

EASTER SUNDAY SERMON Leif Bentsen

***Seeking Life's Deeper Meaning - You've got to get down to reach the spirit in the Sky.***

Happy Easter.

[take out egg, rabbit, and crucifix and place in front of pulpit]

Seeking life's deeper meaning?

Why are we here today?

The origins of the Easter Egg, lie in pre Christian rights of spring. The Easter Bunny is a late arrival. He shows up around the 16 the century as Osterhase , dropping decorated eggs in the baskets of good children in Germanic speaking areas of Europe.

The resurrection of the good Rabbi Yeshua, is probably a combination of pagan rites of spring and the Jewish holy day, Passover, which commemorates the story of Exodus.

All are rites of spring, all have a religious origins, and can be looked at as metaphors for rebirth of life.

And why do we celebrate rebirth of life?

Is it because we are all seeking the deeper meaning of life?

For UUs, seeking life's deeper meaning is a pretty tough road to travel.

Our road has no maps. No dogma. Our dogma is that there is no dogma.

There is no Book of UU, There are no parameters, No rules to guide us.

This in turn can be very liberating. It is up to us as individuals to choose our own path.

However, the hard part is to actually start the journey down the path, to open the door and step out. And are we going to walk, drive or fly?

If you're a member of the social justice committee, you'll probably have to take public transportation. That's OK, bus rides can be spiritual.

When Susan Dearth was standing up here a few months ago, She relayed Rev Dr. Michael A. Schuler's thoughts on Sustainability that were expressed in his book, *Making the Good Life Last*.

In her presentation, Susan finished with: What remains is to address the need common to all human beings that could loosely be called spiritual. A sustainable spirituality begins and ends with *attention*. That means, in the first place, attention to what is important, to what ultimately matters. It has been said, "What we attend to, we become." He talks about the importance of gratitude in our lives and its link to happiness.

In my earlier reading, the Dali Lama also talks about happiness as being an integral part of Spirituality. It is born from within, motivated by a profound desire to transform oneself in order to become a better human being

There is a Persian proverb "Knowledge of self, is knowledge of God." If you want to ease future pain and suffering, I said ease, not eradicate, and have more happiness in your life, you're going to have to dig deep into your mental abyss and discover who you really are.

I am not saying that you are unhappy and come here to find happiness. I'm not referring to being giddy or goofy. What I am saying is that, in general, human beings want to be happier than they are.

We are born that way. We are born in a state of happiness or joy. We are not born in sin. We are not born in sin or evil and have to claw our way out. It is the opposite. We are born in a state of happiness and joy; we push sin and evil away along with all the things that life throws at us.

Why, it's our right as Americans to pursue happiness –

In his book "Finding Your Religion" UU minister Scotty McLennan points out that established religions claim paths to spirituality, and that their path is the best. Using the "climbing the mountain" metaphor, McLennan points out that it's not uncommon for individuals to switch paths while scaling the lofty peak of Happiness. Look at us. How many of us have changed paths from another religion.

To get up this mountain of joy, McLennan suggests there are eight steps to finding spirituality:

Thinking, experiencing, walking, joining, crossing, sitting, suffering, and finally, rejoicing.

Thinking means opening your mind to religious inquiry, the myths and symbols.

Experiencing refers to opening your senses as well as your mind to what is around you. The flowers, the stars,

Walking means pick a path, and start walking. It might not be the right one, but you are not going to get anywhere sitting on your duff – and it requires effort and exertion.

Joining. You are not alone in your search. Join fellow travelers on the path you have chosen and discuss your doubts, fears, and hopes.

Crossing extols the value of using a comparative approach of what you have learned about different beliefs even though you have set off on a particular path. An atheist can appreciate the benefits of meditation.

Sitting is just that. Sitting under your version of the Bodhi tree meditating or praying. Direct experience of the ‘Ultimate Reality’ (the ultimate reality being whatever He, She or It is) is most often reported in these private moments. In a few minutes, I’ll share with you my Ultimate Reality of reaching that spirit in the sky.

Suffering plays a very important role in our spiritual development. Sometimes we fall apart, other times they become opportunities for

personal deepening, closer connections with family and friends, for deeper connection with our being.

Finally, there is rejoicing. Celebrating, singing, dancing, feasting all have roots in religious holidays. Humor is healing, don't stop enjoying. Think not only of Easter, think of weddings, bar mitzvahs, rites of passage. And rejoice in the small everyday things that bring you joy....

Now, the Mountain Rev. McLannan talks about. I've been to the top. It wasn't an easy trip, it was unplanned, but it was kind of fun, and funny, and the mother of all epiphanies, at least mine anyway. For those of you who attend a lot of KUUF committee meetings, this might also be considered the mother of all check-ins.

Once upon a time, a long time ago, before anyone in this room knew me, including my wife.

Back in the late seventies, when Starbucks only had one store, I was single, living on a boat in Lake Union in Seattle, about a half block from the Aurora Bridge.

I was unemployed, I lost my children through divorce, I was a dead beat dad. Lonely, couldn't find a date, broke, nobody calling to see how

I was doing. Depressed. The only entertainment I could afford was watching the occasional jumper off the Aurora Bridge. But they didn't jump that often. The whole world was against me. Oh woe was me.

So I am sitting there one day between jumpers. I asked myself, "Self, you've gotta figure out who the heck you are."

It was a beautiful calm morning. I had a French Press Coffee maker and stoked myself up on coffee, cup after cup. I started thinking, what the heck is wrong with me, why am I so needy and bummed out?

And I started by asking myself, why do you feel what you are feeling. An answer would pop up and I would ask why do I feel that? I began peeling back the layers of the onion, I was going deeper inside of my self. And thoughts were flying past me faster and faster, I was Alice going down the rabbit hole, and I hadn't taken any drugs. It was kaleidoscope tornado, Things were flying by me, Toto, Dorothy, things peeled out of me, you don't need a shining car, you don't the best clothes, it's ok if no one talks to you at parties, you don't need a girlfriend, you don't need sex. You don't need beer? What? No no, not those, come back, come back. Deeper and Deeper I went, things stripped out of me. I thought I was in that Evard Munch painting The Scream, The Holy Trinity zoomed in and out. And I'm not talking about

the Big Bopper, Richie Valens and Buddy Holly. It was the big three – I can't be like God, but Jesus and the Ghost were the metaphor of combining the spirit of God into a human being ...things went faster and faster, then it stopped in a split second and I suddenly saw myself in mirror shorn of everything, with absolute clarity, a voice boomed out **“you only need two things: Food and Warmth.** The mirror shattered into a bazillion shards, my ego GONE! Oh, oh, I thought, I'm in deep Caca now.

Then there was bolt of lightning BOOM! And there floating in front of me, surrounded by a luminous cloud right in the middle of my boat. The center of the universe, THE METAPHOR OF LIFE, I FOUND THE SECRET OF LIFE! I did it in a recliner.

The metaphor of life floating in front of me was **de oxee ribo nu cle ik acid**, the DNA Double Helix. The Double Helix, our genetic code spiraling together, The Yin and Yang of life - with a lot of bling. It has a lot of bling, it sparkles. I dove into the center and started swimming between the sparkling strands... there was my grandfather's blue eyes, smelly stinky Vikings rowing to Ireland a thousand years ago, death, birth a thousand times, then it grabbed a hold of me and I started see the big picture, The Gaia Principal, the world is a living, interconnected

organism, The Chaos Theory, there is a pattern in everything no matter how chaotic it looks, life is complex and multi dimensional. HOLY PROCESS THEOLOGY, GOD IS LOVE...

and then 'blink' it all disappeared and there I was in my recliner, on my boat. The day was still beautiful and the Sun had moved a few more degrees to the west.

My first thoughts were, 'What the heck was in that coffee'

I had been to the mountain top. Thank God I didn't get the Ten Commandments, but I did become infused with an encompassing, unconditional love and a tremendous warmth. Every day I would work on it. When I walked down the street, dogs that use to bark at me became friendly. While waiting in the checkout line in the grocery store, babies looking over the mother's shoulders would giggle and smile at me. People started calling me. Women were everywhere, I even started to turn down offers. Life was different. My ego had been stripped out of me. As an individual, food and warmth are the only things that I needed to survive. Everything else was secondary.

Let me explain that in a little more detail. Now think about it. Food and warmth, is that it? Yes that is it. Oxygen is automatic, but in order to

survive as an individual we must actively pursue food and warmth, they are absolutely necessary. However, as a species we need sex. I'll take living in a village anytime!

Like the double helix, life is not black and white, it is messy and complex, but it has a sense of order. Everything is multi sided. Everything has a yin and yang, and a yuk and wow.

I learned to appreciate depression. When I questioned my feelings about why I was feeling blue, I discovered new things about myself. I developed patience, I saw people, things, all differently. I began giving my life back to my community...

Most of the books that I have read and people that I have spoken with have told me that staying on top of the mountain takes a tremendous effort. Great spiritual leaders are solitary leaders. I made a choice to cling to one of the shoulders of the mountain.

I am not the person that I was before my mother of all epiphanies, I am not the same person that was on the mountain top. I am somewhere in between, which is probably why my wife says I don't always practice what I preach.

That's the story of my rebirth. What's yours?

And that's the way it is in the great northwest, where the women are smart, the men good looking, the beer is in the fridge, and the food in Burley is on the counter.

May the spirit of happiness and joy always be with you.....And never stop walking.