



Through All the Cycling Seasons
First Unitarian Church of Cincinnati
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The night before I sat down to write this homily, I had a dream. I was running a bicycle race through the United States, sort of a *Tours d'etats unis*. Not likely, I said when I woke up, but what would make me dream such a thing? The next day I was working with Marlo Troughton, the office administrator, to put together the order of service and when she came to my title, *Through All the Cycling Seasons*, she made bicycling motions as if she were chasing Lance Armstrong. I had to laugh. Is my subconscious that clever? That literal?

It wasn't what I had in mind when I chose the title. I was thinking of Max Coats' wonderfully expressive poem that Sharon just read, and chose that line to exemplify the wonderful world we share *through all the cycling seasons* of our years and of our lives. I was thinking how often we are reminded to *live in the moment*; reminded that *the here and now is all that we really have*. For reasons of health and sanity, I often agree with that view. I meditate to ground myself in the here and now, to remind myself not to worry about what can't be changed or what might come to be. But, oh, my friends, I agree with Max many times over that *we need celebrations that speak the spring-inspired word about life and death*.

We need to remember our lives – both the joys and the sorrows. *We need* to celebrate our lives – both the inspiring events and the disappointing; the major and the minor. We need to remember to do this as individuals, certainly. But we need to remember as a community all the events that have carried us from Spring to blessed Spring, through all the cycling seasons.

We talked about this service of remembering back in February or March. Sharon suggested putting up pictures on the art wall because when we celebrated the church's 175th anniversary a few years back, people enjoyed looking at the pictures that were taken out of the archives. We also said, let's not wait another

175 years; we talked about making it an annual event, a real celebration of the seasons of church life.

Thank goodness for the photographers among us. We at least had pictures to jog our recollections. Because what we realized, when we began to lift out specific memories to help us think about the many joyful events we share in these rooms, there was no discrete place where we had recorded these events – where we *saved* these events from our communal amnesia. We had to go back through a year's worth of scattered records, ask people with better memories than ours, research old calendars. And then we crossed our fingers and hoped we hadn't missed anybody or any significant event. If we really believed that we *need that sense of holiness to crack our own hard, brown December husks*, we realized we weren't doing a very good job of either ministering or administering it.

But, as our colleague Robert Eller-Isaacs wrote in his *Litany of Atonement* (637), we forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love. I think that in itself is a lovely way to start any celebration.

I've always thought that as human beings, we tend toward remembering the hard times better than we do the sweet, the soft, the heady, or the sublime. Oh, we do anniversaries well enough and birthdays. We party, but I'm not sure that's really celebration. I'm not sure that when we sing to the birthday celebrant as the cake is brought out that we are celebrating, "Yahoo, you're alive, you're among us, we're all still here." No, the message is 'happy *birth* day', not happy life; our subtle, perhaps unrealized emphasis is on 'you're getting older and some day even that will stop,' and our message is 'eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we may die.' Is that really the way we want to live and celebrate our lives?

We also have this cultural dictum to be modest. What's that about? We can't really celebrate the things that are important to us as individuals, or we're seen as proud – not spring-inspired, but autumn-harvested – full of ourselves. And thus we miss the possible minor celebrations of achievement or recognition.

Here's what I want. Give me religious inspiration to help me celebrate life. Give me sun salutations to perform that with my body I can honor each new day. Give me the nourishment of grace, that I may acknowledge the aspects of creation that have given their life, their leaf, their seed, their nectar, their flesh to sustain my own life. Give me praises and blessings – *Om Nimah Shivaya* or *Namaste*: the divine within me salutes the divine within you – so that I may truly celebrate the worth and dignity of every person. Give me Janus, god of beginnings and endings, that I might look both forward and back at the same time, and indulge in blessed memory, even as I enjoy the moment and dream the future. And give me a community of human saints like you, to live among and love, so that when my own life feels not worth celebrating, I will have models and inspiration to celebrate

anyway, *to push life out of inner tombs and outer pain*. Give these things to me and I will give them back to you.

I invite you – I implore you – to cast your mind back over our last challenging and exciting year together, to cycle through the seasons, to remember, to celebrate and *to move the seasons of the self*, so *Spring can come for us*. Celebrate with us, so Winter, always waiting to surprise us, will not dare to go on and on.