

**Faith in Fellowship**  
**UUFM—Rev. Rita Capezzi**  
**March 20, 2022**

### **Homily**

Our Soul Matters theme for the month of March is “Renewing Faith.” And so, we continue our exploration today, gaining wisdom for our journey from those hopeful in the face of trial and disappointment; from a post-punk, alternative music icon; and from our own lived experience.

Here’s a story. A congregant texted me the other day a short video of a beautiful new life, a baby with soft skin and the tenderness of newness, of fragile need arousing exquisite care. This baby spoken, in his baby dialect, with his grandmother, communicating with her and she with him beyond the language of words, with vulnerable sensation and trust that the message gets through, though we might wonder how, given that no common words were spoken.

Now a shift. I’m uncertain about the amount or intensity of attention you all give to sermon titles and worship descriptions, to Orders of Service, but we are celebrating today. Today is a day of celebration. Here we are gathered, held in the balance of the vernal equinox—night and day the same length. It only happens twice a year, something to give us pause. And celebrate we will today, but not necessarily what the Weekly and the website say we will celebrate.

You may have been expecting that we would celebrate the conclusion of a successful silent auction. That’s in today’s worship description. But we are not celebrating an auction today. We wanted an auction, we wanted the fellowship of an auction evening with theatricals and cakewalks, with offers of abundant treasures and new opportunities and shared dinners. But it just didn’t work out—for a variety of reasons. You might have been expecting to celebrate a pledge drive that reached its shining financial goal, the goal that moves the chains on the field for when our Fellowship will achieve a yearly balanced budget, with no further need to spend reserves on operational costs. But it just did not work out—for a variety of reasons. Celebrations call for music, and you might have been hoping for, even though it was not advertised, a rousing choir anthem and song leaders and talented musicians from the ranks of our congregation. But that just didn’t work out—for a variety of reasons.

You might feel some anxiety about this news. What will it mean for us? What are we going to do? Why isn’t worship like it used to be? Where are the printed Orders of Service, for goodness’s sake! Anxiety is understandable, but I advise against it. We are held in this moment, in the balance of the equinox. At a time like this, a good practice is to let it be. Just let it be, especially in this time we are sharing. Let it be, and listen for the wisdom within the silence and the dark in you. Focus on the feelings that soothe your spirit, inviting you to quiet yourself and to wait, to see what unfolds, to imagine possibilities without attachment or struggle. Rest in the wisdom of letting it be. There will be answers, light will shine. There will always be singing in the hard times. And today we will sing. And I ask: Did you see the full moon on Friday—maybe not, obscured by clouds or past your bedtime. But the full moon was there, nonetheless. Did you celebrate St. Patrick or St. Gertrude this week—maybe not, not your ethnicity or you don’t like

cats. But still the celebrations went on—celebrations of roots and history living still. Do you feel the balance of the vernal equinox right now—perhaps not, for how does one feel that? Yet still the balance is there, even if we are not tuned to it. For now, let it be.

William Sloane Coffin said, “I love the recklessness of faith. First you leap, then you grow wings.” Today might seem like an ordinary Sunday, but it is no more ordinary than any other day of this miraculous existence, the gift of life. Today is a day of celebration, of recklessness, of believing, despite anxiety and disappointment, that we ought to have faith in ourselves as a community, with gifts to present to each other and to the world. Let us prepare ourselves for the leap, sure that the necessary wings will emerge. Because what we celebrate today, not fundraising in itself, what we celebrate whenever we gather, is intangible and ineffable. The very nature of the universe and our human possibility within it calls us to a radical “act of cosmic defiance, of subversive optimism, of unconditional and insubordinate love,” to defiantly expect the universe we wish for. What does that mean, and how do we put ourselves into such a flamboyantly hopeful and countercultural position when so many forces would have us fearful, hopeless, and depressed?

Post-punk musician and philosopher Nick Cave—I know that sounds strange to many of you, but wisdom is everywhere if you look for it—Cave reflects on a universe that “simply does not care about us; it does not act with malice or desire to harm us – it is simply unaffected by our condition.” Cave’s comments are part of his answer to the despairing questions of young Croatian Gianelli, who might in this moment be a frightened Ukrainian teenager wondering what life means in the midst of this vicious invasion and heart-breaking devastation. Poor Gianelli might be a trans youth in Texas, wondering how they are to become themselves when the state is actively against them. Despite the suffering, Cave does not look at the universe as a source of misery. Rather, he says that this reality is what “connects me to you and you and to every other sentient being in the universe.”

A religious sensibility is what Cave imagines we require in order to live in a world that is indifferent, though not, he says, cruel. A religious response—to love regardless of the outcome, to love in spite of the pain, to see and seek connection irrespective of the costs. Cave writes: “If one acknowledges this state of affairs, then it sets up a situation that allows us to make a simple choice – either we respond to the indifference of the universe with self-pity and narcissism and live our lives in a cynical, pessimistic and self-serving manner; or we stand tall, set our eyes clearly upon this unfeeling universe and *love it all the same.*” No matter what disappointment we face, no matter how vicious the world is, how viciously it might treat us or those we love, “we love it all the same.” According to Cave, making the second choice, standing “before this great, blank, heartless cosmic event” saying ‘*We believe in you.*’ ‘*We love you.*’ ‘*We care for you,*’ well, that amounts to “the greatest act of human beauty we can perform.”

And a religious response calls us to “create our own divinity, our own Godliness, through our ferocious need. We yearn the heavens awake, and if we are quiet, in prayer or in meditation, sometimes we can feel the heavens stirring, breathing our fragile and reckless love back through us.” In prayer or meditation, we feel the stirrings of faith and make the leap, trusting the wings will emerge. Cave is clear-eyed about prayer in an indifferent universe. He says, “Well, I don’t know where my prayers go. I don’t

know if anyone is listening. My prayers mostly revolve around the wellbeing of the ones I love, because I feel, possibly erroneously, that the world aligns itself in such a way that it draws those I send my prayers to closer to me." Prayer, for Cave, enables him to "proceed in a rightful way," feeling "less a victim of the endless self-defeating thoughts that can go on in my mind, and instead I feel a quietness and clarity of thought." Prayer—good vibes, intentions, positive affirmation, loving thoughts—whatever you call it, it doesn't matter. Prayer as the reaching out through time and space to embrace those we love, believing that holding our beloveds in prayer can really do something for them and for ourselves as we pray.

So, beyond expecting everything now to be as it was before the pandemic, instead of dwelling fearfully upon deficits that seem to stop us in our tracks, let us pray. In other words, let us celebrate the love that is here and the love that can be. We celebrate the sweetness of having coffee hour in the fellowship hall, even as it is bittersweet to think of coffee hour in the fellowship hall and not be able to attend it. We celebrate those who are no longer with us—by choice or because life has moved in this way. We celebrate that we remain a religious community though fractured in space. We celebrate all who are present, yearning as much for each other's company as for any message from the pulpit. We celebrate the here and now—of doing and giving and moving for justice, searching for the truth of our times and seeking knowledge, providing our children a sense of their worthiness and value in a world that can treat children as less than and disposable. And we celebrate the unknown and the unknowable—the itch, the tingle, the catch in the breath when we realize that we are caught in a web of existence that is strange and mysterious as it is comforting and vital. We gather in the only place in our culture where it is right and good to ask—Who am I really, at my center? Why am I here? How am I to be in this world of pain and isolation as well as joy that is as piercing and sudden as pain?

For 70 years, UUFM has been a community leaping and growing wings, regardless of the pitfalls—sometimes fearful, sometimes fearless, at the same time. 70 years of being and doing, yearning and striving, staying and hunkering. We wobble ahead, feeling that we are something important in the world, not always sure what, but faithful to the fellowship—to gathering, to being visible in the community, to sending out the saving word of Unitarian Universalism, to becoming more than we are individually, collectively loving into existence the world we long for, trusting as a baby.

Yesterday, today, and, with loving work together, for many years to come, we people of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Mankato, we will find the spoons to work our obstacles and create solutions, regardless of what confronts us. We gather, then and now and into the unfolding future, with faith in the power of diversity, the power of love, and the hope of a world transformed by our care. Ours is not a faith that requires perfection or rightness in one another. Rather, ours is a faith that in our shared imperfection we may learn to stumble and fall together. A faith that though we may understand less than does a baby, though we grown ones might struggle to understand an exquisite new life, love calls us on, always on, to deeper understanding and connection. A faith that we will help one another to rise and to try again and again and again. Whatever our challenges, disappointments, and shortfalls, I have faith we will find a way through, together.

## Reflection

Every morning is a first morning, every Sunday is a new Sunday, a chance to sing praises for the life that is given to us, for the birds bringing us promise of the spring, for the rains, for the sunlight, inviting us to elation. Today is such a day, when we open ourselves to the promise of the new and unknown, when we move together as a people for goodness in our own lives and for all people. Whatever our challenges, I have faith we will find a way through, together.

The universe, our town, from the macro to the microcosm level, our world can feel brutally indifferent to us and our needs and desires. Life on earth can feel hellish, and it is, the more we hold ourselves in isolation, the less we share the plenitude with each other. The difference between Heaven and Hell is not the amount available. The difference is in the sharing—and sharing means taking care of each, with a joyous sound of laughter filling the air. Sharing our love of life with each other. Sharing our beliefs about the holy with each other. Sharing our resources with each other. Living with scarcity at the center pushes us away from each other. Living with plenty at the center moves us into joyful relationship. May we be joyful, now and always.

Primed with love for the spirit of Life, may we draw ourselves together in a web of holy relationships, reminding us that we are not alone in history, reminding us that we are not alone in entering the future unknown and unfolding, reminding us that we are not alone in our grief and pain, in our joy and wonder. May we be inspired to honor and extend the beauty we find in this world. May we open our hearts to all of our neighbors, open our souls to a renewal of faith, open our hands to join together in the work ahead. May we wake to the glory of what is, the glory of what we will face together as a religious community with faith in each other, as you remember, today and every day, that you are loved, you are worthy, you are welcome, and you are needed. May you feel it so. May it be so, and may we say together “Amen!”

<https://www.theredhandfiles.com/do-you-pray-with-your-family-and-maybe-friends-hopeing-that-sometimes-someone-leesen-your-despered-litle-iner-voice-to-get-answer-or-gidence-ephifany-in-this-cruel-world-which-most-of/>