

A Recipe for Humble Pie  
a talk by Rev. Dr. David Breeden  
at First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis  
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Simple Simon met a pieman,  
Going to the fair;  
Says Simple Simon to the pieman,  
Let me taste your ware.  
Says the pieman to Simple Simon,  
Show me first your penny;  
Says Simple Simon to the pieman,  
Indeed I have not any.  
Simple Simon went a-fishing,  
For to catch a whale;  
All the water he had got,  
Was in his mother's pail.  
Simple Simon went to look  
If plums grew on a thistle;  
He pricked his fingers very much,  
Which made poor Simon whistle.<sup>[1]</sup>  
He went for water in a sieve  
But soon it all fell through  
And now poor Simple Simon  
Bids you all adieu!

## INTRODUCTION

This month we've been considering the Soul Matters theme, "Mystery: The practice of embracing life with humility and awe."

I've talked about how I see humility is the best approach to how we deal with our own ideas. For one thing, all of us are situated in particular places and particular times, and

so it's difficult for any one of us to see all that much of the bigger picture of our world and its people.

I've also discussed the difference between a fact and meaning. Reason and science are very good at finding measurable facts but not so good at finding meaning. And I've insisted that meaning and purpose are what most human beings really need in order to "embrace life."

And I talked about how liberal Protestantism in the United States has failed to generate much awe because of a focus on individual conscience rather than collective well-being. And I suspect that's a big part of the reason that the liberal side of Christianity is rapidly shrinking. Many Americans, especially educated Americans, are finding meaning and purpose and awe way outside the walls of liberal Protestantism.

I also traced the development of Pentecostalism and the charismatic, conservative movement in the US as a reaction to the liberal abandonment of the poor and uneducated, which comprises most of the US population. Yes, it's a contradiction, but liberal religions love poor and oppressed people, but poor and oppressed people do not love liberal religions.

(Hear or read my other talks at <https://firstunitarian.org/category/podcasts/>)

Today, as we wrap up a calendar year that has not gone the way most liberals—secular or religious—would have liked, it's perhaps a good time to think about a recipe for Humble Pie and a way forward.

It may be that American liberalism—both secular and religious—is itself the pieman in the old nursery rhyme, selling a pie that an increasing number of people simply can't afford.

As I've said before, the health of a worldview is how willing the people who hold it are to considering its failures. So, let's take a hard look at where we're at.

ONE

I recently learned a brand new marketing acronym: LOHAS. L-O-H-A-S. That stands for "lifestyles of health and sustainability."

LOHAS are people who are interested in living healthy lives of personal development as they protect the environment, work for social justice, and live sustainably.

Does that describe anyone you know?

Does that describe *everyone* you know?

If so, that might be a problem for your assessment of reality.

Despite the fact that LOHAS are a 500 billion dollar market, they—we—make up only 27% of the US population.

It is the LOHAS who can afford to buy organically grown and sustainably sourced food. It is the LOHAS who are becoming “spiritual but not religious,” and exploring alternative philosophies and religions as we commune with nature and look to nonprofits for our meaning and purpose.

(I’m not being critical: I’m being descriptive. I’m not wily enough to have realized there are LOHAS with disposable income.)

Allow me to talk about one little piece of that puzzle. At Christmas, I drove down to my family farm in the southern part of Illinois, not from from the Ohio River. And I visited a graveyard where some of my dead relatives are buried—my great-grandmother and my great-grandfather and a great-uncle.

The graveyard sits by a Cumberland Presbyterian church. It’s miles out in the country, but people still attend—they have a Sunday morning service; a Sunday night service; and a Wednesday evening service.

All through the Ohio River Valley there are small Cumberland Presbyterian congregations. (Growing up, these were the only Presbyterians that I knew existed.) Many of my forebears were CPs.

The movement started in 1810 a hundred miles or so south of my family farm. That movement was one of the early adaptations of European Protestantism to the realities of poor, uneducated rural life in this hemisphere.

The defining characteristic of the Cumberland Presbyterian movement was its rejection of the mainline Presbyterian belief in predestination—meaning that you are going to heaven or hell when you are born and you’ve got no choice in the matter.

The Cumberland Presbyterians adopted a doctrine they called “Whosoever Will.”

“Whosoever Will.” Whosoever wills to be saved from hell, will be saved from hell.

It’s a belief that an individual’s free will could save them from eternal damnation. All you have to do is give your life to Christ.

Why were poor, backwoods Americans so enamored of this concept?

The American poor and oppressed then, and continuing into our own time, reject the predetermined hierarchies that the American middle class take for granted, along with the many privileges of social status and social safety nets.

The Cumberland Presbyterian split, born in a small log cabin in Tennessee, is the archetype for the left / right –liberal / conservative–split in American religion.

Cumberland Presbyterianism told Simple Simon to forget about what that pifman had to say. Simon *could* have a piece of the pie, even if he didn’t have a penny; it told Simon that he *could* catch a whale in a bucket, gather fruit from a thorn bush, and gather water in a sieve.

*No, not in this life, but in the next one . . .* As an old hymn puts it, “I’m just goin’ over Jordan / I’m just goin’ over home.”

In that land far away, all your wishes will be fulfilled, and even beggars will ride horses . . . . The principalities and powers of this world will be broken forever.

Want to guess the most prevalent bible verse carved on the tombstones in that cemetery?

John 14:2, reporting the words of Jesus: “In my Father’s house are many mansions.”

(I suppose I don’t have to add that those mansions won’t be log shacks.)

TWO

I have to admit it: it's darn nice to be a LOHAS, living a healthy life of personal development as you protect the environment, work for social justice, and live sustainably.

We ask the pieman if the ingredients are organic and fair trade.

But it's important to remember that most people in our nation and on this planet can't afford to do that. Never have. Most likely never will.

There's two recipes for humble pie. Look it up when you have some time. One sort of humble pie includes raspberries, blueberries, blackberries,, fresh peaches . . .

Yum.

Then there's "umbles pie," a meat pie cooked up by the poor in Medieval Britain, made from venison innards, hog guts, sheep guts, that sort of thing. The Medieval equivalent of chitlins or chorizo or pickled pigs feet.

That's the source of another old saying: "Eatin' high on the hog."

When you eat *high* on the hog, you can live a life of sustainability and health and personal growth. You eat low on the hog, chances are you've got Type II Diabetes.

(Then you've got people like me, LOHAS who slip off occasionally to have my biscuits and gravy and my spicy fried chicken. )

THREE

The failure of Americans to talk with each other goes a lot farther back than the 2016 election.

The biggest difference—besides the idea of free will—between those Cumberland Presbyterians and the mainline Presbyterians was one thing: mainline Presbyterians required their ministers to have an education; the Cumberland Presbyterians didn't *even want* their ministers to have an education.

After all, educated preachers are going to tell you that you can't catch a whale in a bucket. But, for many, many people, if you can't catch a whale in a bucket, what hope do you have?

Early on in this nation, there were lots of narratives out there, and unfortunately they were often contradictory and they continue to this day.

Yes, there were proto-LOHAS, but the biggest demographic was a marketing niche that doesn't get marketed to all that much: LTPs, the "long-term poor."

The poor European immigrant was finally free of government restraint: See, you make *umble* pie because the lord of the manor goes sport hunting and gives you the deer guts. If you went hunting, you got hanged for poaching.

So, when they got to the backwoods of North America, they said, "I've got my gun and I've got my freedom, now just leave me alone." States rights all the way.

For poor African Americans, the narrative was very different: the US Army won the freedom and promised forty acres and a mule. Where is it? Only the federal government could pay up and fend off white supremacy. But it didn't.

Poor Mexicans were saying, "hey, you stole a third of Mexico, and now you say I'm a *foreigner* speaking the wrong language?"

And natives were saying, "You take *whatever* you want, *whenever* you want, and you say it's the *law*, but the law only seems to go in one direction."

The failure of Americans to talk with each other goes a long way back. In many ways it's mutual incomprehension. A chasm that only a few labor unions and a few religious traditions have been able to cross.

But not mainline Protestantism.

As I've mentioned before, the explosion of Pentecostalism in the early twentieth century occurred among the poorest of the poor—African Americans, Latinos, Natives, and poor Euro-American. And the most shocking thing to middle class Americans at that time were newspaper reports of the races mixing together.

I suspect that marketing demographics tell us a lot more truth about where people are in their lives than do preachers and politicians.

As I said earlier, liberals love the poor and oppressed; but the poor and oppressed don't much love liberals. LOHAS and that other marketing niche, the "long-term poor," don't talk all that often.

That didn't start in 2016.

## CONCLUSION

Yes, 2018 will go down as one ugly year. We'll be hearing and reading summaries of the mess over and over the next few days.

As you're bombarded with all that, I invite you to reflect on what happened 76 years ago, in 1942. (Who out there remembers 1942? Ah, young folks, when you get a chance, ask these folks about 1942.)

Think about 1942 and 2018 will better.

The Second World War began for the US in December of 1941.

In 1942 the Japanese swept across the Pacific capturing British and American troops and territories one after another.

German tanks swept across north Africa.

The Luftwaffe began what's known as the Baedeker Blitz on Great Britain—we'd call it the *Lonely Planet* blitz these days—bombing specifically civilian and cultural targets rather than military targets to create terror.

In 1942, the Nazis first opened a brand new type of concentration camp, called an extermination camp.

In 1942, the sale of new cars was banned in the US to conserve steel. In 1942, gasoline and food rationing began in the US.

In 1942, body parts routinely washed up on Atlantic beaches due to submarine warfare. German submarines controlled the North Atlantic. Japanese submarines openly patrolled the California coast and occasionally fired on the shore.

(In 1942, Daylight Savings Time was invented.) And the BBC banned the song "Deep in the Heart of Texas" because munitions workers stopped to listen, and that slowed them down.

In 1942, as the reality of food rationing sank in, Mary Frances Kennedy Fisher, better known as M.F.K. Fisher, published my favorite cookbook of all time, titled *How To Cook a Wolf*.

The title derives from the old saying for barely scratching by: "keeping the wolf from the door."

In the book, Fisher proposes one way to keep the wolf away is to cook it up for supper.

I think the quote in your order of service this morning well summarizes Fisher's theme and life stance:

And with our gastronomical growth will come, inevitably, knowledge and perception of a hundred other things, but mainly of ourselves. Then Fate, even tangled as it is with cold wars as well as hot, cannot harm us.

Fisher contends that, by starting with simple sustenance, working to hone one's cooking skills as well as one's tastes, and thereby affecting one's "knowledge and perception of a hundred other things" each of us can ultimately gain knowledge and perception "mainly of ourselves."

Self-awareness. That's not a bad idea. And not a shabby recipe for a new year.

Unlike Julia Child, who was her contemporary, Fisher did not consider complexity a virtue. One of the chapter titles the book is "How To Boil Water"—kind of a Zen sort of idea.

Another chapter is titled "How to Distribute Your Virtue," and another, "How to Be Cheerful Through Starving".



As we slide toward that time when many of us make resolutions for the new year, Fisher's advice just may help.

Start simple:

Boil some water.

Throw in that wolf that's been circling around.

As Ms. Fisher wrote, gain "knowledge and perception of a hundred other things, but mainly of ourselves. Then Fate, even tangled as it is with cold wars as well as hot, cannot harm us."

And be thankful it's not 1942.

## SOURCES

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