

“The Magic of Ketchup”
Unitarian Universalist Congregation of South County
Rev Denis Paul
September 29, 2024

Blurb

Walk into any "comfort food" or "homestyle" restaurant, no matter how cheap or expensive, and ketchup will always be unapologetically available. There's a reason so many people love it.

Order of Service

Sounding the Chime

Welcome and Announcements Rev. Denis Paul

Opening Hymn 299 Make Channels for the Streams of Love

Chalice Lighting Nancy Richman
"Invitation," by Shel Silverstein

Opening Words

Reciting the Covenant Together
Love is the spirit of this congregation,
And service is its prayer.
This is our great covenant:
To dwell together in peace,
To seek the truth in love,
And to help one another.

Joys and Concerns

Prayer
"If You Are," by Laura Martin

Offering

Offertory TBA

Reading

From "The Prairie Home Companion," October 20, 2012

Hymn1009 Meditation on Breathing

Sermon "The Magic of Ketchup," Rev Denis Paul

Hymn 318 We Would Be One

Closing Words

"May You Be Changed," by Emily Richards

Extinguishing the Chalice

We extinguish this chalice, but not its light that we take with us, out into the world, sharing it with those we encounter on our journey.

Closing Song

Carry the flame of peace and love, until we meet again (3x)

Script

Sounding the Chime Rev Denis

Welcome and Announcements Rev Denis

Welcome to the worship service of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of South County. I am....

Before we begin, we're required to point out in the event of an emergency you should exit quickly. You can go out the way you came in, behind the pulpit or down the hall and to the left.

In an effort to keep everyone healthy, we are mask friendly. We ask that if you see someone wearing a mask, you give them a little extra space, and If you aren't feeling well, please stay home and join us by Zoom.

This is a sacred time in the week. A time to slow down, to break from the distractions fighting for our attention so that we may just be together celebrating our blessings and naming our challenges. So, let's all take a moment now to turn off or silence our cell phones.

[Pause. Breathe a second]

Whether you're with us here in the sanctuary, or you're joining us via Zoom, thank you for being in this congregation of like-hearted individuals, dedicated to welcoming, loving, growing spiritually, and seeking justice.

Together, we celebrate joys and sit in sadness in our fullness of being. However you express your values, your identity and your affections, you are welcome to journey with us.

I'd like to invite this morning's congregational greeters to rise so that everyone can see who you are.

If we have any newcomers in the sanctuary this morning, I invite you to please fill out the yellow Welcome Card in your hymnal, and put it in the collection basket during the offering. Or, you may want to give it to one of these wonderful greeters before you leave. They can answer any questions you have.

If you're so inclined, feel free to introduce yourself during the part of the service we call Joys and Concerns.

Newcomers on Zoom, I'd like to invite you to introduce yourself to other participants, especially our virtual usher, the magnificent Kathy Swink.

Before we get started, I have these quick announcements.

On Tuesday, we'll be at Caf Bar for beverages and Banter at 1:30;
At 2:30, The Community Sewing Space gets going again after the summer off;
At 7:00 we'll have our second class about "What We Do," focusing on UU rites of passage;
And also at 7:00 the social and racial justice council will be meeting by Zoom.

That's just one day in the coming week, so please, pay attention to the newsletter, and check out our online calendar.

Please rise now, or sit with gusto if you will, and open your gray hymnal to # 299, as we sing together Make Channels for the Streams of Love

Opening Hymn 299 Make Channels for the Streams of Love

Make channels for the streams of love

Where they may broadly run;

And love has overflowing streams

To fill them every one.

But if at any time we cease

Such channels to provide,

The very founts of love for us

Will soon be parched and dried

For we must share, if we would keep

This gift all else above;

We cease to give, we cease to have

Such is the law of love.

Chalice Lighting Nancy Richman

Whenever we gather, Unitarian Universalists around the world light a flame in a chalice as a reminder of our shared commitment to engage in the world as it is, seeing things from a different angle, and changing whatever we can to make it more just.

_____, would you do us the honor of lighting our chalice? As I share the words of "Invitation," by Shel Silverstein.

If you are a dreamer, come in

If you are a dreamer, a wisher, a liar,

A hope-er, a pray-er, a magic bean buyer...

If you're a pretender, come sit by the fire

For we have some flax-golden tales to spin.

Come in!

Come in!

Opening Words

Once again this week, someone used a fake email address pretending to be me, phishing. I want to remind you that I will NEVER send you cryptic messages asking for a favors, and I will NEVER ask you for money in a message.

While scamming is constant threat that can leave us feeling a little jaded, my desire is that we all remain dreamers, hoppers, pray-ers and even magic bean buyers. That we can engage in a little daydreaming and story spinning. After all, where is the joy in life if we can't weave a tall tale once in a while, or — I don't know — buy a raffle or lottery ticket? Even when we know we're more likely to be hit by lightning than win a billion dollars.

So this morning, as we sit by this tiny little fire with all the might of our greatest aspirations, we celebrate our capacity to dream together, to see the metaphors that exist all around us as our greatest teachers, and to make meaning from the seemingly insignificant details of life.

Reciting the Covenant Together Rev Denis

You know, congregations of many different faiths gather each week to comfort, support and challenge one another to live into their beliefs more fully. Most of those congregations share one belief over all: it's their doctrine, their statement of the one and only truth with a capital T, and you *must* profess your commitment to that doctrine as a *creed* in order to belong.

We UUs are different. Not better, just different. We are bound together NOT by a creed or doctrine. We are bound together by a covenant: the promise we make to each other about how we will be with each other, and how we will live in the world. Together.

Please rise now, as you are able, and recite with me our covenant, which is printed in the order of service.

Love is the spirit of this congregation,
And service is its prayer.
This is our great covenant:
To dwell together in peace,
To seek the truth in love,
And to help one another.

Please be seated.

Joys and Concerns Rev Denis

[Move Camera to altar]

Our covenant is a serious commitment. After we renew that covenant, we make good on our promise to dwell together in peace and to help one another by listening to one another's joys and concerns, the important milestones in our lives. We honor one another by sharing briefly, honoring the privacy of others, and refraining from making announcements.

Folks in the sanctuary, please come up to our altar to the elements, tell us your name, and share using a clear, audible voice. If you cannot come up, raise your hand so I can bring you the microphone.

Folks on zoom, please share using the chat function so I can read it to everyone.

Who would like to begin?

[J+C. Offer Mic. Read Chat]

I place this stone in the water for everyone who has been affected by hurricane Helene. For the 60 dead, and tens of thousands of people who have had their homes or businesses destroyed by the epic storm, from Florida to Indiana.

In the week ending Friday, there were 7 mass shootings in the United States, resulting in 45 injuries and 8 deaths, including:

Froylan Garcia, 32

Benjamin Hezekiah Haggray, 20

Linden Woodberry, 21

Antria Holloway, 21

Tahj Booker, 27

Carole's McCain, 27

Roderick Patterson, 26

And one teenager whose name has not been released.

May we have the fortitude to create the change that ends gun violence.

This final stone is for all the joys and concerns that remained unshared, and for those among us who are — for myriad valid reasons — disinclined to speak aloud.

[Return camera to pulpit]

Prayer Nancy

"If You Are," by Laura Martin

If you are angry, let your anger be fire
So it can warm someone chilly.
If you are grieving, let your grief be a river
So someone thirsty can drink.
If you are numb, let your numbness give you capacity
To walk in hard places and not feel hurt.
If you are broken, let your brokenness
Be what makes space for a new thing to enter.
If you are fearful, let your fear be a warning signal
That others may look up.
If you are lost, let your being lost
Make a new place and call it home.
However you are,
Keep going.
However you are,
Keep going.

Offering Rev Denis

Maybe you remember this tv commercial:

A Rolls Royce is gliding elegantly through a lush landscape of country estates.

A gentleman in the back is fixing himself a sandwich, as the super wealthy always do when being chauffeured. He opens a jar of mustard, and starts to panic as he discovers the jar ... is empty.

The camera switches to the outside, where the Rolls Royce pulls up alongside another Rolls Royce. The back windows go down, and the panicked man pulls himself together enough to ask "Pardon me. Would you have any Grey Poupon?"

A hand in a white glove hands out a jar as a disembodied but very upper crust voice says. "But of course."

The message I got from that when I was a kid was that the rich always share their little luxuries. With each other. If you're not in a Rolls, you're out of luck.

The rest of us, well, we make do with what we have. And what we have is right here with us already, like the funds we need to keep our congregation doing good work in the world.

And when we are asked to share, No matter how much we have, we say.... “But of course.”

This morning’s offering will now be accepted.

Offertory TBA

Gratitude

Thank you for all that you do to support the work and the mission of this congregation. Thank you for welcoming the stranger, loving each other, growing spiritually together, and seeking justice in the world. And thank you for your generous donations, which we pledge to use wisely.

Reading Rev Denis, Nancy and Nick

Rev Denis: This morning Nancy and I would like to reprise a skit from an old UU favorite: “The Prairie Home Companion.” It originally aired on public radio on October 20, 2012, a couple weeks before the presidential election. It’s weirdly appropriate to these times.

Jim. These are the good years for Barb and me. I’m voting Romney. She’s for Obama. So we have the satisfaction of participating in democracy, but having absolutely no effect on the outcome. We don’t talk about politics because if we did we’d get a divorce, and that’s too much work. So life is good. I was sitting on the couch watching some old videos of “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous,” when I noticed Barb was sitting in the corner, weeping. What’s wrong, Barb?

Barb. Oh, Jim. You’re there taking a video tour of Donald Trump’s bathroom and meanwhile there are children and animals and rivers who need our help. I mean, we could be using our time and resources to do good in the world, Jim. Instead of coveting the marble walls of a room where a rich narcissist poops.

Jim. It’s Italian marble, Barb. It’s high quality.

Barb. Oh, I don’t care, Jim. It’s all so wrong.

Jim. Now, Barb. I do all sorts of good in the world. I've owned a pistol for ten years now and have yet to shoot anybody with it.

Barb. Oh, Jim. Did you read that story about the New York cab driver who took the young man to hospice, and he was so moved he gave the kid a nice long ride so he could see all the sights of the city before he went into hospice? And then it turned out that the young man was just going there to spray paint some graffiti, but still. It was so generous and thoughtful of him.

Jim. I used to feel the way you do back when I was 15. But then I read Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, and I saw the truth. Barb, life is not Montessori. Life is a struggle. The rewards should go to the strong. And the rest should die. Like in nature.

Barb. Jim, you were laid off at Amalgamated Paperclips 16 months ago. No healthcare. No severance package. They dumped you like you were an old couch.

Jim. I've got my investments. A valuable stamp collection. I have my baseball cards. After this election we'll be sitting pretty. It'll be 1955 all over again.

Barb. I wish you would try being a little kinder. Like on the freeway. You get behind someone who's driving the speed limit, and tailgate until you gun it past them and then you flip the finger. I mean, why?

Jim. If you can't drive your car, you ought to stay home.

Barb. You know, I wonder if you're getting enough ketchup.

Jim. Ketchup?

Barb. Yes, Ketchup. Ketchup contains natural mellowing agents that help people not be jerks.

Jim. Jerks? Who are you talking about? Are you talking about me?

Nick. Song

These are the good times, time for dialogues
So let us all be civil, and not write angry blogs
Life is flowing like ketchup on hot dogs

Rev Denis: Ketchup. For the Good times.

Nick Ketchup. Ketchup.

Rev Denis: Please remain seated for hymn #1009 in the teal hymnal, Meditation on Breathing. That's #1009.

(Mike to give direction on singing parts?)

Hymn1009 Meditation on Breathing

When I breathe in I breathe in Peace

When I breathe out I breathe out Love

When I breathe in I breathe in Peace

When I breathe out I breathe out Love

Breathe in

Breathe out

Sermon “The Magic of Ketchup,” Rev Denis Paul

In a New Yorker article twenty years ago, Malcolm Gladwell —author of the wildly popular book *The Tipping Point* four years earlier, wrote about “The Ketchup Conundrum.”

He talked about how someone noticed that mustard in the US was pretty boring. Mustard powder for taste, turmeric for color, and vinegar and salt to preserve it. Boring, slightly metallic, and ubiquitous. French’s was the undeniable leader, and it was easy to imitate convincingly. Until someone came up with Grey Poupon. They used higher quality, more flavorful ingredients — white wine instead of vinegar — and less turmeric for color, then hired an advertising company to create the *need* for the product.

Those Rolls Royce commercials were so successful that everyone was saying “but of course,” in myriad situations.

According to Mr. Gladwell’s article, someone in Massachusetts at the time was trying to do the same with ketchup: create a market for a more upscale version of the old favorite. He failed.

The thing is, most people like ketchup, and have a very specific idea of exactly what it's supposed to taste like.

Kids love it because — like ranch dressing — it has a pleasant flavor. And in a world where they have so little control over anything, they can usually use as much of it as they want on anything from French fries to carrot sticks. So ketchup is ubiquitous. Nonthreatening. Common. Consistent. Everyone knows it's ideal color, flavor, and consistency.

It wasn't always like that.

Back in 1869, when packaged foods were still a very new thing, Henry J. Heinz was experimenting with ketchup in Pittsburgh, and accidentally fermented a batch a little too long, discovering a new flavor profile. Up to that point, homemade ketchup could be just about any kind of tomato based sauce. It could be red or green, fresh or fermented, sweet, sour or bitter, and spelled with a K or a C. He loved what he came up with, more than anything he'd ever tried, and began marketing it, even as he refined the taste and texture.

In 1876 he got the perfect balance of sweet, sour, savory, salty and that elusively complex thing we now call umami. He was a marketing genius, so his product became very popular very quickly and set the standard for what ketchup is supposed to be, in terms of flavor, color, viscosity and even spelling.

Heinz was lauded at the time for being an exemplary business man. It was a time when child labor and deplorable working conditions were the norm. It was a time before any kind of regulation, so packaged foods contained festering meat, maggots, even rodents and their droppings. Heinz saw himself as a bastion of high moral standards, so he bucked all the trends of the time by offering his adult-only employees a fair wage and safe working conditions that included fresh uniforms daily and places to wash up before work and relax during regular breaks. He was the first to package his product in clear glass bottles, so consumers could see its purity.

The clean standards with which his ketchup was made meant that it didn't have to include preservatives other than salt, sugar and vinegar. His competitors were all using benzoate, a preservative that is still used in personal care products. Heinz made it his mission to get benzoate banned and worked with the nascent FDA to create regulations, standards and inspections for the entire food industry.

Like other industrialists of his time, the guys who still have mega corporations named after them, he was ruthless with his competition, doing everything he could to expose their substandard practices AND defame them and their products. He attacked. He exaggerated. He lied if he had to.

In service to the Heinz company, his son organized religious groups and newspapers with a zeal that got his efforts labeled as nothing less than a *crusade*. He aimed his speeches and articles directly at their competitors, often calling them “hosts of Satan.”

If you competed with Heinz, you were against humanity, God, America, and its citizens.

Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

It didn't really surprise me this week when I learned Henry J. Heinz is a second cousin twice removed of the guy with the Italian marble bathroom.

It's a pretty ominous history for such an accessible product. But it doesn't end there.

I recently saw an episode of “Taste the Nation,” hosted by model turned food author and activist Padma Lakshmi.

In an episode called “Ketchup or No Ketchup,” she visited Puerto Rico, where the national dish is *Pasteles*. *Pasteles*, like *tamales* are dumplings with a nugget of meat inside. *Tamales* are made from corn flour, steamed inside corn husks; while *Pasteles* are made from starchy kabocha squash, boiled in banana leaves. Each has a unique texture and mouth feel.

The evolution of the *pastele* is directly related to geo-politics.

Through conversations with historians, farmers, chefs, food writers and activists, viewers learned that over the course of 5,000 years or so, the Caribbean island was inhabited by a half dozen or so communities transplanted from nearby islands and the continent we now call South America. At the end of the 15th century, the time of Columbus, the *Taíno* people dominated. Less than a century later, they were nearly extinct, and the island was colonized by Spain. The Catholic Church encouraged migration of Europeans to Puerto Rico. I guess you could call it a “mission of salvation,” that made the island very multi-ethnic. In 1898, during the Spanish-American war, the United States invaded, taking Puerto Rico as a territory.

Back then, the island produced its own food, Like kabocha and pork, but because of US shipping regulations and tax structures, for the last few decades virtually all of its food supplies are imported, changing availability of ingredients. As a result, *Pasteles* turned into something different. And American influence, brought to the *pastele* ... you guessed it. Ketchup.

For a while there, practically everyone put ketchup on their *Pasteles*, instead of *salsa*.

But things are changing in Puerto Rico. Since hurricane Ivan, when “Italian marble bathroom guy” famously threw paper towels at people seeking assistance, the independence movement is growing, as residents are growing their own food, effectively boycotting the import industry.

For the expanding legion of pro-independence Puerto Ricans, ketchup is a metaphor for colonialism. To them, the universally loved condiment that was invented in the United States and adopted by the world is a metaphor for the invasiveness of our political, cultural and economic dominance. So as they rediscover the traditional *Taíno* version of the *pastele*, they are forgoing ketchup.

Like I said, ketchup is a metaphor for colonialism in Puerto Rico.

I find that fascinating, because as I always say, preaching is a methodology of finding helpful metaphors. I call it “metaphoraging.”

So, what can we learn from these ketchup stories, that can help us be more inviting as a congregation, and maybe more *just* as a nation? I know you may have more answers, probably better answers to that question, but here are my takeaways.

First, If you give children something that they like, and let them have control over how and when they use it, they find comfort in its familiarity throughout their lives, AND they will be really, really, loyal to that product. And it’s not just products. It could be a dipping sauce or a theology. If they like it and have control over how they use it, that thing will *belong* to them.

Second, when things appear simple, but are actually quite complex and nuanced the way ketchup is, they are extremely compelling. Like vanilla ice cream. Strong flavors like chocolate and mint can cover up a world of sins of low-quality ingredients. But with a scoop of simple vanilla, you can really taste the quality of not only the vanilla, but also the cream, sugar and egg.

It can be a transcendent experience.

I realized this concept recently. I'd heard that cardamom coffee is a thing now, that all you have to do is grind four to five pods with your java beans. I love cardamom, so I gave it a whirl, with just a tiny bit of honey, to bring out the flavor. It was heaven. I drank it every morning for two weeks, then just got sick of it. The cardamom and honey covered over the subtle earthy-chocolatey-smoky dark roast I love. For me, plain coffee is so much more comforting.

And that's the thing about these simple, familiar experiences of every day life: they're comforting. As Barb said to Jim: they have natural mellowing agents.

And history is kind of like flavors. On the surface ketchup seems so innocuous in its universality. It seems.... Inconsequential. But when you learn about its history, you find out that even something so simple can have a complicated, often stormy or violent history.

Like Unitarian Universalism. On the surface we look like a bunch of nice, generally well-educated, largely middle-class people. But we are so much more than that. So much more. And when we assume diversity instead of homogeneity, and really express interest in the lives of newcomers, without any preconceived notions about who they should be in order to belong? That's when newcomers become long-timers.

Not only that, we have pretty unseemly history ourselves: apologetics for slavery and Jim Crow; support of Eugenics; financial gains from systems of oppression. These days, every single congregation has to make tough decisions that run counter to who we say we want to be in order to protect ourselves from frivolous lawsuits. It can all leave a bad taste in your mouth. It can diminish the comfort.

The third takeaway for me about the story of ketchup is that when you try to copy something that is almost universally loved, it just doesn't work. Copying good ideas in different contexts is rarely effective.

A couple weeks ago, I talked about how we might look like a Protestant church to the casual observer, but we aren't that. We're different. We would rather ask questions than accept a shared set of beliefs we might not understand. We value faith in humanity, the scientific method, the wisdom of literature and art, and the order of the universe. If we try to make this Protestantism without the creed, it's like trying to make ketchup without the sugar. Or the umami. It's just not right.

That's why I am so enthusiastic about creating our own rituals, traditions and holidays that reflect and reinforce our shared values and our uniqueness as individuals. Every time we gather, every time we celebrate holidays, honor milestones in our lives, or simply share our joys and concerns, it's a chance to live out our commitment to justice, equity, transformation, pluralism, interdependence, gratitude and LOVE.

In the United States, I think Christianity is like ketchup: Traditional. Unchanging. Ubiquitous. Even comforting for many. But a lot of people are turning away from it, recognizing the problems with it, the way many are no longer eating ketchup because of the corn syrup. They're reaching for spicier sriracha as they seek more exotic spirituality.

Maybe Unitarian Universalism is more like mustard. Honest. Accessible, but not everyone's taste. It's so simple that if you really pay attention to the quality of the contents, it can be transcendent. You can make it at home, but so much more enjoyable when shared.

[pause]

Let's rise now, in body or in spirit, and open our gray hymnals to number 318, We Would Be One.

Hymn 318 We Would Be One

We would be one as now we join in singing
our hymn of love, to pledge ourselves anew
to that high cause of greater understanding
of who we are, and what in us is true.
We would be one in living for each other
to show us all a new community.

We would be one in building for tomorrow
A nobler world than we have known today.
We would be one in searching for that meaning
Which binds our hearts and points us on our way.
As one we pledge ourselves to greater service,
With love and justice, strive to make us free.

Closing Words Nancy

Our closing words are by Emily Richards:

May you leave this time together changed.
May the promises you have made to yourself about who you want to be
feel closer to the reality of who you are right now.
May you share that feeling of transformation wherever you go.
May it spread into every word, deed, thought, and interaction
Until we are all changed, transformed and transforming together,
becoming our better selves.

Extinguishing the Chalice

*We extinguish this chalice, but not its light that we take with us, out into the world,
sharing it with those we encounter on our journey.*

Closing Song

Carry the flame of peace and love, until we meet again (3x)