

# “The Examined Life: How, Then, Shall I Live?”

Rev. Lynn Harrison  
First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto  
25 November 2018

N.B. These sermons are made available with a request: that the reader appreciate that, ideally, a sermon is an oral/aural experience that takes place in the context of worship, supported and reinforced by readings, contemplative music, rousing hymns, silence, and prayer and that it is but one part of an extended conversation that occurs over time between a minister and a covenanted congregation.

You may have seen them in the subway—the large boxes to load up your new Presto card.

This is the new method of payment to ride the TTC these days, the Presto card, replacing the Metropass and before that, the token, and before that, the paper ticket.

I like the name, Presto, because it makes getting from place to place seem like magic—and we know it can be anything but, especially up on street level during rush hour.

You need to get to school? Presto!  
You need to get to work? Presto!

You need to get to First Unitarian?  
(Wherever the heck it happens to be...?)

Well...you get the idea!

It's really quite attractive: the notion that we can “get where we're going” if we simply have the right tool or vehicle.

The names and the methods change over time,  
but all of us continue on this journey of understanding.

As meanwhile, the wisdom teachers tell us...  
it has no beginning and no end.

Seeking knowledge and insight,  
that we might connect with others  
and serve the world more deeply...

We've come to the end of our "Examined Life" series,  
having made six important stops along the way:

Who am I?  
Where am I going?  
Where did I come from?  
Why me?  
When, if not now?  
and What have I done?

We are not the only people considering these questions.

The Honourable Justice Senator Murray Sinclair,  
who headed up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, feels they are  
deeply important as well.

Calling education a "sacred responsibility,"  
he called all teachers to lead all children...

"Regardless of their heritage...to think about four key questions  
throughout their education:

Where do I come from,  
Where am I going,  
Why am I here,

and most importantly, who am I?"<sup>1</sup>

Thank you, Donald Cole, for bringing Justice Sinclair's questions to our attention, so I could share them with you today.

We've considered these questions in our sermon series—but but, of course, we've barely scratched the surface.

We've sped through them not unlike a subway train, moving ever quickly forward.

That of course is in keeping with the dominant culture in which we live.

A culture that values goal-directedness, speed, efficiency, and measurable outcomes.

Moving forward in this way, we've arrived at:  
"How, then, shall I live?"

And suddenly I have an image of the hapless minister vaporizing in a puff of smoke... "Presto!"

Or the Wizard of Oz, saying,  
"No, my dear, I'm a very good man...  
I'm just a very bad wizard."

Because of course,  
each of those questions is worth  
many hours of contemplation...

In journaling,

---

<sup>1</sup> Sara Anderson, "Murray Sinclair: Education is key to reconciliation" Rabble.ca, June 16, 2016.

dream-work,  
prayer  
and conversation.

In what's called "discernment"—  
the spiritual questioning that takes place  
beneath of the surface of our lives.

I encourage you to continue to take that time...  
To "live the questions themselves" as the poet Rilke wrote.

Today, we'll carve out a short time, in the centre of our busy service, to  
reflect briefly on this question.

"How, then, shall I live..."

Connected to my community and my culture...  
while being true to my personal values?

"How, then, shall I live..."

In a highly secular society...  
while striving to deepen in my spiritual life?

"How, then, shall I live..."

Knowing that my singular life is a miracle,  
so unlikely in the universe of possibilities?

"How, then, shall I live..."

Knowing that the way I live affects others  
and the earth, and that time for all is short.

“How, then, shall I live...”

When I so often feel discouraged, anxious, or sad?

“How, then, shall I live...”

When I know I will not live for long?

“How, then, shall I live...”

Knowing that others will come after me?

“How, then, shall I live?”

Before we take a few minutes to reflect quietly on this question, using the blank page included in your Order of Service...

I'd like to draw your attention to the wording.

It's how “shall” I live? Not how “should” I.

“Shall,” it seems to me, carries a note of promise.  
Of possibility.

Not certainty, but mindful intention.

“Should” can feel heavy, and weighted down with expectations, perfectionism, and guilt.

I have found that these are not helpful,  
when we are trying to live as best we can.

I'm going to ring the singing bowl now and provide about three minutes,  
in which we can write, or even draw,

a few simple responses to the question...and then there will be a few minutes to share, for those who wish.

Sometimes when I'm walking down the street, I notice that I'm holding my Presto card tightly in my pocket...

Even if I'm still blocks away from the subway station.

It's a nervous habit.

That card, safely in my pocket, isn't going anywhere.

But I like to remind myself that it is.

My hope for you, is that on your continuing journey of self-discovery, you hold fast to what moves you.

To what you find "moving."  
Beautiful, compelling and meaningful.

And to what moves you...  
transports you...  
carries you...

Toward a life of love—  
received and given.

What moves each of us will go by many names...  
and appear to take different shapes.

But I believe that beneath the surface of all of them,  
there is an underlying Web of Love...

An interplay of Being...

An Essence that embraces and includes each of us  
and gives us strength.

The wisdom teacher Richard Rohr wrote:

“The visible world is an active doorway to the invisible world...and the  
invisible world is much larger than the visible.”<sup>2</sup>

If we stay connected to the Presence beneath the  
surface of our questions, we may find we arrive  
at answers we didn't even know were possible.

We may see ourselves face-to-face  
in the mirror as if for the first time...

and know that we are home.

---

<sup>2</sup> Richard Rohr, *Eager to Love: The Alternative Way of Francis of Assisi* (Franciscan Press: Cincinnatti, 2014), xiv.