

I So Appreciate

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I so appreciate you being here at UUMAN this morning – this Sunday morning. Many of you are long-time members, many long-time friends, many of you are short-time members, short-time friends. Maybe you've been here less than a year. And a few of you might be here for the very first time (a show of hands). And perhaps a few of you are here by mistake – perhaps your GPS brought you here but you intended to visit the Baptist church down the street. Anyway, welcome!

I so appreciate you being here at UUMAN this morning – this Sunday morning.

You could have chosen to spend your Sunday morning elsewhere. I mean, there's lots of competition out there. There are always TV shows out there to stream and binge on; or Sunday morning news shows to take in (though that may be cause for deep despair)...hey, and maybe that's why you're here: you watched some early morning news show and in despair that followed you realized you needed to find a church to begin to make sense of it all.

Or, maybe you made the decision to come to UUMAN today despite being overworked, busier than ever, with a little league game and a dance recital to attend later this afternoon.

Yes, I so appreciate you being here at UUMAN this morning – this Sunday morning. Again, you could have chosen to spend your Sunday morning elsewhere. And you wouldn't be alone if you did. In fact, you'd be joining an ever-increasing number of people who choose not to attend worship services of any kind on a Sunday morning. I probably don't need to tell you, or remind you that:

- an ever-increasing number of people have no religious affiliation to any church or denomination of any kind (these are the “nones”)

- an ever-increasing number of people are being raised in households where it is customary not to go to church. This was not the case when the baby-boomers were children. Their post-WW II parents went to church in droves...and they took their children with them. This religious socialization is not happening today.
- an ever-increasing number of people can get any religious sustenance they might need online...for free... without making a pledge....Why get out of bed on a Sunday morning when you can do this?
- an ever-increasing number of people see participation in our culture as isolated individuals having individual needs rather than as an integral member of a cohesive community pursuant of the common good. Such an individual might say “What is the purpose of a religious community? Just what is the common good?”

This is what we are up against. (I may come back to these in another Sunday service in the not-too-distant future.)

In light of this, and because of this, again I so appreciate you being here at UUMAN this morning – this Sunday morning. I am truly grateful.

And I so appreciate and am truly grateful for those who not only show up here at UUMAN, but for those who, time and time again, despite the inconvenience, despite the demands of parenthood, the demands of an occupation and career, despite physical or financial limitations, despite simply being exhausted...despite all this, I so appreciate and am truly grateful for those who continue to make this congregation what it is.

I so appreciate those who choose to show up as leaders here at UUMAN. Those who choose to chair, or serve on, its committees or teams. Those who choose to serve on the Board or Program Council. Those who lead our music, sing in our choir, play in our band, work our sound board. Those who selflessly volunteer in our MCY program week after week, year after year. Those who put together another awesome children’s program this summer. Those who put together the Newsletter after we submit all of our articles after the deadline. Those who

maintain the moving target of our website and manage our communications. I so appreciate all those who work in our beautiful garden, those who keep the urns of coffee full and the septic tanks empty of you-know-what, those who passionately provide hospitality for our Family Promise guests, those who keep showing up at NFCC, selflessly donating their time, those who facilitate our small group ministries and continuing education And I so appreciate all those who are oh-so-generous with their financial pledges and contributions.

I so appreciate that all of those people care enough about this beloved place to continue to show up time and time again. It ain't always easy...but, to me, it is oh so worth it. Why? I believe it's worth it because:

- I believe that UUism is the faith of the future (thank you for being early adopters; you'll be able to tell people you were UU before it was cool!)
- I believe that UUism is the faith of the future that can speak to the universality of our existence, to the diversity of our humanity and our interconnectedness and interrelatedness to natural world and to all things
- I believe that Unitarian Universalism is the faith that the "spiritual but not religious" and the "nones" need but don't know it yet; and they don't know what they're missing
- I believe that Unitarian Universalism shows me of the disconnected, emptiness of rampant individualism; it shows me, again and again that that which truly feeds, that which truly provides sustenance comes of this community, by this community for this community
- I believe that the best of this community within these walls inspires me to build and nurture the best in our community beyond these walls
- I believe that this faith leads to the orientation not of what's good for me but, rather, what serves the common good
- I believe that a faith like Unitarian Universalism is salvific in an nation and in a world badly in need of salvation – salvation right here; right now

- I believe that Unitarian Universalism reminds me that this salvation is truly Universalist in a communal sense; that we aren't all saved as individuals; but that we can't be saved unless we're all saved; as a community
- I believe that Unitarian Universalism demands that justice, like salvation, must be universal and communal; and that calling a person "illegal" is a crime against humanity
- I believe that Unitarian Universalism's theology maintains that a threat to justice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere

This is what I believe and this is why I believe, and I know, that Unitarian Universalism is worth it. Unitarian Universalism is worth showing up for!

I so appreciate that all of you care enough about this beloved place to continue to show up time and time again. It isn't always easy. Sometimes we break our covenants with one another. Sometimes we have conflicts and we have our share of misunderstandings. Sometimes we lose sight of where we're headed. Sometimes we disagree. But despite all this, you are here today – this morning. Like the Zen story of this morning, despite the tigers above and below, despite the man hanging precariously on a cliff's edge with mice gnawing away at his support, he reaches for the strawberry and...."ah, so sweet."

May you continue to reach for UUMAN and may it be "ah, so sweet" to you and to us all.