

MUSIC FOR GATHERING

PRELUDE

WELCOME

Good morning. Peace be with you.

We are in a wonderful season of growing – spring time, when much that seemed dead and buried is springing to life, out of seeds, out of earth, out of eggs, out of life itself! Some peoples are beginning a time of remembrance of continuing life even in desert and wilderness. Some peoples are remembering how life rises even from ashes and dust. Some people are particularly celebrating the water & soil of Earth that makes it a beautiful blue & green pearl of life.

We are the church of all souls. We celebrate every seed and every egg and every being and every living. Let us begin our celebration of life this morning by turning to one another with a greeting of welcome and peace.

SOUNDING OF TEMPLE BOWL

* **HYMN #38** *Morning Has Broken*

* **CHALICE LIGHTING AND COVENANT**

Love is the spirit of this church and service its law.
This is our great covenant – to dwell together in peace,
to seek the truth in love, and to help one another.

OPENING WORDS (See insert) *From the Taoist
Tao Te Ching (ch. 2) and UUA Covenant Source #1*

The Taoist says,
“Within the unfathomable essence that is the Tao is the vital principle of truth informing all creation. Within the Tao is all that lives. The greatest wisdom is to follow the Tao.”

*And we say,
Yes, let us draw upon direct experience of that transcending mystery & wonder which moves us to a renewal of the spirit & an openness to the forces that create & uphold life.*

Minister’s Commentary

Remember the story of the child in the Religious Education program who painted a picture of God? But nobody knows what god would look like. “They will when I get done,” said the young UU. And you have the picture on the sheet in the pew.

This is a picture at the beginning of what I’ll call god, a mere point of energy, but so dense, so full of creative power – or as some say, so full of grace – that It contained a universe, spiraling out and out with more and more forms of being, right up to you and me.

It's not all a mystery as to how the forces that create and uphold life have formed and renewed the human spirit. But the beginning point? What that was is still pretty much unknown and perhaps for the "time being," unknowable, except perhaps by the mystics.

Some of the forces that create and uphold life are the animals – and one blessing we humans used to do was paint pictures of animals in sacred places – maybe to show they were sacred to us – especially necessary to our lives. We painted them deep inside caves, maybe because every creature is born from inside its mother, and the ancient peoples realized that for every creature the Earth is like our mother.

On the handout sheet, in the upper right corner, you have one such cave painting – figures some 12-15' high.

These paintings are about 28,000 years old. We could have had families with the people who painted the animals. We could have learned to talk with them. We could have talked with them about how much like divine spirits the animals are. Their hearts were open to the animals, and grateful. Do you think ours would have been?

For hundreds of human generations, people have somehow been giving recognition that the power in the animals is always renewing itself in us, they said. We've known that for a long time – we've had lots of time to learn and to come to trust the power of life; lots of time to protect it in ourselves and in the animals we depend on and to use it for good things.

It's more than saying I'll help the animals if they'll help me. It's more that I feel good when I help other creatures feel good, including other people creatures. Ever pat a cat or dog? Did it purr or sigh or snuggle or lick your hand or even doggy smile at you? Did you like that?

If we're in the right spirit, we end up loving our **animals and they love us. Ever give them a thank you present just because?**

ANTHEM *Wonderful World* by Herb Alpert, Lou Adler, Sam Cooke

Don't know much about history
Don't know much biology
Don't know much about a science book,
Don't know much about the french I took
But I do know that I love you,
And I know that if you love me, too,
What a wonderful world this would be

Don't know much about geography,
Don't know much trigonometry
Don't know much about algebra,
Don't know what a slide rule is for
But I do know that one and one is two,

And if this one could be with you,
What a wonderful world this would be

Now, I don't claim to be an "A" student,
But I'm tryin' to be
For maybe by being an "A" student, baby,
I can win your love for me

Don't know much about history,
Don't know much biology
Don't know much about a science book,
Don't know much about the french I took
But I do know that I love you,
And I know that if you love me, too,
What a wonderful world this would be

WORDS FOR MEDITATION

From the Rabbi – Gospel of Luke 6 and the UUA Covenant Source #6

The Rabbi says,
“Do not be anxious about your life or what you will wear or eat. For look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap nor store in barns, and yet by their heavenly Source they are fed; And the flowers – they neither toil nor spin, and yet they grow and are clothed more gloriously than Solomon.”

*And we say,
Yes, draw upon the spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature*

QUIET MOMENT FOR MEDITATION

Minister’s Commentary on Meditation Reading

Once upon a time long long ago in the springtime there were children who would wake with the sun and go out to the edge of the woods where they knew they would find eggs in nests to bring home for the family to eat. But their rule was just one egg from each nest so the birds would stay happy and close.

And in the summer the children would go out to the fields and find berries on the bushes and would bring them home for the families to eat – and nobody worried about getting more because enough was enough and better than hunting for berries in the noontday sun was to keep company with one another and talk and play or maybe weave clothing together from the grasses or make tools or carve little statues or make rattles for the babies or just watch the people. And they all knew that the seasons of berries and birds and fish running in the rivers would come again, year after year, and what they had was more than enough and life was good.

Look at the picture on the handout of the cat staring into the eyes of the Buddha statue. “I can do this all day, you know.” That’s funny on the cat. But maybe it was from the

cat's great power to both concentrate and to relax that we learned how to be not always anxious, not always worried, not always afraid for no particular reason. Maybe it's a cat's ability to relish life that inspires us. Someone said, "Purring is the sound of enlightenment." Or of happiness.

Someone has noted that the ancient Egyptians worshiped cats as gods – and that cats seem to still remember that.

But sometimes we cross a line with animals. That's what led to the picture you see of my old cat Cracker slapping at me. Cracker and Max had been lounging in conversation on the kitchen counter. When I tried to take their picture, Cracker had enough. That picture is Cracker telling me, Get outa here, enough! There are boundaries, rules of proper behavior, that are important to the harmony of nature. I think the peace of wild things depends on respecting those boundaries.

What our covenant reminds us is that life will be better if we learn from other forms of life around us. That's also what that Jewish teacher taught – enough already. Enough is enough, we say at Passover. Only when we cross the boundary of *Enough* do we start to get in trouble.

SHARING OF JOYS, SORROWS, AND CONCERNS

Minister's Introduction to Joys and Concerns

One way to learn about the guidelines of life – for growing up, for making friends, for handling troubles, for doing enough, for knowing what is enough – is to listen to one another with a sense of loyalty and with appreciation for the privilege of being trusted.

Mainly we do it in smaller groups, like our church covenant groups or the lunch group or the discussion groups – just sharing what's going on and how we are living. And when we all gather on Sundays, if someone has a special concern or joy, we listen – and so we may learn and maybe help with the sadness and concern & maybe help spread the joy.

I would like to go first this morning with a concern that some of you may have also – and for that I'd like permission to share more than just our usual two or three sentences:

UUA problems: You may have heard about the resignations of the national Unitarian Universalist Association's president and two top staff members after controversy over the hiring of the executive officer for our Southeastern U.S. region of the UUA – a white person being hired once again, although there are no people of color serving at that level in the six UUA regions – a fairly oblivious choice given the basic UU principle that we all need to hear from empowered though different voices.

At FUUMA, ministers were at a loss why what should have been a heart-to-heart discussion resulted in breakdown and resignations. We hope to learn more soon – but in the meantime, my primary thought is this: Our polity – our way of governance in Unitarian Universalist congregations – is that we are congregational and democratic. Each congregation rules itself. The UUA only exists to serve us as we direct it.

So for us the primary thing is not the UUA, but to continue in covenant with one another and our world, to be healers and helpers for one another and the world as best

we can manage at any point in our church evolution – and also to examine whether troubles at the national level reflect problems within our own congregation.

The Sunday after next, 4/30, I'll speak during the sermon about our continuing UU disappointment that we remain a religious community whose members are primarily white despite decades of effort to change that. Our BoT will also discuss this. After our annual meeting on Sunday, 4/30, I hope you will join me here to look further at this disappointment and failing and our possible responses. Enough of that for today – Just a stone in water for now.

Now, if you have a special sorrow or concern or joy you can share briefly and that we might carry in our hearts with you, we welcome you to the microphone to briefly share in a sentence or two and if you'd like, please place a stone into the water to symbolize how one life affects all. Or you may just place a stone in the water in remembrance.

SHARING OF JOYS, SORROWS, AND CONCERNS

Thank you all for your sharing. May we practice hearing all the voices of Earthkind spoken and unspoken and may we hear the true message of the heart and respond in kindness.

HYMN #64 *O Give Us Pleasure*

READINGS *From the Biologist – Ursula Goodenough*
The Sacred Depths of Nature and the UU Principles (insert)

The Scientist says,

“The evolution of the cosmos invokes in me a sense of mystery; the increase in biodiversity invokes the response of humility; and an understanding of the evolution of death offers me helpful ways to think about my own death. If we can revere how things are and can find a way to express gratitude for our existence, then we should be able to figure out how to share the Earth with one another and with other creatures, how to restore and preserve its elegance and grace, and how to commit ourselves to love and joy and laughter and hope.”

And we say,

Yes, we will live with respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

SERMON *DON'T KNOW MUCH BIOLOGY*

Minister's Commentary on the Reading

How much biology do you know? Biology is the study of life, to learn what life is and how it works. If we tried to be “A” students in the study of life, that might be a great blessing! And geography to see where the animals live and trigonometry to figure out all the angles of life and the tangents we might explore. O, for us to be “A” students at life.

The hymn we just sang starts by saying, “Give us pleasure in the flowers today” and it tells of how the bees and birds take pleasure in the orchard trees, and it ends with saying this pleasure, this dancing and humming around the tree of life, is love and nothing else is love – and, really, nothing else much matters if we don't turn our divine energy of life into love, like the birds and bees.

Look at the last picture on the handout, if you would. Online the photo is much clearer. What you have here is a pack of twenty-four wolves on the move. Do you know enough biology and arithmetic to tell appreciate what's going on here?

The first three are elderly and weaker – even in this blurry photo you can see their back legs are kind of dragging. But they are leading the way! Why? Because they know it well and because the pack wants them to set a pace that doesn't leave the elderly and weak behind and also because they are the most willing to risk themselves to die if the pack is attacked.

After them come five strong wolves as first line defenders. Then comes the bulk of the pack except for the five strongest who are stationed at the end to be ready to respond to attacks on the others wherever they are needed. And very last comes the leader, following the pack so it can see everything and can guide the pack appropriately and keep it strong and together.

This whole picture reminds me of how the reintroduction of wolves into Yellowstone Park has revived the whole dying park to health by restoring a balance to nature. Doesn't that make you think that maybe Mother Nature knows things we need to learn?

Life-giving animals, life-teaching animals, life-companioning animals. If we appreciated them fully, would it be a more wonderful world?.

That's all I have to say. Would you say we get a lot of blessings from the animals of Earth and hearth? Are we ready to return blessing for blessing?

BLESSING OF THE ANIMALS

Minister's Invitation to the Blessing

Let us begin our ceremony of blessing. Our ceremony is to acknowledge that the creatures with whom we share the Earth bless us in many ways and that we can also bless them in many ways and should do so because it makes life so much better for all.

So please bring your animal friends or their pictures or just their images in your mind up front if they are willing to come or stand where you are and Michael and I will bring the microphones to you.

We ask you to tell us your animal friends' names & what kind of animals they are ... And now, in response, let us all respond by saying, as printed in the Order of Service: "Thank you for blessing our lives. We promise to be good for you and good for all the creatures you represent."

These animals are blest. May it become so for all creatures. Thank you all. You and your friends may, if I may put it this way, Sit.

Now, during a moment of reflection on our attitudes toward Mother Earth and her Earthkind children, our greeters will pass our offering baskets among us.

OFFERTORY

Thank you all.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

CLOSING WORDS

Circle of Thanks, drawn from Psalm 148

For all dogs and cats, large and small,

We give thanks!

For all rabbits, hamsters, and guinea pigs,

We give thanks!

For all goldfish, guppies, and swimming creatures,

We give thanks!

For all robins, wrens, and singing birds,

We give thanks!

For all racoons, squirrels, and deer,

We give thanks!

For all horses, cows, and sheep,

We give thanks!

For all lizards, snakes and creeping things,

We give thanks!

For all the fun, friendship, and wonder we receive from animals,

We give thanks!

For every animal in the sky, the sea, and the forest,
and for all the beauty of the Earth that sustains them:

We give thanks!

*** CLOSING HYMN #175** *We Celebrate the Web of Life*

***CARRYING FORTH THE LIGHT**

We extinguish this flame, but not the light of truth,
the warmth of love, or the fire of courage.

These we carry in our hearts and out into the world.

POSTLUDE

Worship Leader: Susan Burnore

Organist: Betsy Walch

Pastor: Rev. Jack Donovan

Music Director: Nic Filzen

Anthem: UUSP 2nd Sunday Singers

Ministers: All of us