

***Sunday, Sweet Sunday***  
 a sermon delivered at the  
**Lakehead Unitarian Fellowship, Thunder Bay, Ontario**  
**Sunday, January 5, 2014**

**Reading #1: “A Proper Reformed Sabbath”** Craig Harline  
*[From an urban 17th century Dutch Reformed catechism]*

Q: May one travel on Sunday?

A: No.

Q: May a hunter hunt on that day?

A: No.

Q: May a student that day study worldly arts and sciences?

A: No.

Q: May a dance master that day hold dance school?

A: No.

Q: May a lawyer compose and write briefs that day?

A: No.

Q: May one go around with a pen that day?

A: No.

Q: Should a merchant postpone all his correspondence until that day? Should one go around collecting debts on that day? Should one count money on Sunday? Should one clean house on Sunday, and other such work? Should one hold meat and fish markets on Sunday, and other markets?

A: No. No. No. No. And no!

Q: But the fish will spoil if one waits until Monday.

A: That does not matter

*[Sunday: A History of the First Day from Babylonia to the Super Bowl, Craig Harline, pp86-87.]*

**Reading #2: “The Vicar and the Porsche”** Anonymous source

A vicar was leaving his parish and at the end of his last service, the parish had decided to have a special celebration and present him a wonderful retirement present — a brand new Porsche.

They had asked a member who was also a local judge to come and take part in the presentation, but the judge was a bit late, so the vicar stood up and asked to say a few words.

He said, “When I first came here I wondered what I had let myself in for. The first person who came to confession told me how he had cheated on his wife, exaggerated his tax expenses, and cheated his brother out of the family estate.”

“However as I got to know you all I realized that the church wasn’t like that and I have come to love you as a dear Christian family.”

Just as the vicar finished speaking, the judge arrived, breathless.

He rushed forward to speak and said, “We have been blessed with a wonderful vicar who really loves us — as I discovered when I had the privilege of being the first person to use the confessional when he became our vicar.”

And the moral of the story is:

Don't be late for church. You don't know what you might have missed.

**Sermon/Reflection: “Sunday, Sweet Sunday”** by Rev. Suzanne Wasilczuk

[Sung:] *Sunday, sweet Sunday, with nothing to do.*

*Lazy and lovely, my one day with you.*

*Hazy and happy, we'll drift through the day,  
dreaming the hours away.*

“Sunday, Sweet Sunday.” [From the 1958 Oscar & Hammerstein musical *Flower Drum Song*.]

Just a lazy and lovely and hazy and dreamy day.

But here we all are. Maybe a bit hazy and dreamy. Certainly lovely. But not particularly lazy. Because here we all are. On a Sunday.

What's that all about?

You might know the jokes about UUs & Sundays in the summertime:

We don't have Sunday services because we're all getting our Masters; or writing our dissertation.

We're all closeted high church folks, so we go to the Episcopal church, because we love the processions, & the smells & the bells.

Or, unlike other churches, we don't have services in the summer because God trusts us to do the right thing.

But, here we are. I've been thinking about why.

My preaching professor, Rev. David Bumbaugh, wrote a “Prayer before Delivering a Sermon.”

David writes. David prays:

What in the name of all that's holy  
am I doing here?

What in the name of all that's holy  
are they doing here?

What in the name of all that's holy are we doing here?

Why do we gather together, we theists & atheists, agnostics & mystics, Buddhists & Taoist & Christians & Wiccans? We Unitarian Universalists? Why do we gather together on a Sunday?

The Rev. Bruce Johnson, of the Duluth Unitarian congregation, likes to say that Unitarians look for salvation through bibliography. And, indeed, when I first started to write this sermon I looked to a paper I wrote in seminary. It's entitled: “Why Are We Here? The Function of the Church in Postmodern Times.” It is seven pages long and has fifty footnotes, so it must be full of saving grace. This sermon is not that paper.

But, I do want to share my favorite quote, footnote #48 from a 1952 *Time* magazine, by Marilyn Monroe. In response to a magazine story about her, Monroe replied: "It's not true I had nothing on. I had the radio on."

According to our first reading, there were plenty of things we were not supposed to do on a Sunday, whether in 17<sup>th</sup> century Holland. Or in 20<sup>th</sup> century America – with its Blue Laws that forbade all sorts of activities – certainly the selling of liquor, but also, in various parts of the country, forbidding the sale of tricycles, or car seat covers, or toy footballs [although the selling of bicycles, couch covers, or real footballs was okay.] [1961 Supreme Court ruling, in *Sunday*, p314]

Growing up, I attended church on Sunday because it was just "what you did on Sunday." Plus, not to go was a mortal sin, which is the very bad kind of sin, the kind that would send you straight to hell if you dropped dead all of a sudden.

When I finally wandered into a Unitarian church & read one of their pamphlets my first thought was: "these are bunch of heretics [the root word of heresy means "the act of choosing" what one believes], and they have the chutzpah to call themselves a church. These are my people!"

So why did you come here today? Why did you first come, decades ago, or just a few years ago, or just last week?

Maybe you were born into this faith. Maybe you just stumbled upon it, like I did. Lots of ways to get here.

And maybe you like the coffee [Our slogan in the old Duluth was: "Best coffee in a church basement!"]

*[Sung to the tune of Holy, Holy, Holy] Coffee, coffee, coffee  
We all love our coffee  
Early in the morning, and in the evening, too...  
Full test and decaf. Brazilian. Breakfast blend.*

The coffee. And the many coffee hour treats.

Or the conversation, before and after the service. Rev. Bruce Johnson calls our coming together on a Sunday an ongoing conversation.

Maybe this sermon is just the right white noise behind which you can think your thoughts, let your mind wander, write a to-do-list for the week. Take a bit of a nap.

The Rev. Gail Lindsay-Marrinner, one of the interim ministers in Duluth, would tell congregants that we come to stay aware of each other, check in, so others may know how we're doing.

During our period of Joys and Concerns, we come to witness to each other – to each other's joys and triumphs; to our various life passages.

In the early dry dark of an October's Saturday evening, the neighborhood children are playing hide-and-seek. How long since I played hide-and-seek? Thirty years; maybe more. I remember how. I could become part of the game in a moment, if invited. Adults don't play hide-and-seek. Not for fun, anyway. Too bad.

Did you have a kid in your neighborhood who always hid so good, nobody could find him? We did. After a while we would give up on him and go off, leaving him to rot wherever he was. Sooner or later he would show up, all mad because we didn't keep looking for him. And we would get mad back because he wasn't playing the game the way it was supposed to be played. There's hiding and there's finding, we'd say. And he'd say it was hide-and-seek, not hide-and-give-UP, and we'd all yell about who made the rules and who cared about who, anyway, and how we wouldn't play with him anymore if he didn't get it straight and who needed him anyhow, and things like that. Hide-and-seek-and-yell. No matter what, though, the next time he would hide too good again. He's probably still hidden somewhere, for all I know.

As I write this, the neighborhood game goes on, and there is a kid under a pile of leaves in the yard just under my window. He has been there a long time now, and everybody else is found and they are about to give up on him over at the base. I considered going out to the base and telling them where he is hiding. And I thought about setting the leaves on fire to drive him out. Finally, I just yelled, "GET FOUND, KID!" out the window. And scared him so bad he probably wet his pants and started crying and ran home to tell his mother. It's real hard to know how to be helpful sometimes.

A man I know found out last year he had terminal cancer. He was a doctor. And knew about dying, and he didn't want to make his family and friends suffer through that with him. So he kept his secret. And died. Everybody said how brave he was to bear his suffering in silence and not tell everybody, and so on and so forth. But privately his family and friends said how angry they were that he didn't need them, didn't trust their strength. And it hurt that he didn't say good-bye.

He hid too well. Getting found would have kept him in the game. Hide-and-seek, grown-up style. Wanting to hide. Needing to be sought. Confused about being found. "I don't want anyone to know." "What will people think?" "I don't want to bother anyone."

Better than hide-and-seek, I like the game called Sardines. In Sardines the person who is It goes and hides, and everybody goes looking for him. When you find him, you get in with him and hide there with him. Pretty soon everybody is hiding together, all stacked in a small space like puppies in a pile. And pretty soon somebody giggles and somebody laughs and everybody gets found.

Medieval theologians even described God in hide-and-seek terms, calling him *Deus Absconditus*. But me, I think old God is a Sardine player. And will be found the same way everybody gets found in Sardines - by the sound of laughter of those heaped together at the end.

"Olly-olly-oxen-free." The kids out in the street are hollering the cry that says "Come on in, wherever you are. It's a new game." And so say I. To all those who have hid too good. *Get found, kid!* Olly-olly-oxen-free.

- Robert Fulghum, "All I Really Need To Know I Learned In Kindergarten"  
<http://www.mjglass.ca/metaphor/getfound.htm>; accessed 25 August 2013.

Here we share our lives with one another. We wake up to all the ways we are connected. We "get found!"

We come to witness to each others' losses, our griefs, our worries, our fears.

*[Sung: I Feel Like Going On, though trials mount on every hand...]*

We hold all our astonishment, our gratitude, all our dismay, our despair in our hearts, and in the heart of this community.

Last June, at our Unitarian Universalist Ministry Days, United Church of Christ minister Lillian Daniels talked to us [about her book, *When Being Spiritual But Not Religious Is Not Enough*. It is Daniels writes:]

“Being privately spiritual but not religious just doesn’t interest me. There is nothing challenging about having deep thoughts all by oneself. What is interesting is doing this work in community, where other people might call you on your stuff, or heaven forbid, disagree with you. Where life [in a faith community] with God gets rich and provocative is when you dig deeply into a tradition that you did not invent all for yourself.”

“What we’re put here for’s to see.” [Robert Frost, “The Star Splitter”;  
<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/173537>; accessed 20 August 2013.]

And on a Sunday, we come together to see what’s worth seeing [hearing, thinking] – to worship – to shape worth – to hear about, to ponder – what is worthy of our time and energy and money – what [knowledge and attitudes and actions] can bring peace to our lives, what can nourish our spirits, what can heal our world.

We come to grow our spirits, to refine our souls.

*Sung: I keep wanting to spread my arms  
Wide like wings  
Breathe deep and  
Sing for my life, sing for the earth  
Sing, sing, sing!*

“We are here to abet creation and to witness it, to notice each thing so each thing gets noticed. Together we notice not only each mountain shadow and each stone on the beach but we notice each other's beautiful face and complex nature so that creation need not play to an empty house.” – an Annie Dillard quote.

<http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/483544-we-are-here-to-abet-creation-and-to-witness-it>; accessed 31 July 2013.

We come together to celebrate life. To have a conversation. An ongoing conversation. And some of us return most every Sunday.

Maybe we’re just the stalwart few. Or the searching few. Maybe we’re especially celebratory. Or maybe we are exceptionally sorrowful, and need the company.

We come to share our stories, to remember our connections, our inextricable interwovenness.

Theologian Thomas Merton said, “There is no way of telling people they are all walking around shining like the sun.” But, on Sunday, we remember that we are each a product of the Big Bang, that First Radiance, the Primordial Flaring Forth. We remember that First Light within each of us.

We sing “*This Little Light of Mine*”

Last December I sang Peter Mayer's "Where Is the Light?"

*Sung: It's in my skin and in my bones  
In my heart and in my soul  
That light of life, so bright and golden  
Like a summer day*

Stardust. We all come out of that first Big Bang, the Great Radiance. That burst of Stardust creation. We are all walking around, shining like the sun.  
Another Sunday lesson.

Here we struggle with the paradox, the thisness and thatness of life, the ambiguities of life.

Author E. B. White writes of this ambiguity:

"If the world were merely seductive, that would be easy. If it were merely challenging, that would be no problem. But I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve the world and a desire to enjoy the world. This makes it hard to plan the day." [To save? To savor? – UU minister Richard Gilbert condenses the quote this way.]

In this fantastic, frantic, frenetic, fractured world, we come on a Sunday morning, for both a reality check and for a regular infusion hope.

On a Sunday, we come here – not only remember the brokenness of the world, our own frailties, our mortality – we come here to remember the great and glorious cloud of witness. All those folks who came before, who started this faith, who built this particular community of faith. Who worked for love and justice.

Reminded that we are all:

*Sung: Working on a ship we may never sail on  
Ship gonna sail, gonna sail someday*

That's singer/songwriter Utah Phillips.

Working on a ship we may never sail on  
We're gonna build it anyway

We are, each of us, working on this big, blue boat we call the Earth. We benefit from the work of others; we're working on this boat as we "ply the starry sea, lean over the edge in wonder, cast questions into the deep." We are reminded that others will some day benefit from our work.

We are reminded of our connection to all those folks who've worked through the ages to build up a world, a world made more fair, her people one.

A great and glorious cloud of witness – who have struggled to bring about positive change, often at great personal cost to themselves.

[Sung]

*Martin Luther King [1929-1968] said "I have a dream!"*

*Ship gonna sail, gonna sail someday*

*Dorothy Day said "swords into plowshares"*

*Paul Robeson said, "I won't stop singing"*

*Ship gonna sail, gonna sail someday*

*First Nations people said "Idle No More!"*

*Ship gonna sail, gonna sail someday*

*Working on a ship we may never sail on*

*Ship gonna sail, gonna sail someday*

*Working on a ship we may never sail on*

*But we're gonna build it anyway*

Spoken: Now [many of them are] gone but we're still building

Ship gonna sail, gonna sail someday

With the winds of peace and the waters of justice

Ship gonna sail, gonna sail someday

<http://www.thelongmemory.com/shipsgonnasail.html>; accessed 3 January 2014.

All these Sundays together are a work of many and varied parts.

A collection of memories,  
a work of community,  
a hope for the future.

*Sunday, sweet Sunday, with nothing to do*

*Lazy and lovely, my one day with you.*

May our days & our dreams together be sweet & deep & nourishing.

See you in next Sunday!

Oh, don't worry about that "being late" thing. Get here when you can.

May it be so. May we make it so. Blessed be. Amen.

### **Introduction to Hymn:**

Preachers never failed to single out dancing as an abomination, – especially on Sunday. According to these preachers, dancing was always accompanied by kissing, romping, and caressing, and 'each leap was another step toward hell.'

[Dancing] was 'dirty, unvirtuous, unsuitable, unashamed, and unbridled,' something to be avoided at all times... Although 'respectable dancing,' with only 'chaste steps' and movement was possible in theory, even this should be avoided, especially on the Sabbath, for all dancing offered too much opportunity for 'fleshy lasciviousness, vanity, high-mindedness, and smoldering unchastity.'" [Sunday, p88]

In this spirit, may we sing hymn #311, "Let It Be a Dance."