

## Calendar September 2025

### Minister's Message

I have just returned from Summer School, at Great Hucklow. This year marked its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It went by the title of "Finding My Religion: Being Unitarian in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century". Over 50 of us gathered in person for theme talks, engagement groups and variety of other activities. Many others joined on-line for some of these. It was wonderful to be a part of as it has been since I first attended over 15 years ago.

I was very involved this year, as it seems I am so many areas of my Unitarian life. I co-led an engagement group and "Theme Talk" with Arek Maleki who is the minister at Leicester. He is a gifted man our "Engagement group was titled "The Words We Speak Become the House We Live In," words attributed to the Sufi mystic Hafiz. We actually built a house. I will speak more about this in the coming weeks, exploring some of the themes. Our theme talk was well received as we explored our journeys in our own unique and yet complimentary styles. We gained a nickname "Tweedledum and Tweedledee" from one of our groups. It was said we just need to have a cap each. This was a bit rude to Arek who is 20 years younger than me. Interestingly one of the tutors at Luther King House would often call Arek Danny when he studied. The tutor had taught me when I trained for the ministry. I will let you decide which one of us is which. I will also share some of the things we explored in the coming weeks. I also had a ballad written about me, which was both beautiful and slightly embarrassing. Oh, I also returned with a wonderful gift. A giant knitted whale. This was created by our own Ruby. I had bid for it and finally won it during the silent auction. As I was driving and witnessed some things on the road in recent years it awakened my homiletic consciousness once again. Something I will explore this Sunday.

Birthdays and anniversaries have been on my mind. I recently attended the Golden Wedding Anniversary of Bill and Morag Darlison. Bill is one of my ministerial heroes. I have loved being in their company many times over the years. I was travelling with a sense of sadness as I had the feeling that this might be the last time I would see Bill. When I arrived, he greeted me warmly and then told me he was pleased I had come as he had a request. He told me that when his time comes, he would like me to conduct his funeral. He told me it is all arranged and that I would be given some space in its creation. I of course agreed and he told me he would email the details. I then shared in a wonderful lunch with speech from Bill. It was both moving and hilarious. There was not a hint of self-pity, just deep gratitude, and love for his beautiful wife Morag. As he said she is still the most beautiful woman in Pontefract, before adding that his friend said, "no Bill the most beautiful in England."

Bill had been given a terminal cancer diagnosis over 20 years and recovered and there is no cancer currently. Treatment ended a few weeks ago and he looks well. I will of course do as requested, but it may not be in the immediate future.

I have shared in beautiful, if somewhat eccentric company and heard the most wonderful of words in the last couple of weeks. This is in complete and utter contrast to some of things I have witnessed and heard in the world around me. Things that break my heart and disturb me greatly. I am reminded of those words by Hafiz "The words we speak become the house we live in." I wish to build a house of love and not one of resentment and hatred.

Love and respect.

Rev Danny

### **Dates for Diary**

From Monday 8<sup>th</sup> September I will be on one weeks leave. Will return on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup>.

Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> September at 11am "Our Common Search for Meaning" "Do you Remember?"

Exploring "Memory" to re-member is to bind up our whole lives and to discover the riches. The idea that it is memory that brings the moment to life. That memory can often to change as time goes by, that our life's history can be re-written. We will also explore the possible differences between remembering and remembrance.

### **Extra Material**

"Making a Fist," by Naomi Shihab Nye

For the first time, on the road north of Tampico,  
I felt the life sliding out of me,  
A drum in the desert, harder and harder to hear.  
I was seven, I lay in the car.  
Watching palm trees swirl a sickening pattern past  
the glass.  
My stomach was a melon split wide inside my skin.  
"How do you know if you are going to die?"  
I begged my mother.  
We had been traveling for days.  
With strange confidence she answered,  
"When you can no longer make a fist."  
Years later I smile to think of that journey,  
the borders we must cross separately,  
stamped with our unanswerable woes.  
I who did not die, who am still living,

still lying in the back seat behind all my questions,  
clenching and opening one small hand.

From "Finding Your Religion: When the Faith You Grew Up with Has Lost Its Meaning"  
**By Scotty McLennan**

*Scotty McLennan on learning to be hospitable to many religious paths.*

In his intriguing book on the different stages of faith, Scotty McLennan celebrates the spiritual practice of hospitality.

"By the end of the summer I had decided I wanted to become a Hindu. On the morning, I approached the priest with my request, he took me to sit with him in the front room on a Persian rug. The rain was coming down in sheets and banged loudly against the roof. I was stunned by his response. 'No, no!' he chided. 'You've missed the point of everything I've taught you. You've grown up as a Christian and you know a lot about that path. It's the religion of your family and your culture. You know almost nothing of Hinduism. Go back and be the best Christian you can be.'

"I remember how the rain against the roof seemed to rattle my brain. I was upset. 'But I don't believe Jesus was any more divine than Krishna or the Buddha,' I pleaded. 'And Christians would condemn you for knowing about Jesus and not accepting him uniquely as your Lord and Savior.' His response was simple: 'Then go back and find a way to be an open, nonexclusive Christian, following in Jesus' footsteps yourself, but appreciating others' journeys on their own paths.' The more I could learn about others' paths, he explained, the more it would help me to progress along my own and deepen my understanding of it. These words have remained my marching orders for life."

### **Losing My Religion by Robin Bartlett**

I somehow lost my chalice necklace on Commonwealth Avenue in Boston the same day I lost my marriage and my religion. I must have dropped it while I was walking down the street. It was a bad day.

Let me back up. I grew up Unitarian Universalist. I had a chalice necklace for a long time that I only sometimes wore. When I went to divinity school in 2009, I started to change so much that I didn't recognize myself. I began to feel that Unitarian Universalism lacked depth and symbolism, and I began to love Jesus with a passion. I prayed to a radically loving and forgiving God I had never believed in before because I had never needed God until then. I had just finished a hospital chaplaincy internship. I just knew that I was going to die soon because I was thirty-five and if I live until I'm seventy then I'm officially middle aged, and I only had a little bit of time

left to *make a difference in this world*. What if Unitarian Universalism couldn't help me do that? My marriage was crumbling at the same time, and I was *coming unhinged*. It turns out it wasn't just my chalice necklace that was lost. So was my soul. And my dignity. Has this ever happened to you?

So, I wandered up and down Commonwealth Avenue, wiping away boogers and sobbing like my seven-year-old sobs when I'm mad at her, looking for my chalice necklace and actually saying out loud over and over again, "What does it mean? What does it mean?"

I talked to my therapist and a mentor about this incident, asking them if it meant God wanted me to be a Christian and not a UU. They confirmed to me that yes, I was coming unhinged. My mentor gave me one of her extra chalice necklaces and made me some soup.

Two years later, my sanity restored, I finally purchased a new chalice necklace at General Assembly in the shape of a cross. I thought, "this is how I can honour the place I have come to in my spiritual journey...where Jesus and Unitarian Universalism hug on this cross." I wore it every day. People commented on it all the time. "I thought you were a UU. Why are you wearing a cross?" This made me feel very annoyed and, at the same time, gave me the kind of self-satisfied pride that comes from rebelling against your mom.

The week before my ordination, I returned home from church and realized that my chalice cross was missing from my neck. So, I did what any totally sane thirty-something does. I took to Facebook to ask my Facebook friends, "*What does it mean?!*"

And my Facebook friends said a bunch of things, from "You need a better clasp on your chain" to "It means you don't need outward symbols to know what is in your heart." The most useful advice of all was: "Get a tattoo. You can't lose that."

The next day, I found my cross chalice, with its chain missing, in my inside coat pocket. So, here's what gives me hope for the next time I am feeling off the chain: When I am lost, I will always be found. I will always be found by the Love that won't let me go. That Love doesn't exist only in symbol. Instead, it almost always comes in the form of people—talking sanity, making me soup, and telling me what it all means.

"For you" by Walt Whitman:

The sum of all known reverence I add up in you, whoever you are,  
Those who govern are there for you, it is not you who are there for them;  
All architecture is what you do to it when you look upon it;  
All music is what awakes from you

when you are reminded by the instruments;  
The sun and stars that float in the open air,  
The apple-shaped earth and we upon it;  
Our endless pride and outstretching, unspeakable joys and sorrows;  
The wonder everyone sees in everyone else,  
and the wonders that fill each minute of time forever;  
It is for you whoever you are -  
it is no farther from you than your hearing and sight are from you;  
It is hinted by nearest, commonest, readiest.  
We consider bibles and religions divine --  
I do not say they are not divine;  
I say they have all grown out of you, and may grow out of you still;  
Will you seek afar off? You'll surely come back at last,  
In the best known to you, finding the best, or as good as the best --  
Happiness, knowledge,  
not in another place, but this place;  
not for another hour, but [for] this hour.

**"Beyond Theism, Beyond Heaven and Hell" By John Shelby Spong**

*John Shelby Spong's explanation of God as expanded consciousness.*

"I experience God as expanded consciousness. Life is ever-unfolding. Consciousness is ever rising. We see that in the growing human awareness of those who are different from the majority. We see it in our increasing sensitivity to, and in the enhanced sense of our responsibility for, the life of our world. All of these things, I believe, are the result of a new awareness of what it means to be human. In expanded consciousness, the barriers we erect and behind which we hide in our search for security actually serve to cut us off from the meaning of life. That is the great sin of organized religion. Organized religion seeks to turn us inward upon ourselves. It binds us into a world marked by enormous limitations. Organized religion always divides the world into warring camps. It separates the followers of 'true religion' from the followers of that which it judges to be false religion. It separates true believers from heretics, the clean from the unclean, the saved from the unsaved, the baptized from the unbaptized, and the circumcised from the uncircumcised. These markers, however, cannot be part of the God experienced as life, love, being and consciousness. Whereas God's qualities cannot be categorized, branded, or judged by external standards, religious markers such as being saved or being baptized can; the latter are nothing more than the manifestations of the supernatural tribal deity who builds the power of one people by diminishing the power of another. It is only in the expansion of human life and the expansion of self-consciousness that we find the ability to cross barriers and to transcend boundaries. It is this expansion of life and consciousness that invites us into a new understanding

of what it means to be human. Finally, it is this expansion of life and consciousness that links us, I believe, with eternity, with timelessness. It is this expansion of life and consciousness that I now think I can say links us with God. We have moved beyond religion, meaning that even God can no longer be a religious concept."

### **"Some Questions You Might Ask" by Mary Oliver**

Is the soul solid, like iron?  
Or is it tender and breakable, like  
the wings of a moth in the beak of the owl?  
Who has it, and who doesn't?  
I keep looking around me.  
The face of the moose is as sad  
as the face of Jesus.  
The swan opens her white wings slowly.  
In the fall, the black bear carries leaves into the darkness.  
One question leads to another.  
Does it have a shape? Like an iceberg?  
Like the eye of a hummingbird?  
Does it have one lung, like the snake and the scallop?  
Why should I have it, and not the anteater  
who loves her children?  
Why should I have it, and not the camel?  
Come to think of it, what about the maple trees?  
What about the blue iris?  
What about all the little stones, sitting alone in the moonlight?  
What about roses, and lemons, and their shining leaves?  
What about the grass?

### **Coleman's Bed – David Whyte**

*Make a nesting now, a place to which  
the birds can come, think of Kevin's  
prayerful palm holding the blackbird's egg  
and be the one, looking out from this place  
who warms interior forms into light.  
Feel the way the cliff at your back  
gives shelter to your outward view  
and then bring in from those horizons  
all discordant elements that seek a home.*

*Be taught now, among the trees and rocks,  
how the discarded is woven into shelter,  
learn the way things hidden and unspoken  
slowly proclaim their voice in the world.  
Find that far inward symmetry  
to all outward appearances, apprentice  
yourself to yourself, begin to welcome back  
all you sent away, be a new annunciation,  
make yourself a door through which  
to be hospitable, even to the stranger in you.  
Above all, be alone with it all,  
a hiving off, a corner of silence  
amidst the noise, refuse to talk,  
even to yourself, and stay in this place  
until the current of the story  
is strong enough to float you out.  
Ghost then, to where others  
in this place have come before,  
under the hazel, by the ruined chapel,  
below the cave where Coleman slept,  
become the source that makes  
the river flow, and then the sea  
beyond. Live in this place  
as you were meant to and then,  
surprised by your abilities,  
become the ancestor of it all,  
the quiet, robust, and blessed Saint  
that your future happiness  
will always remember.*

by David Whyte