

Rising from the Rabbit Hole

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

Rev. Rodrigo Emilio Solano-Quesnel

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Easter always brings a great deal of imagery: life coming back from the ground that appeared so dead for so long; lifeless eggs cracking open, revealing the life hidden inside; bunnies emerging from their burrows, buried deep within the earth, after being seemingly entombed over the winter.

Rabbit holes, as it happens, are a great place to be at times when we need to hunker down and let the harshness of the outside pass over.

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And in a broader sense, they can also be places of unexpected inspiration. Just as the storybook Alice chased a hurried rabbit and fell down the rabbit hole to find an unexpected land of wonder, so do we sometimes find ourselves unwittingly falling down rabbit holes that capture our imagination and invite us to expansive exploration.

Over the past few months, we've all had the need to stay inside for longer than we'd like... and not just for the winter. For many of us, that might have also meant more time spent online, or digging through some of the books on the shelf that haven't been seen in a while – or perhaps haven't been visited at all, since they were placed on the shelf!

These rabbit holes have existed long before the internet after all. Another way you may have found yourselves into this kind of setting is on a forgotten corner of the library, with many books about the same subject lumped together on the stacks.

For me, falling down an internet rabbit hole has become a regular occurrence. One of my characteristic pandemic rabbit holes has been

browsing through virtual choirs, which have already been around for several years, but have experienced a boom over the past year – for obvious reasons. And I was amazed by the qualities of many of these creations. Not only were many of them well put together, but they were also playfully put together, witnessing to the harsh realities of our current times, while also finding reasons for – and moments of – levity, seeking and finding spots of joy to shepherd many of us through these times.

Along with the sheer entertainment and inspirational value that they bring, I’ve also found that these proverbial rabbit holes tend to reveal small subcultures you might not have even realized were there – but enough people who share niche interests and talents can get together to really make a kind of cottage industry about specific needs – and excuses to get together, even if it’s “only” online.

I was quite piqued by the fact that there were many amateur choirs made up of medical professionals, which I didn’t know was a thing. And many of them were in fact Canadian medical professionals. Voices Rock Medicine is specifically a group of women physicians in Toronto, who share joy, and offers support to each other – and to the rest of us – by getting together, while apart, and singing.

A few of us here at Olinda have even gotten into the virtual choir racket... just this week, some of us sent our recordings for a Canadian Unitarian Universalist song that will be added to a composite choir and unveiled at the Canadian Unitarian Council’s national service in May.

Among the other rabbit holes that I’ve found myself falling into, I’ve also found a few other interesting subcultures that offered me experiences I didn’t even realize I’d enjoy.

For instance, I’ve always liked music by Enya. (And if you don’t know who I’m talking about, Enya is a unique singer who is hard to categorize – she’s sometimes labelled as “New Age”, but could also fall under

Celtic... although she's really a genre unto herself.) Essentially, she sings beautifully about beautiful things, and she arranges her songs with multiple layers of her own voice. For about four decades she has been singing oddly ethereal music that is both uplifting and oddly relaxing. Chances are you've heard one of her songs – perhaps you'd recognize her classic hit *Orinoco Flow*, with the iconic refrain “Sail away, sail away, sail away”.

So, over the past months, I found that there's a whole subculture of DJs who specialize in making Dance Club remixes of Enya's songs. And I love it when a good remix or mashup can show me a new dimension of an old favourite. Surely enough, there's an entire catalogue of electro-dance versions of Enya's iconic *Orinoco Flow*, as well as many of her other hit tracks (and there are many of those).

Speaking of channels that transcend musical genres, I also ran into a rabbit hole of channels that feature re-imaginings of current pop songs as medieval-style music, complete with medieval instrumentation, and some rewording of the lyrics to have a more “older” feel. Quickly, I discovered that there's an entire cottage industry of this kind of medieval adaptations, to the extent that the genre has its own label: Bardcore [as in “bard” and “hardcore”]. Some go to quite extensive lengths for authenticity's sake, with one creator not satisfied with using slightly older Shakespearean-style lingo, but doing full-on Old-English translations (the kind of ancient English that looks and sounds like German, and has letters we don't use any more).

And just over the past couple months, you may have also heard that sea shanties became all the rage, with many younger folks getting into revivals of the old genre, and inviting their friends to collaborate – remotely – on multi-part harmonisations of classic sea shanties and maritime hymns. Among the most common of these were endless recreations of the old classic *The Wellerman*.

Professional musician Adam Neely has a hypothesis about why these maritime genres have experienced this kind of revival at this particular

time – he thinks that sea shanties and maritime anthems have the perfect structure for singing collaboratively over electronic media because of their antiphonal call-and-response structure, which allows people to work with the time-lag effect that is so prevalent on online communication.

And yes, I even found a Bardcore medieval-style cover of Enya's *Orinoco Flow*, sung as a sea shanty. Amazing what you can find when you go deep enough into a rabbit hole!

I suspect many of you have also had your own rabbit holes to dive into. Certainly, many of us have become “armchair epidemiologists” with a newfound fluency on the lingo of R-numbers, efficacy rates, exponential transmission, and the mechanisms of mRNA technology to produce protein spikes provoking antibody production as an immune response [which we can all talk about leisurely over dinner, or Café drop-ins].

Of course, few of us have become true medical experts, and we have been reminded of the value of trusting medical expertise, recognizing the realities that the field is not static, and therefore decisions need to be made with imperfect – and shifting – information.

And here's where we come into the double edge of rabbit holes. We've heard about these on the news, as folks get dragged into unfounded fears, misinformation, and conspiracy theories. And they have real impacts – we've seen these with dubious personalities hawking dubious remedies, or denying the real risks of disease. Most recently, on January 6, we saw some of the effects that follow large parts of a population getting stuck at the deep end of a conspiracy rabbit hole.

And perhaps this is a reminder that a well-balanced life invites us to emerge from rabbit holes – to rise from the entombed caverns of isolated exploration, to reconnect with the outside world and re-embrace

it in its complexity... perhaps with a measure of new perspectives and a new depth of knowledge – but more importantly, with better questions about how we can better engage with our interconnected web.

On the other hand, staying in a rabbit hole for too long – especially those that risk leading us astray – can develop into something that we might recognize as an *obsession*... an excessive preoccupation that can alienate us from all those other areas of our lives that offer value to us as we enrich each other.

By contrast, when a newfound interest – or an unexpected expansion of that which feeds us – invites us to look at our world in a new and richer way, with fresh motivation, and with a clearer sense of inspiration, we might say that we have... something else that is typical Easter lingo – a *passion*.

Passion, my friends is that fresh energy that leads us into... taking up a new hobby, getting physically active, learning a new language, getting involved with our communities, offering something to that which is larger than ourselves – to be of service to humanity. My friends, passion is what leads us to be church together... passion is why I answered a call to ministry, and passion is why we share a ministry in this fellowship.

My friends, over the past year, we have taken some time to explore... to dig deep into some questions about how we can do church and be church – now and in the future. We've taken some much-needed time to recoup and regroup. We've explored some important rabbit-holes, growing our sense of who we can be, and how we can be. And in the coming months... with some stops and starts... we can rise from the rabbit holes. And continue to embrace our passion.

So may it be,
In Solidarity and Love,
Amen

Opening Hymn #269 Lo, the Day of Days Is Here

~)-| Words: From Frederick Lucian Hosmer, 1840-1929

Music: Robert Williams, c. 1781-1821, harmony by John Roberts, 1822-1877

LLANFAIR

(alternative tune: EASTER HYMN #268)

Meditation Hymn #344 A Promise through the Ages Rings

~)-| Words: Alicia S. Carpenter, 1930- , rev., © 1983 Alicia S. Carpenter

Music: Severus Gastorius, c. 1675, ed. by A. Waggoner

WAS GOTT THUT

Closing Hymn #63 Spring Has Now Unwrapped the Flowers

Words: Piae Cantiones, 1582

~)-| Music: Thomas Benjamin, 1940- , © 1992 Unitarian Universalist Association

BLACKBURN

Try it with the tune TEMPUS ADEST FLORIDUM (“Good King Wenceslas”)