



Unitarian Universalists in Covenant Greensboro's Downtown UU Church

2018 Sermon Series

Our Common Journey

By Rev. F. Nelson Stover

The 2018 sermon series at the Unitarian Universalists in Covenant church in Greensboro will focus on enabling people to tell the story of their personal journey in the light of the 14-billion-year journey of the emerging Universe.

The Unitarian Universalists in Covenant meet for worship each Sunday from 11:00 to noon at Scuppernong Bookstore, 304 S. Elm St., Greensboro, NC. Check the UUs in Covenant website (www.UUCovenant.org) for the themes for each Sunday of the month including which services will focus on this series.

Since religious experience emerges from a sense of the awesome aspects of the natural world, our religious consciousness is consistently related to a cosmology that tells us the story of how things came to be in the beginning, how they came to be as they now are and the role of the human in enabling the universe in its earthly manifestation to continue the mysterious course of its creative self-expression.

- Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe*, p. 115.

Our Common Journey

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The 2018 sermon series at the Unitarian Universalists in Covenant church in Greensboro will focus on enabling people to tell the story of their personal journey in the light of the 14-billion-year journey of the emerging Universe. Rev. F. Nelson Stover will deliver a series of sermons focusing on major events in the journey of the cosmos and explore how those illumine our individual lives and collective experiences. Each month, a pair of worship services will be dedicated to one aspect of the journey. The first sermon in each month's pair will provide an overview of the universal dynamics at play; the second service of the month will allow congregants more time to share and reflect on their own life experiences in the larger context. YouTube versions of the first sermon in each series will be available on the UUs in Covenant website.

Newness From Nowhere (January) – Fourteen billion years ago, the Universe as we know it began its journey from chaos to consciousness. Time separated from space and particles of matter coalesced out of the intensely hot plasma. Wild uncertainty and confusion often precedes the emergence of clarity, focus and direction at the beginning of any journey of a person or group.

Building Bonded Commitments (February) – Early in the life of the Universe, electrons and protons formed bonded pairs which could survive the bombardment of otherwise destructive radiation. An important step on many people's journey involves making life-long commitments. The two services this month will explore the interior resources required for establishing and maintaining lasting bonds.

Facing Internal Pressures (March) – After several billion years, large clouds of gas began to squeeze together. Under these intense internal pressures, the clouds finally burst into fires we now see in the sky as stars. Often in life, intense pressure and friction ignite flames of wild creativity. Learning how to live through these kinds of times builds interior resilience.

Through Destructive Transformation (April) – Eventually, many stars consume the basic elements which have fueled their fiery luminescence. The unbearable pressure leads to a collapse which then explodes into a supernova. This destructive transformation spreads heavier elements throughout the surrounding space creating the seeds of future suns and planets. Organizations and individuals, too, sometimes collapse into chaos and confusion. Even these times sow the seeds of creativity for tomorrows yet to come.

Organizing for Creativity (May) – About 5 billion years ago, after countless supernova in the outer parts of the Milky Way galaxy, our solar system began to form. Everyone lives within the dynamics of systems – sometimes a person may be the stable center, sometimes an orbiting satellite, sometimes a periodic passer-by or a distant outlier. Each role contributes to the cosmic and planetary dance. Each is vital and unique.

Into Vitality (June) – Sometime, somewhere, about 4 billion years ago matter crossed the threshold into life. Some say life is lightening embodied. Like every living cell, individuals also possess the possibility of embodying self-determined creativity. This sermon pair will explore the awakening that occurs when the threshold from stasis to vitality is crossed.

Beyond Disaster (July) – Early life-forms' very acts of survival created conditions which eventually signaled their own demise. They consumed the nutrient rich waters and eventually learned to harvest the sunlight. They filled the atmosphere with corrosive oxygen until they discovered ways of respiration. Likewise, individual actions and social patterns repeated over and over, sometimes, eventually become counter-productive. Navigating these times evokes creativity and collective ingenuity.

Enlivening Something Bigger (August) – Over several billions of years, single-celled creatures had learned to respond to one another and to thrive in clusters and masses. One day, something new happened – a group got an idea. A new multi-celled creature appeared such that creative power shifted from the cell to the collective. In the current century, the human species has arrived at a similar point of inflection. Figuring out how to thrive in community in ways which include the human and non-human realms provides the central challenge for caring citizens.

Stepping into the Unknown (September) – About the time the colliding continents lifted the Appalachian Mountains, some life-forms dared to venture out of the sea and on to the land. They invented the wood cell to combat the pressures of gravity and to allow the storage and movement of water within their bodies while moving beyond the oceans. This sermon pair will focus on the interior resolve and strategic prowess required for stepping beyond comfortable surroundings and exploring new vistas.

Joining the Flourishing (October) – The disappearance of the giant ferns and the eventual demise of the dinosaurs set the stage for the rise of mammals and the appearance of colorful flowers with nutritious seeds and trees that produced fruit and nuts. As old life-forms disappear, new possibilities arise and co-exist with dying forms. The lessons of past times of wild new creativity provide wisdom and insight for times like the present when the new is unfolding though the old has not yet receded.

Embracing Symbolic Consciousness (November) – The human species' presence on Planet Earth began about two million years ago. Empathy with the daring steps taken to cross into symbolic consciousness by our not-to-distant ancestors provides clues that may embolden people today to take the next steps on the Universe's journey from wild chaos to profound consciousness.

Gifting Tomorrow (December) – The future, for all generations of all species, depends on the decisions and actions of all of everyone alive today. Finally, each individual and group has the opportunity of deciding its gift to the future. After a year of following in the Universe's footsteps, the next step belongs to those of us alive today. What gifts will we give to the future?

Unitarian Universalists in Covenant *Greensboro's Downtown UU Church*

We are brave, curious, and compassionate thinkers and doers. We are diverse in faith, ethnicity, history and spirituality, but aligned in our desire to make a difference for the good. We have a track record of standing on the side of love, justice, and peace.

We have radical roots and a history as self-motivated spiritual people: we think for ourselves and recognize that life experience influences our beliefs more than anything.

We need not think alike to love alike. We are people of many beliefs and backgrounds: people with a religious background, people with none, people who believe in a God, people who don't, and people who let the mystery be.

Mission: To enable the search for meaning from a peaceful heart, living lives of integrity and service.

Vision: In this fellowship we call UUs in Covenant, we have gathered seeking a higher purpose and deeper life than we might find alone. We are grateful for everyone who joins us in our service and in our covenant. Our covenant reflects our values statement. We seek to enable all who join us to live the life idealized through our covenant with each other. We pledge to listen deeply and respond with open hearts and minds. We embrace membership in the community as a gift and a commitment. The relationships we form here are based on the needs of the soul, needs that render us vulnerable and dependent on each other's grace, mercy, and generosity of spirit. We pledge to be guardians of each other's spirit, to enable you on your spiritual journey, and to always believe in every person's worth and dignity.

About Rev. F. Nelson Stover

Rev. Stover completed his BSc in Computer Science at Purdue University and received a BDiv from Chicago Theological Seminary. His dissertation was entitled “New Directions for Religious Communities”; it focused on the church’s role in social change. In 1970, he was ordained by the United Church of Christ in Michigan and encouraged to pursue a social ministry.

Working with the Ecumenical Institute and the Institute of Cultural Affairs, Nelson conducted human development training programs for individuals at all levels of society for the next two decades. During this time, he spent five years in India and extensive periods in Australia, Belgium and Egypt. For another two decades, he designed and implemented computer software solutions for professional associations in North Carolina on the staff of with a Greensboro based systems integration company.

Nelson is now President of Emerging Ecology (www.EmergingEcology.org), a non-profit organization committed to *promoting a worldview for the next generations’ solutions*. His lectures and writings focus on foundational principles and practical actions relevant for developing a mutually enhancing relationship between the human and non-human worlds.

Nelson lives in Greensboro, North Carolina. He may be contacted at StoverN@Bellsouth.net. Many of his personal writings, previous sermons and presentations are available for download at www.EmergingEcology.org/FNS.

Background Information

Each sermon and conversation will be self-contained and will not require previous scientific studies or knowledge. While the services will be grounded in contemporary scientific wisdom, the focus of the time will remain on personal experiences and depth reflections.

Much of the background information for this series comes from the following resources:

Astrophysics for People in a Hurry, Neal de Grasse Tyson,
W. W. Norton & Company, 2017.

Journey of the Universe, Brian Thomas Swimme & Mary Evelyn Tucker, Yale
University Press, 2011.

The Universe Story, Thomas Berry & Brian Swimme, Harper San Francisco, 1992.

Voices from a Walk Through Time, F. Nelson Stover, on-line
www.EmergingEcology.org/Documents/VoicesThruTime.pdf.

Additional, up-to-date information about the Unitarian Universalists in Covenant is available at www.uucovenant.org.