

Apocalypse Always and Why First Unitarian Society Is Here

In the final book of the Christian scriptures, the *Book of Revelation*, the author of the book imagines a scroll that contains the Apocalypse. It is sealed with seven seals. The first four of the Seven Seals are what have come to be called the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, nightmare figures riding white, red, black, and pale horses. Traditionally these have been interpreted as Pestilence, War, Famine, and Death.

Over the millennia, preachers and would-be prophets have gone to town on foretelling the time of the end of the world. "The end is near!" can I think be fairly called a timeless cry.

That's natural, in some ways, because pestilence, war, famine, and death are constants in human existence. Always, somewhere in our global village, there is pestilence, war, famine, and death. The past few days, we've heard of massive storms and killed earthquakes. I suspect there *always will be* these doom scenarios as long as the human story on this planet lasts.

Always, somewhere, for *someone*, it is the Apocalypse.

What we have in the face of these Four Horsemen endlessly riding our earth is compassion and love and hope and choice. Your order of service this morning contains a quote from science fiction writer Octavia Butler: The human species is a kind of animal, of course. But we can do something no other animal species has ever had the option to do. We can choose . . .

You chose to gather here, in this place, today.

Today we begin our 136th year of gathering at a place called First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis. When they began back in 1881, the gathered community stated this purpose:

to form an Association where people without regard to theological differences may unite for mutual helpfulness in intellectual, moral, and religious culture, and humane work.

Theological difference. Mutual helpfulness. Intellectual, religious, and moral study. Social justice.

If you look up “humanist ritual” in Wikipedia or text books you’ll be told that humanist ritual has never worked. They’ll give you some examples. But they won’t mention First Unitarian Society. That’s ignorance speaking.

For a hundred and thirty-six years the ministers and people of FUS have been practicing ritual without the trappings of Christianity or any other religion. We prove *by doing* that we don’t have to hold onto religious traditions to have a “service”—which we’ve renamed “assembly.”

First Unitarian Society is the largest Humanist gathering anywhere in the world. We are the birthplace of the concept of congregational humanism. FUS is a truly unique institution—unique on the planet. We have to keep telling the FUS story.

Perhaps it took the unique cultural qualities of the Twin Cities to create FUS—a culture that has been socially progressive; a place open to diversity in both people and in thought; a place that values ideas, education, and difference. A place that embraces dynamic change. Perhaps. But we can choose to make it much better than it is.

There are several strong Unitarian Universalist communities in the Twin Cities. FUS is unique in our focus on Humanism. Like all UU congregations, we strive to embrace diverse theological views. But here we go one step further—we believe that Humanism transcends individual religions, embracing as it does the latest and best in human thought.

For Humanists,

- People matter more than ideas.
- Humanists embrace the fact that human beings have many kinds of knowledge and talk about truth in many different ways. And that all ways matter.
- Humanists believe that science, mathematics, and scholarship transcend national boundaries, tribal boundaries, and time.
- Humanists relish the fact that we may well be wrong about what we think is real. Knowledge changes all the time. For us a “mystery” is not a place to give up thinking about it, but rather an invitation to explore.

- Humanists believe that evolution is the greatest story of all. (We will be hearing that from visiting speaker Michal Dowd in a few weeks.)
- Humanists embrace that fact that human beings are animals, like any other species. We are special, but so are all other living things.
- And as Humanists, we devote ourselves to nature and to life and to the flourishing of the earth and its living things.

That's Humanism in a nutshell.

If each of us holds onto these truths, we will be more humane, more thoughtful, and more loving. Perhaps we will even change our society for the better.

So, welcome to our 136th year of gathering in this place called First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis. We go on doing the impossible, gathering people with theological differences in order to be mutually helpful. To pursue intellectual, religious, and moral study. And to realize a just society.