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**COME SUNDAY AND CELEBRATE  
MARCH 8, 2009**

**READING**

**“THAT LIVES IN US”**

**Rumi**

If you put your hands on this oar with me,  
they will never harm another, and they will come to find  
they hold everything you want.

If you put your hands on this oar with me, they would no longer  
lift anything to your  
mouth that might wound your precious land –  
that sacred earth that is your body.

If you put your soul against this oar with me,  
the power that made the universe will enter your sinew  
from a source not outside your limbs, but from a holy realm  
that lives in us.

**SONG**

**“COME SUNDAY”**

**Duke Ellington**

**Lord, dear Lord above, God almighty,  
God of love, Please look down and see my people through.**

I believe that God put sun and moon up in the sky.  
I don't mind the gray skies  
'cause they're just clouds passing by.

Heaven is a goodness time. A brighter light on high.  
Do unto others as you would have them do to you.  
And have a brighter by and by.

**Lord, dear Lord above, God almighty,  
God of love,  
Please look down and see my people through.**

I believe God is now, was then and always will be.  
With God's blessing we can make it through eternity.

**Lord, dear Lord above, God almighty,  
God of love,  
Please look down and see my people through.**

## SERMON

### Come Sunday and Celebrate

Today we come here together to celebrate: to celebrate our community here gathered as the Unitarian Universalist Church of Wakefield. We celebrate our place in the community of Wakefield where we have been a beacon of liberal religion since 1813. We are more than the oldest church building in town but the place where all can come and explore life's meanings, the meaning of community, the search for justice, and the light of truth which many have shone before us and which we hope to shine for those who will come after us.

We rejoice that we are stewards of history. We are proud of our past, we explore our relationships with each other, the community, and that which is greater than us in the present, and we look toward the future with hope, informed by that past and the work of the present. This is the place where we can try things out, where we can stumble and pick ourselves up again, where we can learn and where we can think. We do not need to check our minds at the door. This is a place where we can let our light shine, if we will get out of own way and uncover it.

Come Sunday—we the true and faithful of this place come here again. Some of you come every Sunday, come snow or rain. From September's water ceremony through the sharing of the flowers at the last service in June, you are here in your favorite pew or in your place in the choir. Some of you come from time to time, glad this place is here but more often sharing your Sunday mornings in a quiet way with loved ones or by grabbing a few quiet hours alone after a busy week or perhaps catching up with caring for an older parent or the laundry. Perhaps for you it is your first day here and you are wondering why you should "Come Sunday and celebrate."

Indeed, why might we be celebrating here this Sunday? The short answer might be that this is the time the Board of Management has chosen as a target date to collect the pledges for the support of the ministry of this church. In the last decade, some of our neighbor UU churches have marked the end of their canvas period with a so-called Celebration Sunday. I have experienced two of them elsewhere and shared the experiences with the board. We decided that, after the long winter we have all struggled through, that on this Sunday on which we "spring forward", we might want to celebrate what we do together here, with one aim to collect our pledges either today or in the next few weeks, and giving grateful thanks to those of you who have already done so.

But we are celebrating far more than that. We are celebrating what is unique, what is special about this place—about the ministry, service and caring that we do together here. Two weeks ago when I was talking about Universalism, I talked about how once there were banners depicting many of the world’s religions on these walls, hung where the wreaths are now. Jeff found them for us hung with the choir robes.

You may remember that at the front of our hymnal is our covenant with each other as Unitarian Universalists, otherwise known as our Principles and Purposes. This covenant was adopted by the 1984 and 1985 General Assemblies. Among the sources from which our Living Tradition draws it lists “Wisdom from the world’s religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life” and “Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God’s love by loving our neighbors as ourselves.” It names also other sources which you can read and which we lift up in our Sunday services and our life together. The Universalist heritage of this church has been symbolized here by the Universalist cross which is sometimes on our altar, as it is today, but was also made visible by our banners displayed in the sanctuary this morning. I am especially pleased that Louise Gannon is with us this morning who was one of the makers of these magnificent banners.

So one thing we celebrate this morning is that we can be comfortable together with a range of theological viewpoints. Some of you may be humanist in your thinking; others may be comfortable with your Christian or Jewish backgrounds or have found the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth to be inspiring. Some of you may have discovered Buddhism or you may be looking forward to my reflections on meditation in two weeks, which is why I put a Buddha on our altar this morning. Some of you may not know what you think this morning but you know you want to be in a place where one major thing on the agenda is reflecting on meaning making. We celebrate that we can come together here, come Sunday, and take this time out of time to reflect together, question together, worship together, pray or meditate together and to sing together.

We celebrate that we have a place to celebrate the joyful times: the weddings, the child dedications and other life passages. And we can celebrate together is that we have a place to mourn together, to grieve together, and to care for each other on the twists and turns of our lives. We celebrate that we have a tradition that can celebrate life, even in the midst of death or life-threatening illness. That does not mean that we are happy about the difficult passages or take them lightly but that we move together as a faith community to support each other and to

appreciate those in our faith family who have come to the end of their time on our Earth. We don't pretend to understand all of life's passages, but here, come Sunday and all the rest of the week, we can hold each other.

And here, also, we can celebrate that we can forgive each other when we unwittingly step on another's toes, are impatient, are quick to anger or not as accepting as we would like to be. And we have a place to practice that forgiveness. You may remember the litany that we shared together on the first Sunday of this New Year, my first Sunday with you. The refrain that we sang together went:

“We forgive ourselves and each other. We begin again in love.”<sup>1</sup>

We begin again in love. Just because we are a church does not mean that we don't make mistakes, neither you nor I. Sometimes we goof up, even if we have had the best intentions. Sometimes our “stuff” comes out when we least expect it or perhaps we are still trying to understand what our “stuff” is. Sometimes someone else has behaved in a way towards us or towards those we care for that seems unforgiveable. But here we can hold our humanness to the light of our liberal faith. Here, we can forgive ourselves and each other. We can begin again in love. However impossible that might seem. However long it might take. Come Sunday, each Sunday, we can celebrate that we can begin again in love.

This Sunday in particular I can say that we celebrate by breaking bread together after the service. This congregation loves food and has some wonderful cooks. Sharing a meal together brings a special warmth and togetherness. It allows us to get to know each other with gratitude that we have enough to eat and a place to eat it in. We will be grateful for that sharing and for the hands that have prepared it for us this morning. We celebrate the potlucks that we can have together, as we did last month when you were invited to meet me. This spring I will be bringing back “soup with the minister” once a month. The first one will be Friday, March 20<sup>th</sup>. I invite you to join me a week day for a simple lunch and conversation. All are welcome. Please let me know if you need a ride to be able to join me.

Come Sunday we celebrate that we can bring our children to this place and that they will be able to begin the search for what is meaningful and true in their lives. They will be exposed to the different faith traditions, as our religious educator, Starbuck, is leading them this year and they will explore a Unitarian Universalist identity—all while having fun! Since I have come,

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<sup>1</sup>UUA: *Singing the Journey*, 1037. Les Kleen, music; Robert Eller-Isaacs.

Starbuck and I have included our children for the first fifteen minutes of worship, so they can be exposed to the larger community, hear or participate in a Story for All Ages and hear music from our choir. We celebrate our children who bring vibrant life to all of us and light the way to the future.

Come Sunday, this Sunday and every other in this place, we celebrate music—the music we sing together in our hymns which express our theology and tradition—and the music the choir lovingly prepares and sings for us. We celebrate our choir, Jeff, Alla, and our musicians who add so much to our worship life. Music is important here and our choir is a dedicated group. And we celebrate the life and light brought by our friends from the Linden Tree Coffee House, both from within this community and the broader community. I spent all day here a week ago yesterday for the SOS—Save Our Structure—event and these halls resonated with joyous sound and the musicians appreciated this beloved space.

Music brings people together. Next month and in May I plan to lead, with the help of Jeff and our guitar players and some ringers I may bring in, two “Rise Up Singing” sing-alongs. These will take place on Friday nights and be open to all of us and the larger community. All ages all welcome. We will sing old familiar songs from “Clementine” to Broadway, spirituals to freedom songs. The first one will be April 17. I hope you can join us. Bring any instrument you play. Or just come and be community with each other.

Celebration. Here we celebrate taking action to address injustice and reaching out to those less fortunate than ourselves. For instance, the church is involved in My Brother’s Table in Lynn and the Wakefield Food Pantry. Many of you are committed to making a difference in the community. How can we continue to make a difference in Wakefield and beyond? The current economic situation is creating new needs. How should we be addressing that situation as a community? Do we want to revisit our status as a Welcoming Congregation and perhaps mount a rainbow flag out front, as one of you has suggested to me. Do you want to participate in the Walk for Hunger this year? What other activities are you involved in or would like to be/ I would like to hear more about what you do and how we can do more as a faith community.

And today we celebrate community—this community here gathered. Also on the altar this morning, along with a Buddha and the Universalist cross, is a group of people gathered around a flame. Here we light our chalice each Sunday to gather us together; we gather around our flame. Here we bring our talents, our time and our treasure. Since I came, I have been

amazed how so many of you give so much of yourselves to this place. Each of you bring something, even if at this time in your life, you are just bringing yourself to a pew. Each of you is important. You bring your light here, whether it is preparing and serving our lunch today—thank you Wendy and Kay—putting an offering in the plate, fixing the ceiling tiles so they don't fall during a prayer—or taming the flame of our chalice when it becomes over-exuberant as it did two weeks ago in the middle of my sermon, right after I spoke about the fires the church had in earlier days!

Or perhaps you donate your time collecting pledges from the members and friends of our church which is the financial commitment to this beloved community. Or maybe you plan for the financial life of this church...which brings me finally to our responsibility and commitment to be stewards of this community. This is where the treasure part comes in. It is not easy for us in our culture to talk about money, especially these days. But I prefer to think that meeting our budget, participating in our association—the UUA—and our District of the UUA—the Mass Bay District—and the gifts of time, talent, and treasure we can give as individuals and as a church to be stewardship of our valued community, our values and the very earth on which we live. Our good works and the ministry we share with each other are worthy of our support and that support brings us a good feeling, even joy.

There is a quote by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, someone I not used to quoting but which is a propos: “You cannot call a room truly dark if you know where the light switch is.” We have a special congregational community here. There have been some dark days as you made the decision to stay in this building. Not everyone agreed. Some left the congregation. But you know where the light switch is. You have made some decisions, and we are moving forward. There is new energy. I can feel it, as a newcomer. You have shown me where the light switches are. We are walking this spiritual path together. We will need everyone's support to thrive. We will need to depend on you to decide what that level of support can be, if you haven't already. We will need all of you—whether you are official members or not—to decide on what the value and importance of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Wakefield is to you.

I know that I have given it some thought myself these last weeks. In my theology, I believe that the minister too is part of the gathered community. Therefore I will make my own pledge of financial commitment to the ministry of our congregation. Giving has always been a part of my life, having been modeled to me by my parents. Just so you know how I figure it out, I

have taken a percentage of my expected income and make gifts to my home church where I remain Affiliate Community Minister—the First Parish in Wayland, and the Church of the Larger Fellowship which provides me with helpful resources but also shines the light of Unitarian Universalism into places in our country where we don't have gathered congregations, including prisons. I am a long time support of the UU Urban Ministry in Roxbury. I give to the Living Tradition Fund of the UUA which supports our seminarians and our retired ministers who often face financial hardship. And I give to my seminary who prepared me for ministry. Apart from that I divide the remainder between WGBH and other arts organizations, as well as health charities. And this year I will divide the pledge I normally give to First Parish in half and pledge the remainder to our ministry here in Wakefield.

Giving is a private matter but I am happy to talk to you about it, if you wish. I have found that my giving has made me feel part of worthy organizations I believe in, and I want them to keep going for those who come after me. Gary Smith, the minister of First Parish Concord told this story several years ago. He said, “We were in Ogunquit in early July....On Shore Drive...sits a beautiful Methodist Church, where our first summer there, the congregation served pancakes out on the lawn on Saturday mornings. The church has closed now, replaced by (and he says he is not making this up) Sanctuary Shoppes, a Revelation Gallery, and the Genesis Spa.”<sup>2</sup>

We want to be stewards of this faith community. We need to all take a turn at pulling on the oars, as in our reading. We know where the light switch is—or we will look to find it—so that we can shine our light as a community and so that each one of us can let our light shine.

I end with some words from a poem of Amy Lowell (1874-1925), called “The Lamp of Life”:

Always we are following a light,  
Always the light recedes; with groping hands  
We stretch toward this glory, while the lands  
We journey through are hidden from our sight  
Dim and mysterious, folded deep in night.

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<sup>2</sup> The Meeting House News, First Parish in Concord, 8-30-06.