

**“Time Lords and Landlords”**  
**First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto**  
**Sunday July 15, 2012**  
 Fiona Heath, Summer Minister

**Call To Worship**

*From a chapbook for a Winter Solstice Ritual in the Pacific Northwest by Ursula K. Le Guin.*

It is holy in the south.  
 It is holy in the north.  
 It is holy in the west.  
 It is holy in the east.

Up above it is holy.  
 Down below it is holy.

It is holy in the middle and around the outsides.  
 It is holy in all the crevices and little sticking out bits.  
 It is holy in all the parts I have forgotten.  
 Between the toes and behind the ears it is holy.  
 Along the selvages and hems and seams and gussets it is holy.

It is holy between 2:30 and 4 and even in prime time.  
 It is fairly generally and as a more or less continuous thing holy.

**Reading:**

*From “Now I Become Myself” by Parker Palmer (Yes Magazine)*

Our deepest calling is to grow into our own authentic selfhood,  
 whether or not it conforms to some image of who we ought to be.  
 As we do so, we will not only find the joy that every human being seeks—  
 we will also find our path of authentic service in the world.  
 True vocation joins self and service, as Frederick Buechner asserts when he defines  
 vocation as “the place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need.”  
 Buechner's definition starts with the self and moves toward the needs of the world:  
 it begins, wisely, where vocation begins—not in what the world needs (which is  
 everything), but in the nature of the human self, in what brings the self joy,  
 the deep joy of knowing that we are here on earth to be ... gifts...

Contrary to the conventions of our thinly moralistic culture, this emphasis on gladness and selfhood is not selfish. The Quaker teacher Douglas Steere was fond of saying that the ancient human question “Who am I?” leads inevitably to the equally important question “Whose am I?” — for there is no selfhood outside relationship.

We must ask the question of selfhood and answer it as honestly as we can, no matter where it takes us. Only as we do so can we discover the community of our lives.

As I learn more about the seed of true self that was planted when I was born, I also learn more about the ecosystem in which I was planted—the network of communal relations in which I am called to live responsively, accountably, and joyfully with beings of every sort. Only when I know both seed and system, self and community, can I embody the great commandment to love both my neighbor and myself.

### **Reflection** “Time Lords and Landlords”

I grew up in Mississauga, in the suburban sprawl of the seventies and eighties. My parents were English immigrants. Although both were raised Anglican, they were agnostic by the time I was born. I was not baptized, and did not enter a church until I was seven years old.

I was raised on national geographic specials, British comedies, and science fiction. After one national geographic show about human evolution I was left with the impression that my great great great great grandparents were apes. That was fine with me, I liked the idea of being a cousin to gorillas. I liked being part of a great evolving chain of being, with humans having common ancestors with other creatures, knowing we are part of an ever evolving whole.

As a geeky, awkward teenager, with strict parents, TV was a valuable window on the world, a box of dreams, as science fiction writer Ursula Le Guin called it. Gilligan’s Island. Happy Days. Three’s Company. The Love Boat. (Those were sad days for television).

But there was also Doctor Who. It was on TVO every night at 6pm. When my father worked late, we were allowed to eat dinner in front of the TV. Sitting there, eating beef stew and dumplings, trying to keep the cat from my plate, I found what I didn’t know I was looking for.

Big questions. Moral decisions. Choices that mattered.

In a story titled Genesis of the Daleks, the Doctor, who is a Time Lord, is sent back in time to end the development of the Daleks.

The Daleks are creepy half creature, half machines who want to exterminate everybody. The Doctor is poised to blow up the incubator room but hesitates. He would be committing genocide.

The Doctor wonders if he has that right, to kill an entire intelligent species.

He wonders if killing them all doesn't make him as bad the Daleks themselves.

He knows that in the future, in response to their evil, good arises.

This TV moment woke me up. The idea that decisions could have moral complexity blew my little suburban mind. It was the first time I truly realized that the world was not black and white. That I thought about how far reaching the consequences of our choices can be. That I thought about how violence as a response to violence implicates you in the same way.

In the end, circumstances change and the Doctor does not have to decide whether or not to commit genocide, but those ideas stayed with me. The numerous ways humanity makes decisions which shape the world, shape the future. How complex society is, how evil and good form each other. These were big thoughts for a Mississauga teenager. And they made me long to be part of a meaningful life.

A few years later, after this moral awakening, I had what might be called a spiritual awakening. When I was 18, just graduated from high school, we left Mississauga for Saskatoon for my Dad's work. It wasn't a surprise but that made it no less devastating. One of the first nights in Saskatoon I sobbed and sobbed and sobbed. for hours. And hours. Finally exhausted and drained, I was completely empty. And into that emptiness came a dream, a vision, a sensation.

An experience of an endless golden net, interwoven and uneven. Some threads were thick, some were thin, some joined up closely, other threads stretched far away into the distance. It was magnificent. Beautiful. Comforting.

I was reminded that distance didn't end my connections. That I was surrounded by connections I could hold onto. That while I was lonely, I was not alone. Maybe if I had been raised Christian, Jesus would have come to my aid. But I experienced a web of connection instead.

So in my childhood I believed that gorillas were my cousins, that there were big

questions to be asked, and that we are all connected through golden threads. Clearly, I was meant to be a Unitarian.

I am telling you my story because I think all people have moments of revelation which shape how we understand the world. Which shape our being.

We're going to take a few moments of silence right now, because I want to ask you to reflect upon your own childhoods, What moments of moral or spiritual awakening did you have? What started you towards this community of the chalice?

*Minute of silence*

In my childhood I had both a spiritual and moral awakening to a world more complex and more interesting than the safe, suburban society I lived in.

In my twenties I searched for ways to bring that world closer, through environmentalism and voluntary simplicity. And I continued to read.

A lot of science fiction, like any other art, is terrible. But some of it is brilliant. Inventive world making that refracts and reflects back this world, offering insightful metaphors. In my twenties I discovered Ursula Le Guin's work. She's been called a "geographer of ... imaginary worlds"(Kendall in 80!).

If Doctor Who showed me how to ask big questions, Le Guin showed me how magnificently big the universe is. And how important even the smallest life is. She also taught me how socially constructed our way of being is.

Le Guin imagined a world without gender. She imagined a planet structured by democratic anarchy. She imagined a far future in California, a world of tribes and ritual.

While I did not experience God growing up, and knew little of organized religion, I assumed religion was predicated on a belief in a powerful God. In the far future book "Always Coming Home" Le Guin created a society deeply connected with place, animals and spirits. It was a society filled with regular community and personal rituals designed to maintain balance between people and other beings. But none of their spiritual practices involved worship of any gods or goddesses. This was a revelation to me.

Religion need not be about an all powerful being called God. That religion could be about binding a community, not just people to people, but people to place. It could be about harmony between the individual, society,

and the natural world. That religion was about how we understood, and then live out that understanding, of our relationship to the greater whole.

At that time I had not heard of Daoism, or other religions of the balance tradition. I was an atheist. I had never – and have never-experienced the presence of God. And unfortunately, the church going people I knew tended to use their religion as a club of judgment. So I was not particularly interested in or even kind about religion.

After graduating from Queen's University, I moved to Ottawa. There I became friends with an older woman named Judith. Judith belonged to the United church. A spiritual seeker, she was open about her struggle with faith. She wrestled with the image of God, the role of women in the church, The example of Jesus. All of this was deeply heartfelt. Our friendship opened me to the value of religion to a person.

One day, I complained to her about wanting to be a philosopher preacher but without the God stuff. She suggested I might be interested in the Unitarians. This was the first time I'd ever heard the term.

Eventually I moved to Waterloo and lived with other students, one of whom was interested in real estate. He bought an old house nearby to turn into apartments. Once the house had been renovated, Marc and I took the second floor. Now my friend the landlord had bought the building from the Waterloo Unitarian congregation, it had been their meeting space for many years. So our first home together was the second floor of the former Unitarian House. We lived in the religious education rooms. We were never able to get the "RE supplies" sticker off one of the closet doors.

I was intrigued by a religion that grew out of an old brick house. After Silas was born, Marc and I wanted to find a spiritual home. I wanted a place where we could ask the big questions, without being told an answer at odds with my understanding of the world.

Another friend suggested the Unitarians. This time I decided to listen. When Silas was two, we came to a spring service, and were inspired by a service that honoured the earth as well as the mystery.

Lots of other things were happening in my twenties, but science fiction continued to open my mind to the big questions of how we should live, how we could live. And friends like Judith and living in a former "house of worship" softened my attitude towards organized religion. It began to seem like a place for community, rather than

judgment. A place where others might be asking big questions about “life, the universe, and everything”.

I knew that I was connected to a larger whole, but I also knew that I was uncomfortable naming this God. I needed a spiritual community that had room for a different way of understanding the mystery which surrounds us all.

We joined the Waterloo congregation about a year and a half after our first visit. I was quickly drawn to the opportunities to engage in meaning-making through leading services, teaching and work as a lay chaplain. I was delighted to be part of a community experiencing spirit in place, that honoured science as well as mystery. And in leading services, officiating at weddings, I found my voice and vocation.

It took me awhile to recognize this. The idea of ministry as an actual job did not occur me for several years. I had a comfortable job at the University of Waterloo, with wonderful colleagues and always something new to learn. But on a four month sabbatical I realized I wanted to do more. To be part of something more meaningful. Not just on Sundays. But everyday.

I wanted to do work which honours our connections to the greater whole, which encourages us to live ethical lives of respect and kindness.

Frederick Buechner defines vocation as “the place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need.” Ministry allows me to talk about things that matter to me, and allows me to do the teaching and writing that I love to do.

I wanted work that reminds people that, as Jack Layton said, love is better than anger, hope is better than fear, and optimism is better than despair. It is a message we need to hear – over and over.

So I chose ministry. I chose ministry because it matters. Because the earth matters. Because how we live our ordinary, extraordinary lives matters.

I believe the best ministers – like Shawn – inspire us to do more, to be more.

I see the role of a UU minister as facilitating connections: connection to one’s own inner being, connection between people, connection to the earth, connection to the greater mystery.

We need room in our lives for ritual and reflection, to remind ourselves that the world is “fairly generally and more or less a continuous thing holy”.

We are a small denomination and kind of embarrassed by ourselves.  
We don't know how to talk about being lighters of the chalice.  
But we shouldn't be.

Scientist Chet Raymo, in his book, "When God is Gone, Everything is Holy" says that any religion worthy of humanity's future will have three characteristics. One, it will not imagine itself to be exclusively true but will be open to the best and holiest of each faith tradition. Two, it will be ecological, inclusive and aware of the earth and all creatures. Three, it will embrace the scientific story of the world, looking for the divine in the extravagant wonder of the earth.

This is Unitarian Universalism. We could be the religion of this century. Where we celebrate the extravagant wonder of the earth. and work for a better, more inclusive society.

We just need to be proud and be loud. People need our combination of science and spirit. I feel exhilarated to be part of this emerging orientation.  
May we be worthy of the future.  
May it be so.