



Why are we here?

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This sermon message was going to be quite easy to put together because I was planning to give you all an opportunity to talk about how you came to Unitarian Universalism and what is compelling about it and then we had the Johnny Appleseed festival yesterday and it became even easier to put together some thoughts about why are we here.

Yesterday was such a statement of why we are here that I want to begin with those thoughts. Every other church group that was set up along West and Main Street seemed to demonstrate that they had one purpose in mind- to save people, to get them to come into their midst and be prayed over, to get them to discuss and believe as they did, to get them to confess and believe in general. One group was even using Johnny Appleseed as the quintessential Christian to gather the passerby into their discussion. When someone from that church stopped me and began that conversation- I quickly interrupted him and proudly stated that we at First Church Leominster really had the claim to Johnny Appleseed and that he, the person who had interrupted me, with the question "Did I know Johnny Appleseed/ John Chapman?" was rapidly approaching a steep downward slope if he continued to try to proselytize to me by using Johnny Appleseed as the

means to do so. One thing I noticed was that as those religious groups were approaching the attendees of the Festival and encroaching on their space with a you too can be saved message, we were in our space- loving one another -and all who stopped by- up. We were laughing and sharing and talking over and around one another, we were visiting and introducing our friends, we were sitting in small groups talking and doing what we do so well- welcoming the stranger, the child, the differently abled, the ones we knew and the ones we wanted to get to know- not with the purpose of saving them, or converting them but of showing that First Church Unitarian Universalist is a church of warmth, compassion, kindness- after all our bathrooms were open all day to one and all – and most of all respect for the inherent worth and dignity of each and every person we encountered. We had help all day morning to closing. Thank you all. I trust no one person felt like they had to do it all because I saw group sharing and group cohesion. All during the weeks leading up to the festival many hands and hearts and feet and arms and legs did what they could when they could and it was successful, and we showed to the community that being a Unitarian Universalist from First Church is a rocking group. Speaking of rocking. I had come in for 7:00 am to help set up but about 8:30 I had to get some groceries even though I knew that getting a parking spot when I came back was going to be tough, if not impossible. I even thought about just parking at the garage but I took a chance and when I pulled up to our spaces, there sat Betsy and Marilyn on little stools in the parking spot that I had been vacated, risking life and limb they were saving that parking spot for me. They rock and I was and am so appreciative of the huge act of kindness and generous imagination.

And speaking of imagination that for me is one of the primary purposes of why we are here.

Let me give you the five C's that I think help to focus why we are here- and by extension why at our core we are Unitarian Universalist.

1. Curiosity- Unitarian Universalist have an enormous sense of curiosity and a tremendous imagination about all things to do with the divine, the nature of the universe, the nature of humanity. In fact, on Saturday, Bob our custodian was asking me where all our folding tables had gone. I told him "I would have an easier time talking about where is God, the nickname I often use about the divine, than I would be able to answer that question". We in this church and UU's in particular love to ponder questions. We use science and reason, intuition and facts to explore who we are, where we came from and where we are going. We do it with an attitude of amazement, awe, and reverence in which we have and hold life. I think that is something that distinguishes us and makes us want to be here.
2. Continuity is the second C. Unitarian Universalism has a rich and long history coming forward from the second/third century after the death of Jesus. We have a history that spans many continents, many religious traditions and encompasses many ancient teachings. This church has a rich and long history too. On October 16th we will get together after church for a time of discussion about some interesting history of First Church and of Unitarian Universalism. But in spite of our continuity and history, culture and traditions we are a living, moving, breathing faith religion.
3. Our third C is connections. We connect with one another, of course, but we connect to and with the universe of which we are a part. We connect with our inner world, our inner spiritual life, our inner emotional states. All of which influence who we are and how we deepen the connections in ways of care and love and commitment.
4. Our fourth C- is commitment. Because we are here and because we are comfortable living in a state of ambiguity about the afterlife, we will make a commitment to work for justice, equality and other social concerns that effect all right here in

this universe, while being willing to learn from our errors, willing to be surprised and bolstered up in strength by the various ways we do make a positive difference, both individually and as a religious community. Of course one of the real examples of this will be the concert this afternoon. As we remember all those who have died because of gun violence: through the joining our voices together and through the universal language of music we will experience and model another way of connecting to the larger community and making a commitment to all. Don't forget to purchase and wear 'your standing on the side of love' shirt too.

5. And our fifth C is that during any worship service, during group meetings, during task force and committee meetings, during small group, during the myriad of ways that we gather we are called back to our purpose for being a liberal religious association. A group of people; a congregation that calls itself Unitarian Universalist because this is where we can be called back to our differing and overlapping theological backgrounds and beliefs, where we can be called back to a place where we can inwardly and outwardly manifest our ideals, our ideas, our visions, our values, so that we can be our best selves.

Why are we here? let me repeat the five C's: Curiosity, Continuity, Connections, Commitment and to be Called back to a beloved place where we can together build a beloved community.

May it be so.