of the Centennial Home for the Aged to Centennial Inn; and next to Armenia is one of the 10 panel travelling display series, "Why Margaret Fuller Matters" created in celebration of her bicentennial – it will join the other panels in the parlor after the service. We'd also like you to get a pen or pencil out and, if you'd like to, add the dates of these women's lives, perhaps above their images on the order of service. Mary Baker Eddy, on the left, lived from 1821-1910 – 89 years; Armenia White lived from 1817 – 1916 -- 98.5 years, and Margaret Fuller, who died along with her husband and baby when their steamer ran aground, lived from 1810 – to only 1850 –40 years.

How did we come to select these three women? And what can we, as Unitarian Universalists, learn from them? Each of them has an impressive list of "firsts" associated with her name. To highlight just one "first" for each: Mary Baker Eddy was the "first" woman to found a major religion – Christian Science, in 1879, at age 58. Armenia White read the "Call", which she co-authored, for the "first" Women's Suffrage Convention in New Hampshire, in 1868, at age 51. And Margaret Fuller was the first American to write a book about equality for women, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, in 1845, at the age of 35. Not without controversy, all three were involved in one or more of what we would consider social justice movements of their day: abolition, temperance, and suffrage,. They were visionary women with strong convictions; they worked incredibly hard for change and justice, for doing good. They loved life, and they loved.

Let's go back in time, to the very early years of the 19th Century, 1810 to 1821. Napoleon's army is marching over Europe, conquering territory for France. The British are making incursions into the U.S. from Canada in action which will lead to the War of 1812. In America, slavery and indentured servitude are legal and widely accepted practices through much of the country. Women, while expected to excel in domestic areas of home and family, are generally confined in public expression and career to writing and teaching. They have no right to vote, no right to own property, no right to hold public office, and since they can't vote and men are essentially in control, have few prospects for gaining an equal voice in the governance of their country. Religious identities, beliefs, and loyalties are becoming clearly defined. Distilled spirits, initially used as antiseptics in the 1400's, then as medicinal elixirs, are now accepted as alcoholic beverages, and are the cause of financial and other social problems, including violence, in many households. Into this era are born these three women.

Mary Baker Eddy

We could speak for hours about any one of these women, but given her international stature as the founder of the Christian Science religion, probably the most is known about Mary Baker Eddy, unquestionably the most famous of the three women, in fact, the most famous citizen of Concord at the turn of the 20th century. When, after 19 years of living in Concord, she left to spend her final two years in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, she had spent over \$1million dollars to benefit the city of Concord, including donating 1,000 pairs of winter shoes to children, paving several city streets for the first time, and contributing to the construction of area churches. When she spoke briefly in 1903 from a balcony at her home at Pleasant View, the crowd of men and women from around the country numbered 10,000. In an interesting connection between Christian Science and our faith tradition, in 1904, while the Christian Scientist church was being built downtown, its congregants met on Sunday afternoons to hold their services at the Unitarian Church across the street, and visiting Christian Scientists from all over the nation gathered on the Unitarian church lawns to view construction progress.

Mary Baker Eddy, youngest of six children, was born in Bow (you've probably driven past the entrance to her birthplace on Route 3A). By all accounts a bright but sickly child, she was a devoted bible reader, but could never adopt her father's strict Calvinistic interpretation of predestination that God willed salvation for some people and eternal damnation for others. For her, God was goodness and love, and the bible a source of solace and guidance. Despite this significant disagreement with a fundamental belief of the church, Mary did join the family's Congregational Church in Tilton after her family moved there. In her 20s she endured the loss of the three people most dear to her. Two years after her beloved older brother Albert died at age 31 of kidney failure, Mary married, and moved with her husband to the Carolinas, where he

died of yellow fever less than a year later, when she was six months pregnant. After freeing his slaves, she returned home to New Hampshire, where she bore her son, published some writing and taught, while struggling with illness and depression. Five years later her dear mother and then her fiancée died. After an unsuccessful marriage to a dentist, and years of experimenting with some success with the popular alternative healing methods of the time such as hydropathy, hygiene, and hypnotism, and then becoming active in the temperance movement, in 1866 a transformative event took place.

After a severe fall on an icy sidewalk from which she sustained life-threatening internal injuries, Mary Baker found herself suddenly recovered after reading an account of Jesus' healing in the bible. Over the next 5 years she devoted herself to studying the bible and developing her system of healing, which she began teaching. In 1872, she began writing her primary work, which was published three years later: *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. The best seller, now having sold over 10 million copies, describes her discovery of Christian Science, her system of healing and her interpretation of the scriptures. In addition to healing and teaching, Mary Baker Eddy married Asa Eddy, began preaching weekly, and in 1879, after disappointing efforts to get Christian churches to adopt her discovery, with her students she started a new church, Church of Christ, Scientist. It teaches that God is unchanging Love and the source of all good in our lives and the world. It also explains the spiritual laws, or science, that allowed Jesus to heal the sick and the sinner.

In the next three decades, Mary Baker Eddy taught spiritual healing courses at the Massachusetts Metaphysical College which she opened, wrote many more publications and revised and revamped *Science and Health*, and developed a system of governance for the growing religion and its Mother Church in Boston.

For me, Mary Baker Eddy holds importance because my grandmother and her siblings were Christian Scientists. When I asked my dad and his siblings why, I was told it was because HER mother was a Christian Scientist. Apparently Ma Lou spent her last years in a retirement home in Brookline, MA with a Christian Science nurse caring for her. My dad and his siblings all attended Christian Science Sunday school. None of them are practicing Christian Scientist today – as my Uncle Ted said:

“Every Sunday when I was growing up, we would go to the Christian Science church in Barrington, and attend the Sunday School where we would read bible stories and learn a bit about Mary Baker Eddy, none of which I seem to have retained. But the values that those Sunday School sessions seem to have instilled in me have stayed with me. Honesty above all. And always try to do the right thing. Being a generally good person. But the no doctor, no drinking, no smoking doctrine didn't swing much weight

with me as I still drink, smoked until last year, and see doctors on a much too regular basis.”

Mary Baker Eddy made it clear in *Science and Health* that “...the use of tobacco or intoxicating drinks is not in harmony with Christian Science”.

One of my cousin’s reports that my grandfather, a rarely church attending Episcopalian, said to his daughter (her mother, my aunt) of Christian Science as they were sipping martinis, “it’s the damnedest religion!”

We grew up with the Christian Science Monitor, a gift from my grandmother, as our weekday newspaper. The Christian Science Monitor was founded by Mary Baker Eddy in 1908, before women even had the right to vote, with the mission, “To injure no man, but to bless all mankind”. Listen to this backstory, as related by the Monitor’s Washington bureau chief, David Cook, several years ago.

“ It is 1907. An elderly New England woman finds herself being targeted by Joseph Pulitzer’s New York World. She is 86 years old and holds some unconventional religious beliefs that she expounds in a book, Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures. The book becomes a bestseller, making her wealthy and a well-known public figure.

“The New York World decides she is incapable of managing her own affairs and persuades some of her friends and her two sons to sue for control of her estate. Although Boston and New Hampshire newspapers and major wire services interview this woman and find her competent, the New York World is unrelenting. The lady in question finally is taken to court where the case against her is dropped.

“And the next year this woman, Mary Baker Eddy, founds The Christian Science Monitor.”

Despite unrelenting criticism, Mary Baker Eddy continually worked for what she knew to be true for the good of humankind.

Margaret Fuller

From Concord NH we now turn to Concord MA and Cambridge MA, and the life and vision of a woman who is considered one of the guiding lights of the first wave of feminism; who, according to Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “...[had] more influence on the thought of American women than any woman previous to her time.”

Sarah Margaret Fuller was born in 1810 into a Unitarian family. Her father was an attorney and, later in life, a U.S. Congressman. Margaret was an only child for several years. She was the center of her father's attention, and he began to educate her himself. By age 3 ½, she had learned to read and write, by 4 ½ she was learning arithmetic, and by age 5 had mastered English and Latin syntax. She was very intelligent and, in addition to the usual school subjects, she read widely in political philosophy, history, and even novels (of which her father disapproved).

In 1836 she met Ralph Waldo Emerson, who became an influential friend, and in 1838 he introduced her into a circle of Transcendentalists, largely male ministers rebelling against traditional religion and defining a new concept called Transcendentalism.

I have to tell you I have only recently begun to understand a little of what Transcendentalism is about. I recall being in a college philosophy class where the lecture touched on Transcendentalism, and recall meeting with the professor after class to get a clearer explanation of what it was about. I'm sure I had a "deer in the headlights" look during his long and, to me, unintelligible explanation. However, researching this sermon, I learned two things. First, I am not alone: on an American visit, Charles Dickens was told that "whatever was unintelligible would certainly be Transcendental"; Edgar Allan Poe instructed a young author to write about Transcendentalism by using small words but turning them upside down; and a Baltimore clergyman noted that "a new philosophy has risen, maintaining that nothing is everything in general, and everything is nothing in particular."

The second thing I learned is that Transcendentalism cannot be properly understood without understanding that Unitarianism, and certain other philosophies of that day, held that truth could be known only through the senses (sight, taste, touch, etc) and through Biblical scriptures. Transcendentalism, on the other hand, argued that there are truths we know from a spiritual realm which transcend our senses and the scriptures.

Transcendentalism spoke VOLUMES to Sarah Margaret Fuller. She was a strong proponent for abolishment of slavery, for equal rights and equality for women, rights for Native Americans, indeed liberty and equality for all people; she came to believe that these were spiritual truths which transcended scripture and human senses. Raised a Unitarian, she did not reject the church as did some Transcendentalists, but she did adapt her inherited faith to her own needs, wishing to be a Christian "in full possession of my reasoning powers."

She became one of the three most influential thinkers in the Transcendentalism movement, along with Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Her contributions were not only in the philosophical constructs of Transcendentalism, but were also grounded in

the real life issues she so fervently espoused. Together Fuller, Emerson, and Thoreau helped transform Unitarianism toward the UU faith we share today.

In the fall of 1839, Margaret formed an enterprise in Boston which she called "*Conversations*". This enterprise offered intellectual stimulation, both for her and the many well-educated women of Boston, allowed time for her writing, and provided a way to support herself and family. She announced a series of public *Conversations* "designed to encourage women in self-expression and independent thinking." She searched for and found a group of women wishing to discuss issues such as "What were we born to do? How shall we do it?", and to satisfy their "wish for some such means of stimulus and cheer, and . . . for a place where they could state their doubts and difficulties with hope of gaining aid from the experience or aspirations of others,". The place of their first meeting was Elizabeth Palmer Peabody's parlor, and 25 women appeared for the meeting at eleven o'clock on a Wednesday morning.

These *Conversations* proved very popular, drawing women all the way from Providence, RI. Most were associated with the women's rights movement. The Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society was also well represented.

Margaret's method was Socratic; each *Conversation* was devoted to a philosophical question, and she would engage the participants in discussion and dialogue before expounding her own views with a clarity of thought and luminosity of expression that dazzled her listeners. That women could have their own opinions on matters outside their "sphere" proved an intoxicating proposition. The first series was based on Greek myths which could become "launching pads for a fresh approach to subjects such as the power of the human will, the sources of creative energy, the development of the arts, and the different faculties that are put to use in rational and aesthetic pursuits." She opened one evening to men, but that was not successful because "the men took over the discussion and performed for each other."

Not surprisingly, *Conversations* incurred criticism and ridicule, not just from men but also from women, some of whom thought abolition of slavery should be the major subject of discussion. Yet over the five years from late 1839 to 1845, more than 200 women participated.

Conversations became a strong base for feminism in New England. Many women who became leaders in the feminist movement participated in *Conversations*, which Elizabeth Cady Stanton called a landmark in "the vindication of woman's right to think."

Toward the end of her *Conversations* enterprise in 1845, Margaret published a book, *Woman of the 19th Century*. It was a manifesto for the women's rights movement, and revealed her enormous knowledge of literature and philosophy as she described the oppression

of the female sex through history, and advocated equality for women. It was her major gift to the times.

Following publication of *Woman of the 19th Century*, Horace Greeley invited her to work for his newspaper, the NEW YORK TRIBUNE, where she wrote as a literary critic and reported on social problems and conditions in that city. Two years later she convinced Greeley to send her to Europe as a foreign correspondent for the TRIBUNE, and ultimately wound up in Italy during the Roman Revolution, where she became the first female war correspondent and also became a revolutionary herself. There she fell in love with and married an Italian officer of the revolution. They had a child together, and when the revolution began to fall apart in 1850, they fled Italy and booked passage back to America. Tragically, upon arriving in American waters and entering New York harbor, a hurricane struck, their ship ran aground and sank. Margaret, her son and her husband all perished.

The Fuller family erected a monument (centograph) in Margaret's memory at Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge, MA. It is still there and reads:

"Born a child of New England,
By adoption a citizen of Rome,
By genius belonging to the World."

Horace Greeley was well known as a supporter of liberal social causes, but he was not a supporter of suffrage or equal rights for women. Not, that is, until he met Sarah Margaret Fuller. During her years working for the TRIBUNE in New York and Europe, Margaret gradually convinced him of the essential justice of her argument for women's rights. Following her death in 1850, he wrote the following of Margaret and her book, *Woman of the Nineteenth Century*:

" ... it was the loftiest and most commanding assertion yet made of the right of Woman to be regarded and treated as an independent, intelligent, rational being, entitled to an equal voice in framing and modifying the laws she is required to obey, and in controlling and disposing of the property she has inherited or aided to acquire . . . hers is the ablest, bravest, and broadest assertion yet made of what are termed Woman's Rights."

Armenia White

The more I read about Armenia White, the more awed I am by this incredible woman, who by all accounts was dearly beloved and respected by all who knew her. In 1817 Armenia White was born into a Quaker farming family. After marrying Nathaniel, who worked his way from a penniless 15 year old laborer to one of the wealthiest men in the state, and while raising

8 children, and caring for aging parents, the two were instrumental in the founding and subsequent leadership of the Universalist Church in Concord. As Cheryl Bourassa writes in the chapter, "Tidings of Faith" in the Concord Historical Society's new book about Concord in the 20th Century, "No family is more closely associated with the Universalist Church than that of Nathaniel and Armenia White." I am curious about what led them to help start this church, which held as a central tenant God's universal salvation of all humanity. Why not join the nascent Second Congregational Society, Unitarian? In addition to their significant philanthropic and cultural contributions to the city and state, both of the Whites were leaders in what we'd consider the social justice issues of their era: abolition, temperance, and suffrage. Their 400-acre farm on Clinton Street, now known as White Farm, where many of us cross-country ski in the winter, was a stop on the road to freedom for escaped slaves. The actual farm house burned in the 1980s, and their brick downtown home, where they entertained prominent figures and welcomed fugitive slaves, was razed for the State House Annex in the 1950s. The White Memorial Universalist Church, so named for them after decades of generous sustaining financial gifts and leadership, was deemed unsafe due to structural damage and torn down in 1984. While these physical structures are gone, their legacy lives on in the open space of White Farm, and in White Park, created by Armenia in Nathaniel's memory after his passing. It is likely that Mary Baker Eddy would have known Armenia White. In fact she donated two swans for the newly established White Park pond in the late 1880s.

Okay. If you're not yet duly impressed, here are some more facts about Armenia. "Armenia was instrumental", writes Rev. Emily Burr, "in the establishment of the NH Centennial Home for the Aged (which was established for the widows of Civil War soldiers), the NH Orphans' Home and Mercy Home for Girls in Manchester, and served on the board of trustees of each from the time of their founding until at least her 93rd year. She was an original member of many charity organizations, such as the Universalist Ladies' Social Aid Society, and founding member of the Anti-slavery Society, the American Purity Alliance (to thwart state regulation of prostitution), the American Peace Society, the NH Prisoners' Aid Society and the NH Humane Society. She was the founder and first president of the NH Woman's Christian Temperance Union. But it was women's suffrage, on all levels --within the Universalist Church, within NH, and within the nation -- that was the cause nearest and dearest to her heart. As the Granite Monthly publication said when paying tribute to her life in 1916, "it is safe to say that no cause was ever closer to her heart, and none so long and persistently labored for, as that of her own sex and the elevation of woman to the plane of political equality with man. She was the pioneer of the women's suffrage movement in NH."

In 1868, she co-authored with Mrs. Sarah Piper, a Call for the first NH Women's Suffrage Convention. I find it incredibly motivational. Listen to this...

A CALL.

To the Earnest, Thinking Men and Women of New Hampshire:

"The spirit of the age, vigilant for justice and righteousness, purified and matured by the recent struggles and experiences for the redemption of a race, still grasps an evil, unjust and oppressive in its results. While our national declaration affirms the 'self-evident truths' of equality, and that 'all just governments derive their power from the consent of the governed,' our democratic government holds arbitrary and unjust sway over one-half of its subjects.

"No discerning mind can fail to be arrested by the doubtful policy of withholding the ballot from the mothers, wives and daughters who adorn our homes with the highest culture and refinement, while it is conferred so freely on foreigners just arriving from the social degradation and ignorance of the old world.

" 'Vigilance is the price of liberty.' 'Man is only just to himself when he is just to all.' Free discussion and agitation is the life of progress. Therefore we, the undersigned, invite you, thinking men and women of New Hampshire, to meet us in convention at Eagle hall, Concord, Tuesday and Wednesday, December 22 and 23, 1868, at 11 o'clock a. m., to consider and act upon the political and civil rights of Woman, and organize for the efficient advocacy of Woman Suffrage.

"No position in life in which Woman is not co-equal and absolute in her relations, involving a community of interests which should have no antagonisms and cannot be separate or hostile, can exist without muddying the springs from which it draws its highest life. Truth is reviving and right is everywhere asserting itself to fulfill its noblest duties. The public is aroused for justice. The times are propitious. We are sowing fallowed ground. Our movement is only reciprocal with sister States, and from across the waters comes encouragement of 'God speed you.' The ballot is our final argument. Come then to the convention, and give us the inspiration of your best thought and cooperation."

[Signed by...]

Nathaniel White, Concord	Hon. D. R. Burnham, Plymouth	Mrs. R. Hatch, Concord
Mrs. Armenia S. White, Concord	Mrs. M. M. Smith, Concord	E. H. Cheney, Lebanon
Eev. J. P. Lovering, Concord	Rev. R. P. Ambler, Portsmouth	A. M. Shaw, Lebanon
Mrs. J. F. Lovering, Concord	Hon. Alfred W. Haven, Portsmouth	Peter Kimball, Grafton
Rev. John M. L. Babcock, Lancaster	CoL J. S. Walker, Claremont	Mis. Peter Kimball, Grafton
M [^] s. Abbie P. Ela, Rochester	David M. Clough, Canterbury	Mrs. D. E. Hill Northfield
Dr. A. Morrill, Concord	Mrs. David M. Clough, Canterbury	Rev. William T. Savage, Franklin
Mrs. Eliza Morrill, Concord	Mrs. Ira Abbott, Concord	Warren F. Daniel Franklin

Mrs. Sarah H. Pillsbury, Concord Rev. F. E. Kittredge, Concord Mrs. F. E. Kittredge, Concord P. B. Cogswell, Concord Mrs. Louisa W. Wood, Concord Col. James E. Larkin, -Concord Charles S. Piper, Concord Mrs. Sarah Piper, Concord Mrs. Lizzie A. T. Lund, Bradford Miss Mary J. Tappan, Bradford Rev. J. L. Gorman, Laconia William N. Blair, Laconia Rev. A. N. Hascall, Manchester Dr. M. O. A. Hunt, Manchester	Mrs. L. M. Rust, Concord Dr. E. G. Moore, Concord Rev. Silas Curtis, Concord Mrs. P. Ladd, Concord Mrs. R. A. Smith, Concord Mrs. J. B. Marston, Concord Rev. H. B. Putnam, West Concord Dr. A. P. Tenney, West Concord George W. Brown, West Concord J. B. Aldrich, West Concord Mrs. J. B. Aldrich, West Concord Moses B. Smith, Concord Mrs. M. B. Smith, Concord Mrs. T. H. Brown, Concord	Miss J. L. Crawford, Concord Mrs. Anna Dumas, Concord Mrs. George E. Todd, Concord William W. George, Canaan R. D. Rounsevel, Littleton Miss Hattie C. Edmunds, Concord Miss Salina Stevens, Concord Miss Mary A. Downing, Concord Miss N. E. Fessenden, Concord Miss Fannie A. Bellows, Concord Miss Martha L. Noyes, Concord James" H. Chase, Concord Col. Peter Sanborn, Concord ... and more than 60 others
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I love this story that Rev. Emily Burr relates in a paper written about Armenia. Emily interviewed Marion Green, one of the last living members of the First Universalist Society of Concord, NH in the summer of 2000. Marion remembers as a child delivering food across the street from a church supper to “Grandma White” as she was known by the Sunday School students.

“We went over with the food” said Marion, “and I remember going up the steps and a servant coming to the door and being scared as could be. And then we went into a room and sitting in a comfortable chair was this plump older woman in a black dress with a little white cap on her head and she was smiling and pleasant and I wasn’t afraid at all. Then she put her hand into her pocket and gave me a piece of hard candy. And I was delighted to be there.”

Conclusion

Imagine again the controversy and contention faced by these three women in the dawning years of the 19th Century. Their visions were of a country and a world where women participate fully and equally with men in all aspects of life, where slavery and servitude are abolished, where believers can celebrate a religion which included the healing power of faith, where social ills, including alcohol abuse, are eliminated.

But wait a minute!! We don’t need to imagine the situation 200 years ago! Today, in the dawning years of the 21st Century, we’re facing issues as fully controversial and contentious as those faced by Armenia, Margaret, and Mary. Should we provide equal rights, including marriage, for gays, lesbians, bi-sexuals, and transvestites? Should we abolish the death

penalty? What about immigration reform and transitioning immigrants into our society? Protecting and restoring our environment? Ethical treatment of animals, bioengineering, and ethical eating? Overpopulation? Economic justice? Quality education for our children? Hunger? Housing?

What issue or issues most concern you? Do you have a vision of what you'd like to see accomplished? One vision our three 19th Century women shared was a country where women participate fully and equally with men in all aspects of life. Perhaps your personal vision is a world where all people work together to protect and restore our environment. Or a community committed to providing affordable housing for all its citizens. A vision is a clear idea of the change or result we want to see in the world. A vision guides us in the activities we develop to accomplish it; it is the beacon that keeps us on the path toward our goal.

And beyond our personal visions, what is the vision or calling for us collectively as a church? You may have heard that one of the things we'd like to do as a church this year is develop a new mission or vision statement. Now, whether you heard about this before, or are hearing it today for the first time, if you're like me, I can tell you exactly what your reaction is. First, you roll your eyes. Then you say something like, "The wordsmiths are going to have a field day."

But after working with the Committee on Ministries, which is responsible for facilitating this process, I've grown excited about it. We hope to have "conversations", much like Margaret Fuller's conversations for women and perhaps similar to our Covenant group conversations. The intent is to gather ideas and, together, work toward a vision or mission statement to guide us over the next few years.

A statement of our shared vision should be simple, straight-forward, and BOLD. Given conditions in the early 19th Century, there were few things as bold as envisioning the abolition of slavery or equality for women. Our statement might be something like "a community of parents and other adults committed to the education of all children" or "an America where all LGBT people are ensured equality and acceptance", or how about "a Concord UU sister church on Mars"! Okay, that last one was a little over the top, but you get the idea.

Whatever shared vision we develop, it won't be mine, it may not be yours, but it SHOULD be ours.

So as we conceive our personal visions and work toward our church's vision, let's draw courage and inspiration from these three 19th Century women, Margaret Fuller, Armenia White, and Mary Baker Eddy, and the results their visions and work brought to the world.

Closing Words

by Peter Morales

*(upon the 50th Anniversary celebration of the union of Universalist and Unitarian churches)
from UU World Summer 2011*

Our past, especially our past success, can be a trap. Yet there is another part of our religious heritage that is the core of our spirituality and a reliable guide for our future: What is central to our faith tradition is our willingness to leave behind what no longer serves us and to embrace the possibilities of today and the promise of tomorrow.

This is what all of the great women and men we honor had in common: They were visionaries who had the courage to embrace new possibilities and to let go of what no longer served the human spirit. They understood that everything changes. They got it at the core of their being. And they boldly created a new religion for their time.

We must do no less.

References for Sermon

Following are links and other published resources for material in this sermon, and for additional information.

On Mary Baker Eddy:

<http://www.marybakereddylibrary.org/mary-baker-eddy/life>

<http://marybakereddy.wwwhubs.com/>

On Margaret Fuller:

<http://www.margaretfuller.org/>

<http://www25.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/margaretfuller.html>

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/ihas/poet/fuller.html>

On Margaret Fuller and Transcendentalism:

<http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/>

<http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/ideas/definitionbickman.html>

<http://thoreau.eserver.org/amertran.html>

On Armenia White:

<http://www.cowhampshireblog.com/2007/12/22/concord-new-hampshires-white-park-and-family/>

http://familyfindings.com/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=217

On Mission statements:

"Evaluating the Mission Statement". John Carver. *Board Leadership*, Number 5, Jan-Feb 1993