

“Why us?”

A Sermon by Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull
First Parish Unitarian Universalist
Cohasset, MA
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“Why me?” we sometimes ask when things go awry, when our world seems to turn upside down and we just can’t get our arms around it. “Why us?” we sometimes cry when things get crazy on a larger scale, when our part of the world seems to move toward chaos and we raise our voices in bewilderment. Why, I wonder, when things are going swimmingly, when we are downwind of gifts we perhaps did nothing to deserve, when harmony strikes as vividly as its opposite, why don’t we ask then: “Why me? Why us?”

I don’t doubt that many here this morning are careening through these moments of your living with challenges and perhaps downright crises – of health, of job challenge, of family discord, of upset over the state of our world. I know that there is pain present in this Meeting House this morning. I know also that there is deep and abiding joy. We are blessed with being. We are blessed with being here. We are blessed with being here together this morning as we greet one another once again, as we worship in this Meeting House that is witness to so many stories of faith and otherwise, as we welcome into our family of faith new faces, individuals and families that we are already coming to know and cherish. Why us? How did we come to be so blessed?

I suppose my favorite theological construct is grace, the grace that is joy and relief and promise wholly undeserved. Sometimes we thank God, in the many names we have up our bulging Unitarian Universalist sleeve for that force that transcends naming. Sometimes we have the grace to thank one among us or even a complete stranger for a kindness unexpected. Sometimes we thank the earth of which we are a part for what may often be much more than our part of its gifts and resources. Sometimes we just don’t know what or whom to thank. This is grace. Why me? Why us? Who knows?

This morning we’ve been blessed by the presence of our children. What amazing children you have brought into this parish family of ours. They just never stop surprising us, delighting us, moving us to laughter and tears and yes, sometimes concern. Just wait ‘til you enter Trueblood Hall later this morning and view the Village they’ve created, mirroring those guidelines of our faith transposed into the language of children. It took some pretty amazing children to raise this village. Why us? How is it that we’re so blessed?

How is it that ten new members chose to join our parish family? Yet another event of grace, another call to ask the question: “Why us?” Why did you choose us and the faith that we hold dear? Why did you choose this blended family of faith that can sometimes make us tear our hair out while at other times bringing us to full consciousness of what a blessing it is to be in this parish of such rich and varied personalities. You will not be bored, I promise you!

Let's stretch the boundaries of "us." Let's consider for a moment that the "us" that is this family of faith goes a long ways back. If the rafters could speak, we would hear voices that sang and prayed and discerned and decided with the same day-to-day concreteness that ours do. They are long dead and yet live long in the thread that courses through the years, the centuries even, of this parish. They are hallowed. They are hallowed as are the voices of our larger faith that spoke from the earlier centuries of the Common Era. They are memorable voices as varied as that of a 3rd century theologian holding to the principles of universal salvation and a 20th century thinker convinced that humankind is the salvation of us all and 21st century folks who relish a faith that bids us doubt and question and consider the awesome size of this tent in which we come together to make sense of it all and while we're at it, to know the redeeming grace of our astonishing diversity.

We're choosey folks, we Unitarian Universalists. We're heretics and proud of it, heresy coming from the Greek word meaning "to choose." As much as there is in life that we might not be able to choose – the family into which we're born, the nation that we claim as ours, the talents we possess, the currents of world cooperation and otherwise into which we're swept – we *choose* a faith that honors *choice*. It's inevitable that we will not always agree, given our allegiance to choice and opinion. It's inevitable also that we will sooner or later know that amazement that comes with realizing we're still here. We stick it out in this tent that seems to hold a circus of countless acts, in this Meeting House that shelters our ever blending family of so many places of the heart and mind, with such wide-ranging habits of how we engage, with such variable expectations of what church should be. Yet here we are, in all our motley glory! Amazing!

"Why us?" we might ask our newest members. I trust you will feel ever at home in this parish in which no one, absolutely no one, can be a pariah, because we each matter and we know it. We're all connected, and we know it. We've agreed to move on in the living tradition that is our even larger community of faith straddling oceans and continents and well over two millennia of fierce faith and tenacious doubt.

What is it that binds us? What keeps us going? Free thinking perhaps, but that's not enough. How about free love? Now I know that has overtones that we might not want to own, but it has a far more pertinent meaning in this morning's context. We think freely, and we love generously. Not always, of course. We're quite capable of shutting down our minds and putting a lock on our hearts. But when we, who tend not to believe literally in angels, tap those quite real angels of our better nature waiting in the wings, we find that we love freely. We forgive generously. We laugh with gusto. We cry with empathy. We celebrate readily. We live fully.

How did we come to be so blessed? Why did any among us choose us? How is it that we abide in this parish that is so human and so sublime, this faith that demands so much of us while serving up again and again its varied riches? Why us? I think I shall stop asking and simply bask in the blessing that it is us. For better and worse and all that lies between, it is us in this family of faith whose call we have heeded, in this larger faith that calls us to persist.

You each matter. We are all connected. How thankful I am that this is so. Amen.