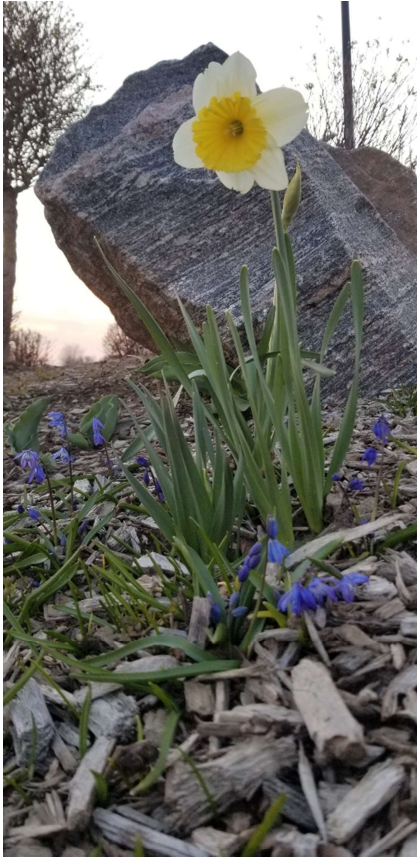


A Grand Unifying Story

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

Rev. Rodrigo Emilio Solano-Quesnel

12 April, 2020



Easter Daffodil - Photo Rod E.S.Q. 1

If you've looked at our Newsletter, you will have noticed that the original title for today's sermon was *We Have the Technology!* And I had chosen that title because I expected (prophesied, if you will) that this would be the first Sunday since we last met in person, when we'd be able to gather in a virtual space by making use of some newer technology.

And indeed, the prophecy has been fulfilled – we have the technology to help us renew a deeper sense of connection, at a time when gathering face-to-face would be unwise, and that by being apart together, we are supporting – in solidarity – worldwide efforts to mitigate the effects of the ongoing pandemic.

Now, one of the hallmarks of this time, is a rapidly-changing landscape, so today I'd like to focus on something a bit bigger, the idea of a Grand Unifying Story. Because at this time of the year, different folks of faith are invited to remember aspects of their tradition that offer just that – a grand unifying story.

And *this* particular year, we find that we are now encountering a grand unifying story of our own. In many ways, it feels like a brand-new story... we've been hearing the word "unprecedented" quite a bit. But in many ways, it's just like many of the grand unifying stories of lore and yore.... some, from not even that long ago.

Folks in the Jewish tradition around the world have lamented how this time to gather as a family, to celebrate the holiday of Passover, has come at a time when large family gatherings could be especially dangerous.

Though many have also remarked that it may be somewhat fitting that the holiday commemorates a story of families staying at home, to protect themselves from a plague, eventually emerging safe into a new kind of life. This has been one of the great unifying stories in Judaism.

Also today, many remember the Christian tradition with the resurrection story of Jesus of Nazareth – a humble carpenter – coming to life anew as a most significant spiritual leader, inspiring his followers into a new kind of life. This too, is the primary great unifying story of the Christian faith.

Now, I'm not going to spend time discussing the historicity of those stories, because their power comes from illustrating a deeper truth that faith can guide us from times of despair into expecting – and creating – a new reality where life has new meaning.

Our current reality, where we have been called into service, often at great personal hardship or expense, represents what feels like a new narrative to our lives, and what life might look like in the future.

In our congregation today, only one member was alive at the time of the last great pandemic in 1918, and she had been barely born. So yes, this is indeed quite new for most of us.

There have, of course been other flu-like pandemics, though they haven't impacted us in the same way. And for several decades, the AIDS pandemic has affected different parts of the world, and different populations, with varying levels of severity. For some, the parallels are quite striking, while many others have felt mostly unaffected.

And I know that some of you were alive for other greatly-impactful moments in the history of the world. Many of you will remember the horrors of the Second World War – how it affected your immediate family life, and then shaped global life afterward... sometimes in horrifying ways, and in some ways with a renewed sense of optimism for what people around the world can accomplish when they resolve to work together, to create ways of coordinating with a larger vision of global community.

We remember stories of heroes, some are famous ones, who helped hundreds of people flee the Holocaust, as well as other individuals who helped in smaller, yet significant ways, be it offering safety to others, as they could, or contributing to a collective effort, sharing in the scarcity to offer a measure of plenty.

Some of you might recall that the original design of our flaming chalice, comes from the Unitarian Service Committee's operations in serving refugees from Europe during that time.

Some of the younger folks, like myself will remember how our world seemed to change suddenly, on a Tuesday morning in September of 2001... as the world realized that life would not be the same again, even when it might feel – somewhat – normal. We have heard stories of heroism from around that time, along with stories of great grief.

During Joys & Sorrows, I mentioned that today marks the 40th anniversary for the beginning of Terry Fox's Marathon of Hope, as he dipped his leg in the Atlantic Ocean on April 12, 1980. That was a Great Unifying Story for Canada, and it has continued to inspire folks around the world.

Even with the heartbreak of his run ending suddenly, barely halfway through, his story continues to inspire individuals – most of whom will never be as famous as him, nor hope to be – to work together,

contributing to what has become the single largest one-day annual fundraiser for cancer research, even when Terry Fox never got to dip his leg in the Pacific Ocean. The story of the Marathon of Hope, is one that reminds us that heroes come in all sorts – famous and anonymous – with large contributions, and small, but significant collaborations.

And now, today, we find ourselves participating and co-creating a new great unifying story. You, me, and more than seven billion others, are called to be part of a global effort to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. Making offerings, small and large. This may mean staying home to reduce the risk for those who can't stay home. Or it may mean going to work – be it to ensure that other people can keep food on the table, or to attend to the health of others.

All of these offerings represent sacrifice. Some of it may seem more glamorous than others – all of it is vital.

My friends, over the course of these weeks and months, we may remember the names of some of the heroes that are becoming today, some names we might forget, most names... we will never learn. All of them will have served the greater good. And we are called to serve alongside them.

And, my friends, we're also called to uphold the prophetic imperative that comes from this shared, global experience. And that is an *enduring* call to action, to proclaim the emerging awareness that has been revealed in the course of this pandemic.

Just as the story of the humble carpenter reminds us that life-transforming inspiration may come from unexpected sources, we are reminded how we depend on *everyone's* contribution, especially those that are often unappreciated, or underappreciated.

My friends, we have also come into deeper awareness about the impact of poverty, about the necessity of quality and accessible health care,

about the need for a robust culture of scientific responsibility and research, about the effect of humanity on the rest of the natural world.

These matters are not new – people have talking about these for some time now, but in the shared experience of the pandemic – the great unifying story of this suddenly silent spring – their importance has become all the more striking.

My friends, the world is again seeing more clearly how what touches one affects us all – and we’re seeing clearly that we can work together. You have been evidence of this.

My friends, we need not wait for the curve to dip down for us to rise up. We are being renewed today, rising into a deeper awareness – and appreciation – of our global community and of the interdependence in the interconnected web of existence, of which we are all part.

In Solidarity, so may it be.
Amen

Suggested hymns:

389 Gathered Here

Words & Music: Philip A. Porter, 1953- , © 1991 Philip A. Porter
GATHERING CHANT Irregular

61 Lo, the Earth Awakes Again

~)-| Words: Samuel Longfellow, 1819-1892, arr.
Music: Lyra Davidica, 1708, version of John Arnold’s *Compleat Psalmodist*, 1749
EASTER HYMN 7.7.7.7. with Alleluias

395 Sing and Rejoice

Words & Music: Traditional round
MOORE Irregular