

From the book, *The Almost Church Revitalized*, by Michael Durall

Afterword: My Plea to Unitarian Universalism

Walter Bruggeman is a man whose words can change your life. Bruggeman is a renowned Old Testament scholar, the author of 58 books and hundreds of articles about Scripture and the contemporary church. I had the privilege of hearing him speak recently.

Bruggeman believes that people frequently come to church with feelings of loneliness, despair, uncertainty, and unresolved anger. They attempt to face life's challenges with honesty and integrity, but may feel inadequate to the task. They are dismayed at seeing greed and evil in the world triumph. They believe their feelings need to be acknowledged, to be honored.

What they often find is a church that offers up timid prayers and anemic meditations. They hear, "Be still before the mystery of life," on Sunday morning. At memorial services they hear the soothing words of the 23rd Psalm, "He maketh me lie down in green pastures." A more appropriate reading that reflects people's raw emotions would be the 22nd Psalm, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

"Pain needs to be brought to voice," Bruggeman stated forcefully, "in order for people to be made truly whole, to experience the depth and meaning of the religious life. But when people come to church they are told they shouldn't harbor these feelings, to wish them away."

UU congregations need a strong enough God, however defined, to handle the world's most troubling concerns. Failing to define such a God limits the emotional repertoire that people in community can and should experience together.

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I confess that I have conflicting thoughts that seem to have no outlet in Unitarian Universalism. Sometimes I go to church feeling lonely and doubtful, but I dutifully take my place in the pew, maintain an outward decorum, sit and listen quietly. I participate in chitchat during the coffee hour. I am nice. But I am not genuine. I come away more troubled than when I arrived.

Writers far more insightful than I have taken liberal religion to task for standing in the wings while others claim center stage – faiths that preach intolerance, strident voices in the media that foster rage and resentment, the incessant drumbeat of advertising that advocates mindless consumerism, television and movies that are disturbingly violent. Bruggeman says that liberal churches do not possess the potent language required to thwart the destructive effects of contemporary society. It makes me wish we had a heavy-duty God.