

What's fair pay? Should we have minimum pay scales or just let the market work? Is there such a thing as paying someone too much? Should we as a country with wants and needs for social cohesion allow corporations to pay executives any amount of money...say \$32 million in annual compensation? Is it reasonable for a society to determine there is a maximum amount any employee, including senior execs can be paid, in the same way that we've determined there is a minimum legal wage? If no, why not?

Beyond impacting any given individual, there is a cost to us as a society that comes with either answer. Somewhere along the line, we as a society determined we didn't want people to labor and still not be able to afford to live life at a certain level.

There is a cost to that decision. Those minimum pay rates get baked into the cost of goods and the consumer pays in the end. So too, with a \$32M salary. Such pay rates also get baked into the cost of goods and get passed on to the consumer. Why should consumers be forced to support such a lifestyle?

If we can decide that people need a certain amount of pay to live a reasonable lifestyle, why can't we use the same metrics and determine how much it takes to live well? We could then legislate that no one could be paid more than that amount.

I find it instructive to note that our cultural tendency is to focus on life style only when talking about the poor. We ask: why should society support "them" buying beer or a large-screen TV while on welfare? We think of such behavior as immoral. Yet, we never seem to ask why society should support a millionaire buying a third mansion or yacht, on his multi-million dollar salary, that "we the people" help pay for?

For me, these questions in juxtaposition, reflect a certain cultural bias. These questions reflect the fact that we as a culture place a higher value on wealth than we do on quality of life for the masses. Our decisions often reflect our values, which then become the basis for our definition of what represents moral behavior.

A few years ago the country was embroiled in a national argument. Some people argued that using "enhanced interrogation" measures, to gain information from captives that would save American lives, was a no-brainer. Of course one would do whatever one could in order to save American lives. Yes, it might be ugly, but it saved lives, American lives, was the argument.

Others took a very different approach. They said such "extra-ordinary measures" was really torture and therefore could never be justified. This argument seemed to place a higher value on human life than on the risks to American lives. These people argued that the world needed to have standards beyond which no-one should be allowed to go, for whatever reason.

So who's right? Should we be able to do whatever we want if it supports our ends or objectives deemed to be valuable? Or, are there behaviors that rational, thinking people should never engage in? Before you answer, remember, nothing comes for free. There is a cost to be paid for either decision.

History shows, in large measure, our country came into being because there was a clear answer to the above question. Our founders clearly determined that their lives, their culture, their worldview was of greater value than that of the so-called heathens. Our founders determined they had the right to do whatever was necessary, to use "extra-ordinary measures, if necessary, to claim this land as their own.

Now our cultural mythology cleans up the story, so the truth of what really happened on these lands of ours gets sanitized to reflect the view of the victor. We're told that Columbus "discovered" these lands. The meaning of the word "discover" is to find anew. So how was it possible for Columbus to discover a land that was already inhabited by people with tools, knowledge, language, a culture that had been passed down through generations? Well, never mind! Columbus discovered these lands, we've been told and fundamentally, that is what we as a nation believe.

This story is accepted because it sits on top of a set of values that form the basis of a code of morality, a code of not only acceptable, but valued and determined behavior. When Christopher Columbus first set foot on the white sands of Guanahani island, he performed a ceremony to "take possession" of the land for the king and queen of Spain, acting under the international laws of Western Christendom. Few of us know this act of "possession" was based on a religious doctrine that history calls the Doctrine of Discovery or the Doctrine of Christian Discovery. Even fewer people realize that today - five centuries later - the United States government still uses this archaic doctrine to deny the rights of indigenous peoples.

The Doctrine of Discovery is the basis on which European nations have justified the conquest of Africa, Asia, Australia, New Zealand and what has become known as the Americas. In combination with other concepts, it is the basis for the slave trade, the partitioning and colonization of other's lands and the atrocities committed upon indigenous people in Africa and the Americas.

It is the concept of this Doctrine, now law, and the belief system of privilege and superiority of Christianity and whiteness that allows this nation of ours to accept the fact of Native Americans being forced to live on the most desolate land in the country. I believe this Doctrine and its embedded belief systems is what allows America to accept the ghettoization, rates of imprisonment and poverty of the inner city. And the inequitable treatment of people of diverse sexual and gender orientation, who continue to seek inclusion and justice.

As you may know, this year's General Assembly of Unitarian Universalist Congregations will gather in Phoenix. There was a vote at our last assembly to make this year's gathering a Justice Assembly. That means we will spend considerable time becoming educated about the issues of immigration and that we will witness in solidarity with partners in Arizona who are fighting against the recently enacted, mean-spirited laws.

We as Unitarian Universalist, as a faith and spiritual community are being asked to take a long, hard look at the truth of our history, to educate ourselves about this Doctrine and its ramifications. We are being asked to follow in the footsteps of the Episcopalians, Quakers and the Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches, who have already adopted a formal position that repudiates this Doctrine.

After two decades of work, in 2007, the United Nations overwhelmingly passed the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. This declaration repudiates the Doctrine of Discovery and calls upon the nations of the world to respect the land claims of their indigenous peoples and the treaties that have been made with them.

Among other things, it recognizes the right of indigenous people to migrate in their own lands, even when national borders have been drawn through them by colonial powers. The United States is one of only four countries in the world that voted against the declaration. They were accompanied by Canada, Australia and New Zealand. While the US verbally endorses the declaration, it has failed to encode it in law.

Today we will hold a Town meeting immediately following our service. The UUA Board of Trustees has asked its member congregations, as a denomination, to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery, and also to endorse measures to help the United States to be in full compliance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. The Social Justice committee will lead the meeting.

Lets be clear, governmental entities often make decisions based on power, politics and what is expedient. We as Unitarian Universalist, and religious communities in general, base our decisions on a different set of criteria. We as UUs ground ourselves in equity and justice in our interactions. We ground ourselves in a belief in the worth and dignity of everyone and a connection to the interconnected web of life. We believe the truth will set us free.

And we as UUs often fall short of living out our espoused values, beliefs and principles. Sometimes we are daunted by just how hard it is to live out what we say we believe. We can be confronted with serious inconsistencies when we are challenged to see the truth of our behavior in juxtaposition to our espoused beliefs. Yet, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off and try again to live into what we believe. So too must our nation.

Again, I remind us of one of the oddities of moral behavior: it is easiest to be moral in the absence of moral dilemma. It is hardest to behave morally when the cost is greatest, when the need is highest, when the stakes are the greatest.

As we think about the Doctrine of Discovery and repudiating a doctrine that has had enormous ill affects, let us not loose sight of the cost of behaving morally. Are we prepared to give up privilege, are we prepared to give away some of our power, are we really committed to equity and treating all people as equals?

Are we, as a nation, willing to change our ways, are we willing to change our laws? Are we willing to give up a belief system that says “might makes right”?

Are we prepared to take a stand and declare, that human life, human dignity, and justice for all, is of greater importance than the inconvenience it may cause me and those that I know and value? Are we prepared to pay a price for our espoused beliefs, or do we hold on to our beliefs only when the going is easy? These are questions we would all be well served to meditate on.

May we find the holy in our answers.

Amen