

**Winchester Unitarian Society**

Order of Service

**July 15, 2018**

**Ringing of the Bell and Gathering Music**

*The bell that calls us to worship is a gift from our Partner Church in Marosvásárhely, Transylvania.*

**Welcome and Community Notes**

Phyllis Preston

**Prelude**

*Sonata in Dm*  
Scarlatti

Eli Forcucci, Harpsichord

**Opening Words** by Rudyard Kipling

Sam Berliner, III

Rudyard Kipling's daughter, Elsie Bambridge, was known in the family as "Elsie Why". The origin of this opening reading may have been a medieval Latin epigram of the 14th century:

Si sapiens fore vis sex servus qui tibi mando

Quid dicas et ubi, de quo, cur, quomodo, quando.

(If you wish to be wise I commend to you six servants,  
Ask what, where, about what, why, how, when.)

We UUs are often accused, probably rightly so, for being elitist and egotistical. As my minister wife preaches, being a UU is not for wimps. Having to find your own way in life and in theology, without the props or crutches of orthodoxy, requires thought and initiative. Children brought up in such an environment do tend to be bright and inquisitive. "Why?" is one of their first questions.

I was a precocious reader of Kipling; his 1902 "*Just So Stories*" was one of my first "grown-up's" books. In it, he had a bit of doggerel that, light-hearted though it may appear at first glance, fits today's topic well:

"I Keep Six Honest Serving Men"

by Rudyard Kipling

I keep six honest serving-men  
(They taught me all I knew);  
Their names are What and Why and When  
And How and Where and Who.  
I send them over land and sea,  
I send them east and west;  
But after they have worked for me,  
I give them all a rest.

I let them rest from nine till five,  
For I am busy then,  
As well as breakfast, lunch, and tea,  
For they are hungry men.  
But different folk have different views;  
I know a person small—  
She keeps ten million serving-men,  
Who get no rest at all!



That may work for authoritative parents and ordinary children, but it sure doesn't serve for bright, inquisitive kids like Kipling's daughter; like many of you, I can give you my own personal assurance on that score. Similarly, it doesn't work for bright, inquisitive minds in authoritarian religions; I am sure those of us who are grandparents and great-grandparents have the direct experience of three generations to back us up on that score.

Many apparent questions of "Why?" are actually those of "How?". "Why does it rain" is a perfect example; "How does it rain?" is easily explained away. But "Why are there mean people?" starts to get a little tricky. "Why do bad things happen to good people?" is a classic complaint. "Why do we exist?" is very tricky, indeed.

I treasure a set of the 1911 Encyclopedia Britannica, the great Scholar's Edition, in which a brilliant article on Nuclear Physics was written by a brash young mathematician named Albert Einstein.

Einstein later stated that he believed in the pantheistic God of Spinoza, not in a personal God who concerns himself with the fates and actions of human beings. He famously said "I am not an atheist", preferring to call himself an agnostic or a "religious nonbeliever." He did not believe in life after death; he said "one life is enough for me."

I shall quote further here, first from Stephen Hawking, the late physicist and cosmologist, who said that philosophical problems can be answered by science, particularly new scientific theories which "lead us to a new and very different picture of the universe and our place in it". He was an atheist and believed that "the universe is governed by the laws of science". He stated: "There is a fundamental difference between religion, which is based on authority, [and] science, which is based on observation and reason. Science will win because it works."

Hawking regarded "the brain as a computer which will stop working when its components fail", and the concept of an afterlife as a "fairy story for people afraid of the dark".

One of Hawking's most famous quotations, exceedingly apt here, is, "Then we shall all, philosophers, scientists, and just ordinary people, be able to take part in the discussion of the question why is it that we and the universe exist. If we find the answer to that, it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason - for then we would know the mind of God and it is my view that the simplest explanation is there is no God. No one created the universe and no one directs our fate. This leads me to a profound realisation. There is probably no heaven, and no afterlife either. We have this one life to appreciate the grand design of the universe, and for that, I am extremely grateful." (Sound familiar?)

Hawking declared, "We are each free to believe what we want." He also said "Before we understand science, it is natural to believe that God created the universe. But now science offers a more convincing explanation. What I meant by 'we would know the mind of God' is, we would know everything that God would know, if there were a God, which there isn't. I'm an atheist." Hawking later said he had used the word "God" figuratively.

Hawking said, "My goal is simple, it is complete understanding of the universe, why it is as it is and why it exists at all."

He died before he got very far along that path, not that he could ever have achieved any such hubristic goal, but what a legacy he left!

Unlike Hawking, and others claiming to be atheists, I simply haven't enough ego to be one; I am forced to be an agnostic. No matter how certain I may be that I am right, or that Hawking is right, I, and he, just might be wrong. This isn't so much hedging my bets - I certainly am not afraid of eternal damnation - as it is facing the reality that I may not (HORRORS!) know everything.

Next, I shall quote from Don Lincoln, a senior physicist at Fermilab, who does research using the Large Hadron Collider. He asks, "Why is there something, rather than nothing?", positing that that could be the oldest and deepest question in all of metaphysics, further stating that the simplest scientific answer to that question is "We shouldn't exist at all."

Skipping blithely past all Lincoln's elaborate physics, I jump to his asking: "Why is there something? Why is the universe not a featureless void? Why does our universe have matter and not only energy?" Lincoln's conclusion - "Science cannot answer those questions."

Again skipping right along, past elegant discussions of matter versus anti-matter, of subatomic particles called leptons and hadrons and bosons and neutrinos and such, I jump to Lincoln's asking "So how is our universe made exclusively of matter? Where did the antimatter go?" He goes on to say, "The simplest answer is that we don't know. In fact, it remains one of the biggest unanswered problems of modern physics."

Lincoln ponders - "For millennia, introspective thinkers have pondered the great questions of existence". "Why are we here?" "Why is the universe the way it is?" "Do things have to be this way?" With recent advances, science has taken some very big steps forward in answering these timeless questions. BUT - and this is a VERY BIG "but", these may be but tiny steps along an asymptotic path, one that has no specific ending but goes on and on, off into the mists of infinity.

Back to Lincoln's, "Why is there something, rather than nothing?" "long exclusively the province of philosophy, in recent years this question has become one that can be addressed by scientific methods. What's more, a new scientific advance has made it more likely that we will finally be able to answer this cosmic conundrum. This is a big deal, because the simplest scientific answer to that question is 'We shouldn't exist at all.'" End of quotation and the beginning of a major objection. To me, this is the ultimate hubris, the greatest gall, the maximum possible over-reach. In my simplistic world, we spring from infinity, exist momentarily, and our energy continues off into infinity. Some of you may have heard me harp on this theme; the Big Bang is merely the other side of a Black Hole. My belief in the Law of Conservation of Energy, and therefore of Matter, comforts me in the security of knowing that there could have been no beginning, and thus no Creator, and can be no ending. I **KNOW** my place in the Cosmos, inconceivably minute in the overall scheme and yet inconceivably immense at the sub-microscopic elemental particle level. No ending, eh? I LOVE IT! It even fits in neatly with the phrase in the both the Old and New Testaments, "world without end". "Amen". Amen, indeed.

With no beginning and no ending, the "How?" may well consume us more than the "Why?"

One "How?" that seriously troubles me is the chicken-or-egg question of causation, of determination, of free will. Being both of a scientific bent and scientifically trained, I know that all actions are the results of prior actions and that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. So, then, where is our free will? Here is a case where asking "Why?" takes second place to "How?". I can rationalize the "How?" by getting relativistic; perhaps we bend the arc of the universe so slightly that we pretend to have free will. Being so infinitesimal in the grand scheme of things allows us to think our actions matter cosmically. In a physical

sense, they really do; just lifting a finger changes the cosmos for all time - the Butterfly Effect. Even just thinking about lifting a finger actually changes the energy balance of all existence. Thus, we are assured our immortality. This little ego boost leaves me free, then, to contemplate the “Whys?”

By definition, a sermon addresses a scriptural, theological, religious, or moral topic, usually on a belief, law, or behavior within a context. In our context today, we are considering laws of physics, laws that most, if not all, educated and rational people accept as immutable. “Immutable” is, of course, relative. Einstein did not refute Newtonian physics, he amplified our understanding of it. Similarly, modern quantum physics does not refute Einstein but builds on it. So “immutability” requires a frame of reference, as does all knowledge.

Our personal frame of reference is very heavily influenced by our upbringing and our reaction to it. If we were brought up to believe in a creator God, then that mindset is still there, no matter how harshly we may have rejected it. Contrariwise, if we were told that the creation myth and all that is tied to it, especially the Trinity, is an invention of frightened minds, trying to explain away death and disaster, then that is what we will believe to be so, down deep, no matter how hard we try to espouse other views. We can rationalize away to our heart’s content but that early imprinting is always there, niggling at us.

We can foam at the mouth about our God-given rights, we can pontificate endlessly about our “purpose” in life, we can tout our good works, but none of that answers “Why?” in any concrete way.

Call this atheist or humanist or anti-theist as you will, I would never presume to absolutely deny the God of the Book (or any other god or gods) as the answer to “Why?” Some anthropomorphic deity, or even a generic divine force, is a neat way to avoid the question and can be very comforting for so many. No, thanks, though. Not for me. I crave the quest; I love the uncertainty, I relish the excitement of the great Tremendum, the vast unknown. Yes, it **IS** scary but as Franklin Delano Roosevelt remarked in his first inaugural address, “the only thing we have to fear is ... fear itself”.

It takes courage to realize, as I propose in my original premise, that to be truly human is to always ask the ultimate question, “**WHY?**” Not to do so leaves us little better than an anthropoid vegetable. We sprout, we grow, and we die, never fulfilling any of the promise of our human potential. To be fully human means probing frontiers, expanding consciousness, refuting dicta, ever reaching outward. There is so much we yet don’t know, so much of which we have barely scratched the surface. I am convinced that the greatest joy is not in the knowing, or even in the finding, but in the searching. And the greatest beauty of searching is that we find that the more we know, the more we know we don’t know. “World without end”, indeed.

Whatever you do in life, please keep on asking “Why?”.

Amen, axé, and blessèd be.

<b>Offering</b>		Phyllis Preston
<b>Offertory</b>	Make Them Hear You Flaherty/Ahrens	Tyson Kamikawa, solo
<b>*Hymn 295</b>	<i>Sing Out Praises for the Journey</i>	grey hymnal
<b>*Benediction</b>	<i>[after Numbers 6:24-26]</i>	Sam Berliner, III

May we bless one another and keep one another;

May we make our faces to shine upon one another  
and be gracious unto one another;

May we lift up our faces unto one another  
and give one another peace,  
this day and forevermore.

AMEN

**Postlude**

*What Am I Here For?*  
Duke Ellington

Steve Forcucci, guitar

**Extinguishing the Chalice**

*We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.  
These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.* – Elizabeth Selle Jones

**Community Greeting**

**Car-Ride Home and Dinner Table Questions for Reflection**

You have a choice to make (or may have already made) -  
which source comforts you in life- a God or gods or Divine Being, or hard, cold science? Why?