Last weekend I was in Washington DC to lead a workshop for the Joseph Priestley District’s Leadership Day. Many of my fellow travelers on the Pennsylvania turnpike were sporting bumper stickers and signs taped in their car windows advertising the Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear. Their license plates suggested that they were coming from as far away as the Mississippi River.

The rally was a satirical send-up by cable channel Comedy Central of recent rallies organized by Fox commentator Glen Beck and civil rights activist the Rev. Al Sharpton. Daily Show comedian and host Jon Stewart proposed the Rally to restore Sanity for the 70–80 percent of Americans “who don't have extreme political views and lack a voice in the media. To illustrate the point, he unveiled a mock motto for the rally: "Take it down a notch for America," and offered
protest signs with messages such as "I disagree with you, but I'm pretty sure you're not Hitler."\textsuperscript{1} Stephen Colbert, of the Colbert Show responded with a “March to Keep Fear Alive” stating that now was not the time to be reasonable, "Now is the time for all good men to freak out for freedom!"\textsuperscript{2}

The estimates are that over 200,000 people showed up. It was a beautiful fall day, sunny and mild, so I’m sure that helped the attendance. There were plenty of celebrities who were going to perform, which also was attractive. But there’s something about humor and satire that helps us to express feelings for which we have no other healthy outlet. Feelings of powerlessness, frustration, and isolation can be dealt with obliquely through sharp, pointed humor.

The Daily Show holds a strange place in our political landscape. It’s first and foremost a comedy show,

\textsuperscript{1} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rally_to_Restore_Sanity_and/or_Fear
\textsuperscript{2} Ibid.
but Jon Steward asks some of the hardest-hitting questions of our political leaders, including his most recent interview with President Obama. Pew and other studies have shown that watchers of the Daily Show tend to be as well-informed about current events as those who watch the Lehrer Report or Bill O’Reilly.3

One of the other sources where I get my news is the weekly magazine, The Nation. It’s been publishing the progressive viewpoint and been doing deep investigative reporting since 1865 and I’ve been a subscriber since the early 1980’s. In it, I read about stories that take months, or even years to make it into the mainstream press, if they get there at all.

But as much as I appreciate The Nation, there is one aspect of it that has always bothered me. There is a lot of identifying and complaining about our social issues and calls for change. But the tone is often a bit smarmy and elitist…. holier than thou, but without the holy.

In the Catholic church of my youth, we had plenty of the holy, and there was some wonderful work being done with the poor. But there was a huge disconnect for me between what was being done on the service end by providing aid and the stands that the church was taking on the policy end, especially in regard to their stand on prohibiting most methods of birth control.

When I walked into my first Unitarian Universalist church 15 years ago, I discovered that it was possible to ground my progressive politics in a faith tradition without the contradictions and occasional cognitive dissonance. And, more importantly, that faith tradition could provide a foundation to sustain the deep kind of work that is necessary for real societal change.

Today, we explore that foundation using the question “Whose are we?” To what or to whom are we accountable?
What or whom do we call upon--
when the going gets rough--to keep our hope alive?
To what or to whom to we owe our ultimate commitment?

In Unitarian Universalism each one of us
needs to answer that question for ourselves.
This year, my colleagues
in the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association
are spending some slow time in our chapter retreats
to explore related questions as individuals and as a group.
I invite you to consider these questions yourself.

The first question is Whose am I?
Who or What lays claim to my heart and life?
Who or what lays claim to my days? (pause)

My answers included my partner and children,
you, the members and friends of this congregation,
my siblings and parents and nieces and nephews.
The larger movement of Unitarian Universalism
also lays claim to my days,
more so now that I am UUA staff!
But the circle gets wider.
My local community and our American commitment
to freedom and democracy.
Our beloved planet earth and its delicate balance
of diverse life-forms.
But there are also certain ideals that claim me.
There is the ideal of diversity,
where even those at the margins might be
a valued part of our human family.
There is the ideal of love and compassion,
where we hold one another in a way where all can flourish.
There is the ideal of creativity,
where we all have the opportunity to enrich and be enriched.
These threads are woven through my life
and inform even the littlest of actions,
from smiling at the harried mother at the grocery store,
to being a little more patient in traffic,
to choosing to take mass transit instead of drive
to knocking on neighbor’s doors to encourage them to vote.

The second question is “Who Calls Me?” (pause)
As a minister I am often asked to share
what or from where was my call to ministry.
Some of us had an aha! Moment where it almost felt like a voice called us. Others, like myself, felt called gradually, like a jigsaw puzzle that reveals its image bit by bit as pieces are added to it. I also believe that there is a call to different kinds of lay leadership that is just as sacred as the call to ordained ministry. Our own Deb Chaney pursued a district-run program that enabled her to be commissioned, recognized for her studies and practice of lay ministry. One of my goals in my new position as regional leadership development consultant is to create more of those kinds of opportunities for the members of our congregations.

But the question was Who calls me? In that question lies a personal invitation, but from whom? From what? From where? I am a religious naturalist, which means I don’t believe in the supernatural.
But there are mysteries in this life
for which I have no explanation
and that I struggle to find words to describe.
Mere words are but a shadow for the experience,
but humans have attempted for generations
to name that experience God.

I have found that there seems to be a direction for my life.
When I go with it, I have a overall feeling of well-being.
Doors open and new opportunities present themselves.
When I go against it, I find that I am struggling.
My favorite theologian, Henry Nelson Wieman
describes this as a feeling of connection
that adds richness and depth to the human experience
and gives direction to human will and agency.
Wieman’s God is a real object of our experience,
one that we interact with
and inspires a commitment of ultimacy.

We encounter tensions when we follow our call.
We have tensions between being in community
and being individuals.
We have tensions between keeping a spiritual practice and dealing with the practical aspects of life. We have tensions between our individual beliefs and those we make claims to hold in common. And we have tensions between the world we dream about and the world we live in.

One of our most difficult tensions is being a part of a faith community where we do not gather around a doctrine or dogma. Instead we gather around a set of promises we make to one another—our covenants with one another. How are we faithful to those covenants? And how does our faithfulness to our individual call inform our faithfulness to each other?

This faithfulness is reflected in our actions. When we connect what we are passionate about to a way to serve, we are being faithful. When we mentor a teenager or teach a Sunday School class, we are being faithful.
When we show our support of this congregation by stepping into a leadership position or pledging at the stewardship level, we are being faithful. When we swing a hammer at Habitat for Humanity or give money to one of our special collections, we are being faithful. When we listen to each other’s ideas or beliefs in the spirit of curiosity, we are being faithful. When we return a harsh word with a soft one, we are being faithful. We are called to make promises and to keep them, and to forgive and try again when we fall short of this calling.

“We forgive ourselves and each other, we begin again in love.”

This litany is in the back of our hymnal and is set to music in the newer teal hymnal supplement.
We need to make the space to allow for the times that our anger gets the best of us, or we didn’t speak our truth, or when we acted out of selfishness or greed. To reflect on our lives sometimes requires confession. To make mistakes means we sometimes need to ask for forgiveness and offer reparations, if appropriate. And when we break a trust we need to seek reconciliation.

(pause)

Discerning whose we are, discerning to what ideals we are called, discerning which path will bring us closer to co-creating the beloved community, these can turn into navel-gazing activities. Our commitment must be accompanied by action. In our hymnal, these two words – commitment and action – are paired together as a subtopic for readings, and for good reason. As Dorothy Day reminds us, there is too much work to do.

Bill Moyers recently told the story of labor organizer Baldema Valesquez and his Farm Labor Organizing Committee.
They took on the Campbell Soup Company - and won.
They took on North Carolina growers - and won….
And now they're taking on no less than
R. J. Reynolds Tobacco
and one of its principal financial sponsors, JPMorgan-Chase.
Some people question the wisdom
of taking on such powerful interests,
but here's what Valasquez says:
"It's OK if it's impossible; it's OK! … Listen carefully.
The object is not to win. That's not the objective.
The object is to do the right and good thing.
If you decide not to do anything,
because it's too hard or too impossible,
then nothing will be done,
and when you're on your death bed, you're gonna say,
"I wish I had done something.
But if you go and do the right thing NOW,
and you do it long enough "good things will happen-
something's gonna happen."  

http://www.alternet.org/news/148720/bill_moyers:_howard_zinn_taught_us_that_it's_ok_if_we_face_mission_impossible/?page=1
In an end-of-year service right in this sanctuary back in the spring of 2009, we showed a clip from the movie Contact. The scene showed scientist Jodi Foster and minister Matthew McConaughey debating the notion of Faith during a white house dinner. During our discussion of the scene, one of the parents in the congregation observed that parenting involves faith. You do the best you can with what you know, and trust that will be enough to help our children grow into mature, healthy adults. That is the kind of faith we need to have with our liberal faith, our faith without certainty, as contemporary UU theologian Paul Rasor calls it. We learn as much as we can about the facts, then we do the best we can with what we know, and trust that will be enough. May it be so, and amen.