

# “Springing For It”

Rev. Lynn Harrison  
First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto  
Online Service via Zoom  
20 March 2022

For weeks now, I've been living with the title of this sermon.

"Springing for It."

I was quite proud of it, actually, because it refers both to the arrival of Spring today...

And also to our discussion theme of "money" for the month of March, alongside our annual stewardship campaign.

Reverend Shawn congratulated me on the sermon title, and I felt quite pleased about it.

But as the days went on, creeping steadily toward March 20th, as the war in Ukraine intensified and Covid concerns persisted... dark clouds appeared on the horizon.

What on earth was I going to say?

§

Now, this is not an unusual problem among ministers... and particularly ministers in this particular culture and this particular time.

In bygone generations, a parish minister was aware of the challenges faced by the small community surrounding him.

(The minister was usually a him.)

He was likely neither aware of, nor expected to preach to, the problems of other communities outside the parish.

Last year (which seems a long time ago) the unconventional Lutheran pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber wrote:

"I [do not] think our psyches were developed to hold, feel and respond to everything coming at them right now;

Every tragedy, injustice, sorrow and natural disaster happening to every human across the entire planet, in real time every minute of every day.

"The human heart and spirit," she wrote, "were developed to be able to hold, feel and respond to any tragedy, injustice, sorrow or natural disaster that was happening *in our village*."<sup>1</sup>

It was the happenings in the village that ministers tried to speak to.

If they were Christian, they'd do that with the assistance of something called the lectionary: the calendar shared by all Christian churches the world over.

Every Sunday has a particular focus and suggested readings.

Today, for example, March 20th is the third Sunday of Lent... the season of restraint and simplicity leading up to Easter Sunday.

Suggested themes for this week are "art" and "prayer"...

One of the suggested readings comes from the Psalms--or songs--which are part of the Hebrew Bible.

The first line of Psalm 63, which is suggested for today is:

---

<sup>1</sup> Nadia Bolz-Weber, "If You Can't Take In Anymore, There's a Reason", *The Corners* blog, Aug. 17, 2021. <https://thecorners.substack.com/p/if-you-cant-take-in-anymore-theres?s=r>

"You, God, are my God,  
earnestly I seek you;  
I thirst for you,  
my whole being longs for you,  
in a dry and parched land  
where there is no water."<sup>2</sup>

§

It is to our collective good fortune that contemporary Unitarian Universalism not allows and invites but indeed expects its preachers to draw from a broader and deeper well of wisdom in our reflections...

And to speak to this particular moment of history, not only in our local parish, but in the wider world.

I would say that most of us try our very best to do this... to greater and lesser success from week to week, depending on so many factors...

Including our experience as ministers,  
our skill as writers,  
our intellect and level of education,  
our emotional and psychological makeup,  
our personal situation,  
the culture and circumstances of the congregation,  
and of course, the state of the community and the world on the particular week, leading up to the particular Sunday.

Coming up against the need and the expectation, that we offer some words of insight, hope or comfort on Sunday morning,

---

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 63:1

we reach deep into our hearts and pockets to "spring for it"--  
that is, to offer something of "worth" of "value" at a time when it is  
needed.

But there are many times when so much water within us has been used in  
the fighting of fires and the shedding of tears...

It can seem that the well has run dry.

There are Sundays when it seems there is nothing to say.

§

Or at least, no insight or analysis I could offer that would stand beside  
anything you could read, or hear, in countless articles, books, TED Talks,  
blog postings, or podcasts today.

It is from that "dry and parched land" where it seems there is no water that  
I find myself looking deeper, or perhaps just looking differently...

Not for the more insightful or impressive or heroic thing to say...

But to the simple value of the "What Is"  
that is always right in front of me.

As an artist, I'm always drawing on the well of "what is."

I believe in the advice to start where you are,  
and to use what you have...and to do so with gratitude for whatever gift is  
given.

As Robin Wall Kimmerer wrote in the passage  
Leslie shared earlier:

"Gratitude creates a sense of abundance,  
the knowing that you have what you need."

So let's go back to the terrific little sermon title,  
"Springing For It"...and see what might arise just from that alone:

§

So...what are you springing for?

What brings your inner spring alive...what activates or releases your inner abundance and generosity?

What are you willing, and able,  
to pay dearly for, because you value it so highly?

This is, of course, a question that comes up during pledge season, and we hope that First Unitarian Congregation is one of those things you will dig deeper for.

But what else do you spring for...and what springs forth from you?

Perhaps they are one and the same.

What you can and do offer  
is always congruent  
with what you find good and meaningful,  
beautiful and important in this world.

So what is it that springs forth from deep inside you,  
to serve the good beyond yourself  
that you recognize on a deep level as good and worthy...  
and that you want to sustain?

If a "spring" is a resurgence  
--a renewal, a resurrection of sorts--  
then what does that look like for you?

Or what *would* it look like,  
if that spring could burst fully into being?

What is preventing that spring from gushing forth?

What's tamping it down...holding it back?  
Or draining it?

When we think about "springing for it," what is the springing?

For that matter, what is the "for"?

In what way might you be going forward?  
What are you leaning toward...or leaning into?

And what is the "*it*" that is your destination?

What is your "it?"

The "it" that is both your longing and your gift  
is both unique to you and in perfect harmony  
with the deep purposes of others.

Do you find yourself springing forward  
toward that today?

Are you bouncing back...or trying to?

Are you springing into action,  
or seeking a deeper spring within?

As we begin this new season,  
how is it different than "wintering" for you?

Or are you so deep in wintering that "springing for" anything seems  
completely impossible right now?

§

The singer and writer Carrie Newcomer offers a simple way to turn our pervasive winters into the possibilities of spring.

She suggests the simple spiritual practice of asking yourself  
"Will I enter this room in love or in fear?"

Whether it's a room, a conversation, a Zoom meeting, or the next step  
along your path...

Ask yourself, "will I enter this room in love, or in fear?" and then see what  
happens.

Carrie Newcomer writes:

"I find [that] without balance, it is easy to feel overwhelmed,  
which gets me stuck or leads me to despair.

No, I cannot personally stop the terrible tragedy unfolding for our kindred  
in Eastern Europe.

But I can support organizations that are trying to help refugees,  
I can support the companies that are refraining from doing business in  
Russia until the violence stops.

I can also do my daily meditations, and prayers,

I can remind myself to do and notice small acts of kindness  
and amplify them in the world.

I can take good care of the bit of natural world around me.

I can add art and music to the ether of the world."<sup>3</sup>

Carrie Newcomer is talking about "springing for it" in her own words...and in her own wisdom.

She's suggesting ways that we can offer our love,  
our inherent worth if you will,  
to the world.

How we can bring our inner wealth forward,  
is what "springing for it" is, it seems to me.

The bubbling up of small acts of wellness,  
that are possible every day.

It might be difficult to find that spring at times.

And so we need our "diviners"...those poets and artists who can point us in  
the direction of the "living water" of sustaining wisdom.

The playwright Albert Camus once wrote:

"In the midst of chaos, I found there was, within me,  
an invincible calm.

In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me,  
an invincible summer.

And that makes me happy.

For it says that no matter how hard the world pushes against me, within  
me, there's something stronger – something better, pushing right back."

Could it be that the "something better, pushing right back"

---

<sup>3</sup> Carrie Newcomer "The News of the Heart" blog, March 14, 2022.

is the "it" we all are springing for?

§

Now, it might seem to some of you that all this wordplay around the phrase "Springing for It" is excessively playful...

A little bit light...perhaps even frivolous, especially given the serious and weighty subjects that preoccupy us today.

Or maybe none of you would say that--  
but there's a critical voice in my head that certainly does.

That voice might ask, what is the point of word-play  
in times like these?

And aren't all those sunny sentiments about spring  
just a shade foolish or naive?

Isn't it a little "too easy" (that voice asks me),  
to simply write about what I know,  
and to enjoy playing with words in the way I love to do...  
because I am, after all, a poet at heart?

It's true that at times, it may seem virtuous to keep the heavy mantle of  
worry wrapped around us...

To project our own fear outward, through a stance of constant analysis and  
criticism...

Or to attempt to do so much, in so many spheres,  
that we inevitably fall short and lose whatever spring  
in our step we might once have had.

Our desire to be virtuous,  
coupled with our awareness of privileges

we hold when others do not,  
may cause us at times to lose access to the wellspring  
of love, joy, abundance, generosity and peace  
that is always here for us..  
and indeed that replenishes us,  
so that we may do our part for the well-being of the world.

We cannot afford to lose access to the wellspring  
of life's inherent worth: the "it" that we are springing for.

The late historian, playwright and World War II veteran  
Howard Zinn wrote:

"To be hopeful in bad times is not foolishly romantic.

It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty,  
but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness.

What we choose to emphasize in this complex history  
will determine our lives.

If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something.

If we remember those times and places--and there are so many--where  
people have behaved magnificently,  
this gives us the energy to act,  
and at least the possibility of sending  
this spinning top of a world in a different direction.

And if we do act, in however small a way,  
we don't have to wait for some utopian future.

The future is an infinite succession of presents,  
and to live now as we think human beings should live,  
in defiance of all that is bad around us,  
is itself a marvelous victory."

§

Today, many parts of the world are, very literally, "a dry and parched land, where there is no water."

Millions of people around the world, from Ukraine to Yemen to Indigenous communities in Canada urgently need clean drinking water, as well as shelter, safety and relief from unimaginable suffering.

As we "feel with" this awareness, reading our social media feeds and tuning into the nightly news--even if we do so for a limited time each day--

Our own wells of hopefulness may run dry more often than we'd like.

Yet within this spiritual winter there also resides an abundant spring.

It is a spring that is fed by our care for one another in this present moment...

Our gratitude for the gifts we are given...  
And our willingness to return the gift:

To "spring for it"...to offer what is needed from the wealth within us...

...in the eternal circle  
of creative love and transformation  
to which we are so very blessed to belong.

Peace to you. And amen.

§

