



Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship
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Schedule of Services

Services are held every Sunday at 10:30 at Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre

6 September

Ross McLuckie

Nothing

There are so many items we deal with each day and they are all put in a box "positive" or "negative". Are these the only alternatives ?

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13 September

Laurence Gormley

Should We have Unitarian Saints?

To our modern eyes Saints seem like a relic of past, perhaps even primitive, religious practice. But are Saints important, and if so what sort of Saints should Unitarians have?

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20 September

Jan Tendys

Civil Society — Why is it Necessary?

A thriving democracy needs a strong civil society. The view from Canada and Australia.

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27 September

Janet Horton

The Pursuit of Happiness

Philosophers write about it, religions promise it, musicians sing about it, and psychologists study it. But what is it and is it really possible to pursue something that is so elusive?

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4 Oct *No service because of ANZUUA*

11 Oct. Candace Parks; 18 Oct. Geoff Matthews; 25 Oct. Colin Whatmough

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Buddha's Dogs

I'm at a day-long meditation retreat, eight hours of watching
my mind with my mind,
and I already fell asleep twice and nearly fell out of my chair,
and it's not even noon yet.

In the morning session, I learned to count my thoughts, ten in
one minute, and the longest
was to leave and go to San Anselmo and shop, then find an outdoor cafe and order a glass
of Sancerre, smoked trout with roasted potatoes and baby
carrots and a bowl of gazpacho.

(See page 6)

Fellowship and Committee News

Jan Tendys

Our Yulefest was successful as usual with Candace's Christmas tree welcoming us into her home and to our feast of turkey. Most of the credit goes to Candace, but Carolyn made a hit with her mulled wine. It wasn't exactly a winter's day but no-one was complaining.

\$150 was donated for our Emergency Fund which is partly for social service expenditure. If members have a suggestion for a worthy cause to which the Fellowship could donate, your Committee would be happy to consider it.

It was a pleasure to see Colin back at Spirit of Life after an operation that turned out to be longer and more complicated than was expected—battered but unbowed.

We have real pleasure in welcoming Michael Bucciarelli as a member. It has also been a good time for visitors recently.

Eric and his Centre for Progressive Religious Thought friends have signed up 60 plus people for their day of discussion with Val Webb. Well done.

Where did Evil Spirits Originate?

Recently I was reading some of the earlier stories in the Old Testament, particularly in the book of Samuel. Part of one episode about David and Saul struck me, at least, as being very strange.

The story was about David playing the harp to entertain Saul when (I quote) "an evil spirit from God seized upon Saul" and he tried to kill David with a spear. Of course, the God of the Old Testament is stern and severe and seeing at that time there was no Lucifer or Satan, evil had to come from someone.

I always use the New English Bible with its translation into modern English, making it easier to understand. However, I did compare it with the old King James translation and the episode is much the same.

The references are to the first Book of Samuel where the episode is repeated twice:

Chapter 18, verses 10 onward.

chapter 19, verses 9 onward

As a Unitarian, I find these quirks of history in religion interesting.
Evan Davies.

Green Notes

As there is so much bad news about the environment, I am always on the lookout for a bit of good news.

In recent months there have been articles in both New Scientist and Scientific American about "grassoline" or cellulosic fuel. This is an oil which can replace petrol and which is made from weeds and any woody material such as sawdust and other side products of wood manufacture. Unlike other biofuels derived from corn or soybeans, it does not compete with the provision of food for all the hungry of the world. It is environmentally friendly in so far as the useful weeds can be grown on marginal land. Of course, all biofuels still emit as much carbon pollution as petrol does, so the advent of biofuels doesn't mean we don't still have to cut down on the size of the cars we use or the amount we use them.

If we could run cars on fuel cells using hydrogen, we'd be in a really environmentally sound position. The fuel cell unfortunately is a very long shot. The good news is that research is inching forward, although still a long way from "lift off".

For Australia with its plentiful supply of natural gas, the more we can shift to gas for all sorts of applications, the better off we will be as regards carbon dioxide emissions.

Jan Tendys

"Business as usual is not what we're about. It's not what change is about. It's certainly not what people of good will from all faiths, who embrace the Golden Rule and seek the common ground of justice and fairness, are about." Jim Wallis, editor of the online magazine "Sojourners." Wallis has been a strong supporter of President Obama and his theme of "Change" for the US.

Readings and References from Service on 23rd August.

The readings are about three fundamental questions. The first question relates to my quest for truth; where do I go for inspiration? The second question is about finding purpose in human existence; what is my mission in life? The third question has to do with my origins; where do I fit, in that 'interdependent web of all existence' of which I am a part? Traditional religion has three equivalent categories. In traditional religion the answers to those questions are indisputable. Truth comes to you from the sacred writings, your world view is dictated by your church, and the pinnacle of your quality of life is attained in the hereafter, provided you believe the 'right' things.

Author, Bruce Sanguin *, affirms that the answers to these three questions provide the necessary foundations for religious living. He doesn't call them "beliefs". Rather they are orienting affirmations. But in Sanguin's kind of spirituality, he doesn't claim that his suggested orienting affirmations are right. Rather, he says, we may choose to act 'as though' or 'as if' they were true and see where they lead us. I invite you to do that with me this morning. To use his (Sanguin's) own words, the three affirmations are:

- An affirmation of "creation as sacred text".
- An affirmation that "we have the capacity to consciously evolve, (and in particular, to evolve toward ever-enlarged perspectives)" which is "a primary practice" of his kind of spirituality.
- An affirmation that "the 14 billion-year evolutionary story of the cosmos may serve as a sacred myth for our age."

Sanguin's sacred text is Nature. In our first reading, Val Webb ** says, "...There has been hesitation in religious circles over the centuries about claiming divine revelation through nature. If GOD is encountered through the natural world why do we need specific revelations like those claimed through Jesus or the Qur'an, and even if God is revealed through nature, are human beings capable of 'reading' this revelation accu-

rately given their original corruptness or sheer humanness?"

Sanguin affirms that since the human species have emerged at the top of the evolutionary ladder as intelligent, conscious creatures, it is we ourselves and no longer natural selection and the will to survive alone that engineer the future shape of life on this planet. And that includes human life. Consequently we have to take major responsibility for deciding what to believe, who we are and what we are becoming. And this, he says, is a never ending task. That is what gets me out of bed of a morning. In our second reading, Caroline Jones, rather than make a definitive statement of who she is, describes the ongoing process as she exercises her conscious awareness to take her towards that end. "That process is cumulative...", she writes, "Although some people appear to be very confident in their identity, it is still not like that for me. The quest to discover 'who I am' is more like a continuing unfolding than a finite goal to be achieved once and for all."

And finally, Sanguin affirms the need in us for a Sacred Story to provide a starting point for our spiritual journey. It is the fourteen billion year evolutionary story of the cosmos and it is linked with his first affirmation. I find that not only is creation my Sacred Text; it also provides the material for my Story.**** He quotes our third reading from Thomas Berry *. It tells a story about the culture's origins, where it is now, and points toward a hopeful future.

"No society can function without a central myth - a narrative that orients the society to reality. provides us with an orienting myth that is grounded in evolutionary science.....The universe is winding itself up in the direction of increased complexity and consciousness. Somehow, to use American philosopher, Ken Wilber's phrase, 'dirt got up and started writing Shakespeare'. By affirming that these two qualities are fundamental to the fabric of the universe, we can affirm that creation is an external manifestation that has an interior correlate. Call that fundamental interiority God/Spirit/Cosmic Wisdom/ Sacred Intelligence/ Being or the Tao or the Hidden Wholeness or the Pattern That Connects, and then act as if (page 5)

If you have a news item or written article you believe would be of interest to the congregation, we invite you to submit it for publication.

Notice

DEADLINE for copy for the next issue of Esprit is
LAST SUNDAY OF THE MONTH

Do you have a topic of a spiritual nature that you would like to share with the congregation?

As Unitarians, we support an "Open Pulpit" and invite members of the congregation to lead the service if they so wish.

Just let Candace know what you would like to speak about and when you are available and we will fit you into the schedule.

Also, please feel free to give us your feedback on any of the services. This is the best way to ensure the services address the needs of the congregation.

Would you care to join us?

Membership is open to all adults and includes this newsletter

If you would like to join us as an active member of Spirit of Life, please ring 9428-

(continued from page 4) the universe was thus constructed, and see what happens to your own energy, your own passion, your own hopefulness, and your own willingness to take action for a more healthy planet."

The language of a new Sacred Story will have to address issues which are beyond space and time and which will endeavour to come to terms with a life force within and/or surrounding the evolutionary process. It will be a serial story with repeated revised versions as our sensitivities deepen and our knowledge of life's growing complexities increase. But its language must never be set in concrete or idolised like the old story has been. So in composing a New Sacred Story it would seem impossible to do so without the use of both scientific terminology and mythological figures of speech. Science can be applied to the black holes in space, but we must never lose the capacity to provide for the modern generation what the old myths have done for millions of flat earth believers – a

foundation on which to build a faith community.

*Taken from an address by Bruce Sanguin on 25/05/09 Author of Darwin, Divinity and the Dawn of the Cosmos. Topic: Ecology, Spirituality and the Evolution of Consciousness.

**Val Webb, "Like Catching Water in a Net" page 93 on Nature Speaks.

*** Caroline Jones, "An Authentic Life", ABC Books, 1998.

****From "The Power of Now" by Eric Stevenson, with special reference to J Shelby Spong, "Jesus for the Non-Religious"

Eric Stevenson

(continued from page 1)

But I stayed and learned to name my thoughts, so far they are:
wanting, wanting, wanting,

wanting, wanting, wanting, wanting, wanting, judgment,
sadness. Don't identify with your
thoughts, the teacher says, you are not your personality, not your
ego-identification,

then he bangs the gong for lunch. Whoever, whatever I am is
given instruction
in the walking meditation and the eating meditation and walks
outside with the other

meditators, and we wobble across the lake like The Night of the
Living Dead.

I meditate slowly, falling over a few times because I kept my
foot in the air too long,

towards a bench, sit slowly down, and slowly eat my sandwich,
noticing the bread,
(sourdough), noticing the taste, (tuna, sourdough), noticing
the smell, (sourdough, tuna),

thanking the sourdough, the tuna, the ocean, the boat, the
fisherman, the field, the grain,
the farmer, the Saran Wrap that kept this food fresh for this
body made of food and desire

and the hope of getting through the rest of this day without
dying of boredom.
Sun then cloud then sun. I notice a maple leaf on my sandwich.
It seems awfully large.

Slowly brushing it away, I feel so sad I can hardly stand it, so I
name my thoughts; they are:
sadness about my mother, judgment about my father, wanting
the child I never had.

I notice I've been chasing the same thoughts like dogs around
the same park most of my life,
notice the leaf tumbling gold to the grass. The gong sounds,
and back in the hall.

I decide to try lying down meditation, and let myself sleep. The
Buddha in my dream is me,
surrounded by dogs wagging their tails, licking my hands.
I wake up

for the forgiveness meditation, the teacher saying, never put
anyone out of your heart,
and the heart opens and knows it won't last and will have to
open again and again,

chasing those dogs around and around in the sun then cloud
then sun.

~ Susan Browne ~