

## A TIME FOR EVERY PURPOSE

A Sermon by Reverend Lynn Strauss

What does it mean to fulfill one's life? We all want our lives to matter. We want to use our time on this earth for good.

Think with me this morning about the significance of time... its implications for religion and for living a life fulfilled. Notice, it is not about a fulfilling life...but a life fulfilled.

As our responsive reading reminds us..."from the fragmented world of our everyday lives, we gather together in search of wholeness." We gather to discern how our lives, individually and as a congregation can find the shape of wholeness...can become fulfilled.

Already, the gift of sabbatical time is working in me...moving me toward deep questions and a journey of worth. Thank you for this gift of time, it is a privilege I pledge to use well.

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose (matter) under heaven." The wisdom teacher of Ecclesiastes, offers a glimpse of the paradox of human living... there is a focus on the limits and contradictions of life-it is a book filled with tensions. The Teacher says..."all is vanity and chasing after wind"...acknowledging the transience, futility and irrationality of life. So how then do we live?

"A time to be born and a time to die." How do we live knowing that we will die? Knowing that even today could be our last?

How do we live with the privilege of the gift of this day?

Reverend Forrest Church often said that religion is our response to the human condition of knowing both that we are alive and that we will die.

Religion takes a position regarding beginnings and endings. All scripture, all mythology, addresses the question of time.

Sometimes the position is a doomsday one, as in millennialism. "The end is Near" was an idea, a fear, a mantra, that animated the earliest Christian community, Puritanism in America and radical Evangelicalism today. We hear its echo down through the ages.

Earth centered and tribal religions, as well as Buddhist tradition understand time as cyclical...all time is sacred, with no beginning and no end. Seasonal rituals and deep meditative practice are meant to move one into a time apart, or a higher place of consciousness.

Orthodox, iconic religions like Catholicism build cathedrals to replicate and reverence times and events of the past or a vision of a future heavenly time.

Liberal religion historically has posited a better future, an optimistic progress toward that city on the hill in which all men and women will be free and equal and happy.

Today's spirituality movement cuts across faith and denominational categories toward a deep awareness of the paradox of living and dying, such as Reverend Church speaks of. Spirituality asks us to focus on the moment.

And each moment contains all of the past.

Our rational faith, embracing the wisdom of science calls us to pay attention not only to the present, but to the past and future as well...we know that time does not exist apart from space...time is not a river we fall into, nor a fixed point, nor a clock we can turn back , nor something we can outrun...spacetime is a continuum...always emergent.

See the light coming in the window...it has been traveling for sixty-three million years to reach us. Out of the collision of galaxies arose renewal, and from the inert dust of the old galaxies, new stars burst into life. The light of the big bang is both end and beginning. What we see is both dazzlingly new and unspeakably ancient. Of such as this, we are made.

So shall we awake in each moment to the beauty and truth and love that is our world- both inner and outer. Our faith calls us to celebrate life. But what does that mean?

we are called to witness to all of life...to the whole which each moment contains. To the collision and the conflict , to the season of death and destruction as well as the season of birth and harvest.

We are called to attend to the brokenness at the core of the world...and to our own broken hearts and spirits.

We must awaken to death and war and disease and hatred... to the suffering that fills the wide sky. Being people of faith, having the privilege of time...of another day, we are called to serve love and justice.

Have I strayed too far from a comfortable sabbatical plan?  
Don't we all need to rest and re-energize? Shouldn't I take it  
easy? Shouldn't you? Haven't we done enough?

Ursula LeGuin in her futuristic fiction offers imaginative  
approaches to time...In "The Left Hand of Darkness", the people  
know that there is something yet to come...the people of her  
story live, as she puts it, forcefully in the present.

If we believe that there is something yet to come, we too  
shall live forcefully in the present...not meekly, not comfortably,  
but forcefully, energetically, fully engaged.

1980 Nobel Prize winner for Literature, Czeslaw Milosz was  
born in Lithuania in 1911...much of his poetry was written as  
response to the war in Europe.

I read this particular poem as a response, not just to the  
horrors in Warsaw in 1944 but as a response to September 11,  
2001, and to the longest war in American history still going on in  
Afghanistan, and to the suicide of a 13 year old boy, killed by  
homophobia...and to the children dying of Cholera in Haiti...and to  
the dying of species on our planet- Milosz writes:

*A Song on the End of The World*

*On the day the world ends*

*A bee circles a clover,*

*A fisherman mends a glimmering net.*

*Happy porpoises jump in the sea,*

*By the rainspout young sparrows are playing*

*And the snake is gold-skinned as it should always be.*

*On the day the world ends*

*Women walk through the fields under their umbrellas,*

*A drunkard grows sleepy at the edge of a lawn,*

*Vegetable peddlers shout in the street*

*And a yellow-sailed boat comes nearer the island,*

*The voice of a violin lasts in the air*

*And leads into a starry night.*

*And those who expected lightning and thunder*

*Are disappointed.*

*And those who expected signs and archangels' trumps*

*Do not believe it is happening now.*

*As long as the sun and the moon are above,*

*As long as the bumblebee visits a rose,*

*As long as rosy infants are born*

*No one believes it is happening now.*

*Only a white-haired old man, who would be a prophet*

*Yet is not a prophet, for he's much too busy,*

*Repeats while he binds his tomatoes:*

*There will be no other end of the world,*

*There will be no other end of the world*

So what do we, we who so love the world do?

What do we do with the gift of this precious day, with our one precious life?

Ursula Le Guin writes a story that honors loyalty as the greatest virtue. After years of separation a couple is reunited... and it is as if they were never apart, for each has been loyal to the other. Loyal without question, loyal, no matter what.

Unitarian Universalists I find are a very loyal lot.

We show up. We give generously. We keep asking questions. We sign petitions, we write letters to our senators, we speak truth to power, we stand in protest and witness for Peace, we bring food for Manna, we bring mittens and school supplies for Beacon House, we raise money for scholarships for Transylvanian young people. We read and study and keep the faith of our conscience of our liberal religious tradition.

We visit those who are sick, we make casseroles, we welcome everyone affirming that all are unique and valued. We plant gardens and care for the earth.

UU's are a loyal people.

And we don't deny the end of the world. We don't fear a doomsday scenario, but in sorrow and compassion we stay awake to the fullness of the times in which we live...to all the purposes under heaven.

This is how I want us to enter our time of sabbatical...for it is not just mine, but yours as well. My hope is that we stay awake to life...to all of it. That we give thanks for the gift of each day and use it well. Thus will we move toward fulfillment of our lives, individually and as a community of faith.

Czeslaw Milosz writes: "What is poetry which does not save nations or people."

And what is religion that does not do the same?

Whether or not we are chasing after wind...this is the life, the time we have been given...we know that suffering fills the wide sky...life is a journey through joy and sorrow, a journey taken in hope.

Even Milosz offers hope...in a poem titled, "On Angels"...he ends with these words...

*Day draws near*

*Another one*

*Do what you can.*

So May It Be/Blessed Be/Amen