



Unity Church of Christianity
Celebration Sunday
November 6, 2011

Howard Caesar

I'm not going to deny you the opportunity to rise, shake a hand, smile into somebody's face, allow the spirit to just rain down on you and have an outlet. So just stand where you are and say hello to the people around you.

There was a woman who gave birth to a child and afterward was exhausted. She was taken back to her hospital room. There was an Episcopal priest wearing the clerical collar, and he came to visit her. It happened to be that she was his wife. He greeted her with a big hug and a kiss. He prayed with her a bit. They had a short, quiet visit because she was tired. He gave her another big hug and a kiss, and left the room. Afterwards the wife's roommate from across the room commented, "You're pastor sure is friendlier than mine!"

Well we are a friendly, loving church, and this is a special Sunday that we call Celebration Sunday. Once a year, in early November, we have this special day to celebrate who we are as a church and a community. We recognize our accomplishments that we've made together as a ministry and to reaffirm our commitment to the ongoing works of this ministry.

I believe there are certain desires common to all people. We all have the desire to be happy, healthy and whole. We all have the desire to attain a certain amount of abundance to meet our needs and that of our family. We also want to feel that we are contributing to the world in some way and that our lives have somehow made difference. At some point we all learn that our desires and the fulfillment of our desires are rooted in one spirituality. The way that one can truly demonstrate and sustain these kinds of things is based on an opening to one's spiritual nature, and with that opening, there comes an understanding of universal intelligence, the power and presence that lies behind all things. The opening of one's spiritual nature leads to a deep connection to this presence and power source of all that is. With this deeper spiritual connection, we learn there are universal laws and principles that we want to be in harmony with and utilize to bless ourselves and to bless our world.

Here at Unity the emphasis is not so much on being religious but being spiritual and the idea of spirituality. I think the desire for most people is to become more spiritual. As Jesus said, "The letter killeth, the spirit giveth life." The most recent studies and surveys reveal a trend in this direction all the more for people around the world. They are looking toward the dynamic of spirituality. It's true for 72% of those surveyed in the age bracket of 18 to 29. This is the trend, the shift toward a spiritual community or church where the emphasis is not necessarily only on salvation but on awakening to the truth of who they are, awakening to a deeper connection to the Divine and developing that relationship with Him on an ongoing basis not just something they experience in church or in gathering, but something they are able to take with them that's real and lives in them.

Many see religion historically creating division. They understand the root and core of spirituality is always about love and oneness. It isn't spirituality if oneness and love, in a universal sense, are not contained therein. People are awakening more and more to the truth that we are all brothers and sisters, that we are all one family. We are united on this Earth to help one another. The survey reflects this kind of a trend in the younger generation in particular. It's all about love and oneness.

Pastor Rob Bell is an Evangelical minister who heads up a 7000-member Evangelical Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He recently wrote a book that has become very well known. It's called *Love Wins*, and it's created quite a stir among some of the Evangelicals. Some are favorable, and some are not so favorable in terms of what he says. In the book, he is questioning some of the deeply held beliefs such as hell, and sin, and salvation, and judgment.

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The thing that happens is when we begin to see God in a new light, there's really no turning back, even if you're a minister of a 7000-member Evangelical Church and getting some pushback. Moving toward a clearer, more universal understanding and perspective isn't an easy thing to come to.

There is such an attachment to the concepts, ideas, and beliefs that we grew up with and are ingrained in us. There's an almost unconsciousness loyalty to some extent, and sometimes the letter within us keeps us from the spirit. It's awakening to that, understanding that, and being willing to go further. It isn't that we're changing God by any means. We are simply changing our understanding of God, and we should be on that pathway of continuing to broaden and awaken in our perspective and understanding. God can only be experienced within the boundaries that we have set for that God, and those boundaries are set by our concepts, ideas, and our current understanding.

There was a stoic and cross woman who went into an art gallery. She made a very quick, superficial tour of the exhibits in the art gallery, and then she approached the attendant saying in a derogatory tone, "Are these the masterpieces that I have heard so much about? I really don't see anything in them." The attendant very gently and politely said, "And madam, don't you wish you could?"

Today we celebrate all those who have boldly and courageously been willing to look further and deeper. Maybe step outside the box a little bit and even risk ridicule to seek a deeper understanding of the Divine, a deeper understanding of one's relationship with the Divine. Things that maybe didn't make sense, one wanted to explore deeper and understand more fully.

We honor the Apostle Paul who said, "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." We should enter into the dynamic of renewing our minds on a regular basis. That's certainly what we're about here at Unity, and today we celebrate our spiritual path dedicated to transformation, and renewal of mind, and opening up to ideas of the nature of the Divine that are pure, sacred, complete, and whole that have to do with coming together in oneness and love. That's a very powerful thing.

Recently there was an impressive Nova production on Public Television regarding the search for the edges of the universe which is uncharted domain for various scientists. In the program, there were scientists commenting on the use of the newest and latest super telescopes that are even stronger than the Hubble. The program revealed that some of the theories followed by scientists for years are in error. They are not accurate. It was believed the universe was actually slowing down in growth and even possibly contracting. Scientists with these new telescopes have

discovered that, at its farthest edges, the universe is not slowing down. The universe is expanding at a more rapid rate than ever before. The scientists coming to these discoveries were excited, happy, and enthused about being wrong. You get my point?

Here at Unity, we strive for an openness and a willingness to be sort of spiritual scientists, to be receptive to new awareness and to new insights that take us deeper. We strive to be open to new ways of looking at things, new ways of looking at ourselves, at life, and at our oneness with God.

Charles Fillmore who is a cofounder of Unity said, "Don't hold me tomorrow to what I may say today." In other words, whatever I say today don't hold me to it tomorrow because I may be different tomorrow. I may get a whole new insight. The spark of the Divine might hit about the very thing that I spoke to yesterday, and I'm willing to release that. He was saying, "I'm that open," and you have to be that open and that willing as opposed to clinging to a particular idea because that's what you've known, and it feels safe and secure. It feels the way of the herd, whatever is the rationale.

God as truth is whole is complete and final. That truth is final. It's not a changing of God, but our understanding is changing and growing. This truth continues to awaken in us as we give a willingness to open. God always has more for us if we're open and receptive to discovering that more.

Wherever we are in our personal enfoldment, on our personal spiritual path, there is certainly always more of God to be discovered. There is something always calling us forward. It's a stirring within us. It's a powerful sense of awakening and deepening. As Paul said, "I press on." I press on. I press on toward the mark, for the prize of the higher calling of God. No matter where he was, he recognized that he still needed to press on, to continue to awaken, to reach higher. That whole dynamic is very powerful.

We congratulate ourselves on uncovering more, to this point in time, in our enfoldment. At the same time we ask ourselves, "What is the more that lies ahead for us?" What is the more that calls to you? What is the more that wants to open up to the fullness of life, to a new enthusiasm of life? Maybe remembering what it was when you were a kid and now life's gotten so serious. Maybe there are new dimensions of love, joy, peace, harmony, abundance and oneness. All of these things are of the principles of the Divine that we can connect with and enter into harmony.

Here at Unity, we really celebrate and emphasize the idea of connection, making a conscious connection with your God, and to remain consciously connected with God on a regular basis throughout your day as much as possible, knowing that He's there guiding you. We may fall

asleep to His presence, but He is always there. He will always take you to that higher calling as Paul spoke of. Everything begins with that higher connection.

A man took a walk on his wooded estate one day. He was worried about his business. He had thoughts about the government, the economy, and his health. He looked around at all the things that needed repair on his estate. He lived next door to a blind lady and looked across to her estate. The blind lady's caretaker had created a line with a steel wire from the house all the way through the woods so she could walk to the river with her hand on the wire. The man stopped in his tracks when he saw her out there. He was alarmed at how briskly she was walking. He thought to himself, "Should Helen Keller be skipping around the woods like that with no one to guide her?" Then all of a sudden he realized as he saw that steel wire. He watched her for a time and noticed this incredible lightness and spring to her step. He noticed her chin was kind of lofty and on her face was a look of bliss. Then he watched as she knelt down in the pine needles and cupped the palms of her hand around a small wintergreen plant. She brought it to her face and breathed deeply to take in its scent. She rubbed it against her cheek, and then he heard her say in utter jubilation, "Thank you God! Thank you God!" And then he felt something. He felt the spirit of God move in him. He was touched by what he had seen. The connection to God that Helen demonstrated was so evident and so strong that it moved him, and he thought that has to be the secret to the lightness of her step and the bliss on her face.

He could remember her life back when she was a small girl. She was a sightless, speechless, deaf, unruly, and rude little girl. He remembered Anne Sullivan pouring water all day into Helen's hands and tapping out the word water. She would pour some more water and tap out the word water. Pouring and pouring, on and on, over and over until suddenly the idea broke through. She made this connection. Her closed mind had now opened, and from that moment she ran everywhere, touching everything, and holding out her hand, eagerly asking for it to be tapped into her hand. "What's this? What's this? What's this?" There was jubilation and excitement that she had made a connection with life, and life was now speaking to her. Oh my God, she had emerged from a darkness like no one could ever imagine, and life was speaking to her.

We're to be about a kind of celebration that we're meant to have when we make a connection. It could be every morning when we get up and make that connection to the Divine. We feel the universe tapping on our heart the word love, the idea of oneness, and just allowing it to be felt.

Here we have a soul named Helen Keller who could not see, could not hear, could not speak, and yet in her own way, she was able to make this deep connection with life, the source of life.

It's important to recognize what we're able to do for each other. Never take lightly the role that your very presence adds to a service such as this. Never take lightly what it means to be an open vessel, through which God is pouring, and being a participant in something like this. It can rub off. It's just the same as that worried man walking on his estate observing and then feeling the energy and impact that truly moved him. The truth is we move and shift one another, and we should never take lightly where we find ourselves and who we may find ourselves with. There's always something to gain by being around a body of people who are willing to live a higher way and are of the idea that we're all brothers and sisters. We're really all in one family together. Everyone is your neighbor as Jesus taught, and everyone can be impacted like Helen Keller's neighbor.

As Jesus said, "If I be lifted up, I draw all men onto me." What he meant by that is if all be lifted up with me, with me in the same consciousness, in holding the same relationship and connection with the Divine that I have, if everyone be lifted there with me, the world shifts and changes.

We need to devote a certain portion of our life to being lifted up and raising our consciousness, not only to impact ourselves but to be supportive of others. In fact, science and physics are showing how intricately we are intertwined in a beautiful tapestry of life.

As ministers we get to see all the different challenges that people go through. We get to see how many people need help, whether it's counseling, or guidance, or inspiration, or spiritual support. We're here to love and accept every one of them, and to do the best we can to help them through, and connect them to the Divine who really is the one who sees us through in the end.

There's a wonderful story about a man named Charles Plum who was a US Naval Academy graduate. He was a jet pilot in Vietnam. After 75 combat missions, his plane was taken down by a surface-to-air missile. He ejected and parachuted into enemy territory. He was captured and spent 6 years in a communist Vietnamese prison. He survived that ordeal, and afterwards traveled, giving lectures on the lessons he learned through that experience. One day he was in a restaurant with his wife, and a person from another table came over to him and said, "You're Plum. You're Charles Plum. You flew jet fighters in Vietnam from the aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk, and you were shot down." And Plum said, "How in the world did you know that?" And the man said, "I packed your parachute." And Plum gasped, and the man shook his hand and said, "I guess it worked! I guess it worked!" And Plum said, "It sure did, and if your chute hadn't worked, I wouldn't be here today." That night Plum couldn't sleep thinking about that man. He kept wondering what he might have looked like when they were on Kitty Hawk together all those years ago. He was trying to imagine him in the Navy uniform, a white hat and bell bottom trousers. He wondered how many times he might've seen him and not even said, "Good

morning,” or not even asked, “How are you?” Or asked anything because he was a fighter pilot, and he was just a sailor. Plum thought about the many hours the sailor spent down in the bowels of the ship carefully weaving and folding the silks of each chute, holding in his hands each time the fate of someone he didn’t even know. Plum then asked his audience, “Who’s packing your chute?”

You see everyone looks somewhere, for those who provide what they need, to make it through another day. Everyone looks somewhere for a lifeline at some point in their life. Plum points out that he needed many parachutes when his plane went down. He needed a physical parachute. He needed an emotional parachute. He needed a mental parachute. He needed a spiritual parachute. He called on all of them to help see him through.

In many ways, what we do here at Unity is pack spiritual parachutes. That’s what we do, and we pack all kinds. We pack spiritual, mental, and emotional. Maybe we don’t hand out physical parachutes, but we definitely pack parachutes. We do it through our teachings. We do it through our classes, through our programs and activities. We do it through counseling, through our prayer ministry, through our oneness ministry, through our pastoral care, through services like this, through our television ministry, through our work in the community and our outreach. These are all the different ways that we touch people. We pack parachutes of love. We pack parachutes of acceptance and embrace all people, and spiritual truth, and oneness with God. We pack parachutes so that we save lives. We transform lives. We move people through crisis and get them back on track. That’s what Unity is.

Today I leave with you the thought that everyone will be given an opportunity to prayerfully be guided in making a commitment to the year 2012 in our operating budget. It’s a way of asking you, “Will you help us to continue to pack parachutes for the people around you and the people you’ve never met and never seen?” We celebrate and appreciate all of those people who have helped us pack parachutes through the years. Those people who helped us purchase the land that we have, purchase the facilities, and all that we have and enjoy now to be able to come together and make it possible. God has worked through many loving channels and accomplished a lot. It’s my hope today that all or most of you will make that connection at a deep level, allow God to speak to you, the spirit to pour down on you and speak uniquely to you in a way that you’re able to come with jubilation and a sense of great privilege and gratitude to God, being moved by the tapping of a message on your heart, wanting to help us make parachutes. For you to be a parachute, for us to be a parachute, for us to make a difference in the world is one of the great desires that we all have. God bless you all.