

THE GREAT WORD OF THE CENTURY—UNITY

On November 1, 1882, the famous advocate of Unitarianism in the West, the Rev. Jenkin Lloyd Jones, stood up to preach. He faced only about twenty five people, seated on kitchen chairs in a shabby and bare rented hall. There were the remnants of the Fourth Unitarian Church of Chicago. Their neighborhood had declined in status. They had lost their minister and their building. The future looked bleak. Without lectern or organ, Jones spoke on the "The Ideal Church," putting into his delivery everything he had..

The ideal church, Jones declared, would be "a free congress of independent souls. It is to lead in the campaign for more truth rather than to indolently stand guard over some petty fragment of acquired truth. It will be the thinker's home. The student of science will handle no discoveries that it will not prize, and indulge in no guesses that it will not respect. Oldest India and newest America will hold no gem of thought that will not be welcomed into its sacred Scriptures. The skeptics will be the cowards who dare not exercise the reason God has given them. Over its portals no dogmatic text is to be written to ward off an honest thinker or an earnest seeker.

"This church must emphasize the Universal Brotherhood; it will stand upon a grand emphasis of the great word of the century, Unity. It will seek to welcome low and high, poor and rich, unbeliever and believer.

"This church will be founded on Reverence. One of its cornerstones will be the besetting presence of that Infinite Sanctity that it cannot escape. Given the freest thought, the widest outlook and the most wholesome desire to help one's kind, but wanting that sensitiveness to things divine, the soul is still deficient in character. The time is coming when the church will have but one message to promulgate, namely: 'Go, love the Lord thy God with all they heart, with all they strength and with all thy mind and thy neighbor as thyself.' These Ethical Verities are as eternal as Deity."

A month later, the Unitarian Church of All Souls was formed. Its motto was "Freedom, Fellowship and Character in Religion." A new building was built. The people reached out to the community. Church clubs were formed. The pews and meeting rooms were crowded with all sorts and conditions of folk. And Jenkin Lloyd Jones was their minister.

Ref: Charles H. Lyttle, *Freedom Moves West: A History of the Western Unitarian Conference, 1852-1952*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1952), pp. 158-160.