

Question Box Service

Rev. Mary Gear

Delivered Sunday, October 10, 2021

Reading: “Here We Are,” by John Corrado.

Here we are: children at the Big Party,
having our moment in the sun,
our piece of the action,
till our bodies give way
and we are called home.

We’re one big, not-always-happy family,
given life and breath by an eternal parent
we dearly long to know.

Now we have our one shot at it,
our one time to be a conscious part
of this ongoing cavalcade.

It’s not a free and easy trip.
We have to live with pain as well as pleasure,
temptation as well as promise,
loneliness as well as love,
fear as well as hope.

We have to live inside a coat of skin,
wrapped up in drives difficult to control
and dreams difficult to achieve.

And though we are the guests of honor,
we don’t get to set the time of the party or its place,

nor are we consulted about the guest list.

This is our time, and there really is just one question:

What are we going to do with it?

Sermon/Homily: Question Box Service

One of the things I love about Unitarian Universalism as a liberal religion is that we don't believe that the answers are set in stone but are living and changing. We are seekers who honor the questions and know that both the questions and the answers change over time.

We are a creed-less tradition, which means that we do not tell people what to believe. We say that everyone has the right to decide their own beliefs, and we accompany each other on our journey to find truth and meaning, knowing that there are multiple truths. We ask questions, we reflect, we discuss, we act, and we decide for ourselves.

I believe this is one of the reasons we seek each other out and create community; we like to have help asking and living the questions, support as we face uncertainty, and companions on the journey.

For today's service, I asked you to share your big questions with the intention of addressing some of them today and bringing others into future services. Some of you sent me questions directly and some of you put them in the chat today. Thank you!

What I'm offering today is only my take on these questions. Another aspect of our liberal religion is that we don't require the mediating presence of a religious leader to have access to the holy. This is reflected in our First Source (of 6 sources) the "direct experience of transcending mystery and wonder." We open ourselves directly to the sacred by asking questions and seeking answers. So, in other words, take what I say under consideration; I have no expectation that you would answer the same way.

So, we begin with a couple of questions sent in.

~ I'd be interested in hearing your take on what UUs mean when they say "worship".

Thanks for this question. This is a word that I use a lot and that some people struggle with. Worship service, worship arts, worship planning, Worship Arts Team.

The ancient English root of the word worship can be translated into “considering things of worth.” We gather to hold up those things of ultimate worth, meaning, and value.

A few weeks ago I spent a couple of study leave days reviewing the services here for the past 2 years that I've been with you. I wanted to get an overview of our time together and themes. Based on that review, I would say that what we hold up as of worth is community, interdependence, justice, facing the reality of what is, honoring transitions, and love.

We gather on Sunday morning in a long Catholic and Protestant and tradition. Worship as an opportunity for connection within and beyond ourselves and the possibility of transformation.

Where we ask big questions individually and as a community, and we offer support to each other as we ask.

Rituals and rites of passage, crossing thresholds (COA, new member welcome, lighting candles for those who have died)

It defines a congregation: UUA Bylaws requires three things from a congregation seeking to join the UUA, to have done in the past year: held at least one business meeting of its members, elected its own officers, maintained adequate records of membership; made a financial contribution to the Association; and conducted regular religious services.

Summary of January workshop: What we seek to create in worship: setting aside time and space to step outside of our usual routine, connect to the voice within and to something greater (which can be named in many ways.) Offer the opportunity for transformation. How to live our UU values in the world. We honor the transitions in our

lives. We tell the story of who we are and why we are, and we bring our story into the world.

~ What does it mean to be evil in Unitarian Universalism? Can UUs find common ground to define evil? What are the theological roots of the UU response to evil?

Evil means:

1. profoundly immoral and wicked, especially when regarded as a supernatural force; embodying or associated with the forces of the devil. (personification of evil)

Immoral is likely a more unifying word for UUs: evil is against our core values—Individual values, societal values, and shared values as UU's. What those shared values are in society and in UU is up for discussion always because we are a living tradition. (Loving v. Virginia changed judgement that interracial marriage is immoral.)

Many UUs deny the existence of the supernatural. For others, they are agnostic, meaning it's just not an issue. UU history says that we are concerned about this world now, so not tending to any supernatural source of evil, but the evil that lives in us and that we create by our actions.

I've said that we each have the capacity for evil within us; it is a part of being human and being of this world. How we act is up to us. Unitarian focus on the rational and real in this time; Universalist focus on everyone's worth.

I suggest that evil for UUs is actions that disregard, damage, deny or destroy the inherent worth of all living beings and actions that deny or destroy interdependence. Actions like denying climate change, passing laws that support racism such as voter suppression laws, and internment of immigrants at inhumane detention centers. Actions that are not motivated by connection and love.

As for common ground, I experience UUS as having shared values and principles, if not shared beliefs. Those values and principles can unite us.

Last question sent in:

~ How do you forgive and move forward with someone, or just move forward with peace, when there's no apology or acknowledgment of a hurt and its harm and in ways that honor and strengthen/free both self and other?

Indeed a big question!

Many religious traditions speak about forgiveness.

Passages in the Jewish and Christian Bible; Lord's Prayer-forgive others as God forgave you. Jewish community celebrates Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement; just did this last month. Buddha said to practice compassion and forgiveness in a way that the person doesn't even know.

Forgiveness is about taking a larger view and of letting go. It might be seeing the bigger picture of the transgression and perhaps that the person who wronged you is a victim, too. Or seeing that the wrong is in a cultural or social context that enables the wrong, like misogynistic actions in a culture that supports it.

It might mean stepping back to notice what you are holding on to-is there something in your identity that is connected to the wrong? What is it in the story that has you hooked? What can you let go of? What is it that you are longing for and why?

Forgiveness is a spiritual practice. Spiritual because we draw on our deepest help values and beliefs to support the challenge of letting go. And, practice because it's hard and we do it over and over. I know from experience that one event can have many layers which come up over time, like a layer of an onion.

This is what ritual is for- rituals of release; tossing stones into water, burning drawings or writing, crossing a threshold from what has been to what may be. Worship may hold that ritual.

[The rest of Rev. Mary's homily was improvised in response to questions submitted during the 10/10 service. You can watch the service on [YouTube here](#).]

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Thank you for your engagement with big questions and for seeking answers. Thank you for creating and supporting a community where we do so.

Let's close with this meditation adapted from the words of Linda M. Hansen:

Much of our human struggle is with what we do not know or understand. It is often difficult not to want answers—or even more difficult, not to think we have them already.

May we experience what we do not know not as an individual failure but as an invitation to community.

May we seek not the true answers so much as the true questions, knowing that true questions make our lives meaningful even if sometimes it's a restless journey. May we be grateful for the restless voices in our communities.

Let us take a few moments of silence to listen for the restless voices within ourselves.

*(Silence)*

May we be good company to one another in our questions and on our journey, as we seek to answer the call of love. So may it be.