

For a Unitarian and a Universalist κήρυγμα

June 14, 2026

Matthew 9:35 - 10:8

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As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick; raise the dead; cleanse those with skin disease; cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.

Community, join me in this prayer:

God of all things bright and beautiful, dark and mysterious, of all things that blossom and that we harvest. God of silences and words, give us the ones we need to preach in what we believe. Give us the grace that we love each other as we ask together and find through our relationships where is it that you are taking us, as a church.

Amen.

1. Proclaim the good news

Community, I titled this sermon as my search for a Unitarian and a Universalist Kerygma. Let us begin. I hope you noticed the word I just said. Kerygma. Everytime you hear the word proclaim or preach, I am very emphatic, that / is / kerygma. There are sixty one times that kerygma shows up as a verb in the New Testament. It is related to a herald. It means to proclaim, to announce, to preach. Kerygma is one of the most important verbs in the New Testament. It is the base of the first church: Proclaimers of the good news.

But what is this good news? That depends. Some say they are the beginning of the gospel of Mark. Jesus Christ (the Son of God). Or, like Paul will say to the Corinthians: “When I came to you, brothers, proclaiming the mystery of God.... I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”

In Acts of the Apostles, scholars agree that there are eight kerygmatic sermons, five from Peter and three by Paul. Right after Pentecost, Peter raised his voice, and proclaimed to them: “You who are Israelites, hear these words. Jesus the

Nazorean was a man commended to you by God with mighty deeds, wonders, and signs, which God worked through him in your midst, as you yourselves know.”

Lastly, in the last of the eight proclamations found in Acts of the Apostles, Paul tells the Athenians: “Because he (God) has established a day on which he will ‘judge the world with justice’ through a man he has appointed, and he has provided confirmation for all by raising him from the dead.” Community, What did you notice? The gospel, the letters of Paul, and Acts of the Apostles are proclaiming different versions of what? A dogma? A commandment, a ritual? Do they fight about whether an angel is female or male in divine nature? Are they fighting about transubstantiation or consubstantiation? Do they emphasize the adoption or the duplicity of Jesus nature? No. No and no.

Pay attention, their proclamation highlighted certain things over other ones, but they were not preaching a creed or a dogma, but a person. Jesus of Nazareth.

II. What is it that a Unitarian proclaims?

Let’s go back to the eighteen hundreds and the Unitarians. First, I have to do an evaluation. What is the name of the statue that is in front of the Arlington Street Church, near the Boston Public Garden? (Silence) Yes, the Unitarian, Rev. William Ellery Channing. In his famous 1819 Baltimore sermon, at the ordination of Rev. Sparks, he said: “We regard the Scriptures as the records of God’s successive relations to (hu)mankind, and particularly of the last and most perfect revelation of his will by Jesus Christ.” Do we still hold this as ours? I don’t think we regard the Scripture as the same. If you ask me, I don’t think the most perfect and last revelation is found in Jesus Christ. You may ask where do I find other records of God’s successive revelations to humankind and I can reply that I have seen it in the poetry of Walt Whitman, Wisława Szymborska or in the smile my grandfather prayed every day. But that is for another sermon.

Rev. Channing said that “Our religion, we believe, lies chiefly in the New Testament.” And even in here I have found many differences. For those who have heard preach Rev. Mark, you might notice his preference for the gospels rather than Paul or Acts of the Apostles. I prefer the gospel of John due to the mystical language, while Rev. Mark prefers the sermon on the plain found in the gospel of Luke. Between preferences, there is no need to divide or separate. We preach of a

book that is rich, abundant, and generous for our questions and doubts. In detail, we don't hold Rev. Channing's affirmation as the entire of Unitarianism.

In another part of this foundational sermon, Rev. Channing said: "our leading principle in interpreting Scripture is this, that the Bible is a book written by men, in the language of men, and that its meaning is to be sought in the same manner as that of other books." I like this. Yes. But just because this book was written like any other book, doesn't answer our need to define the person behind, Jesus of Nazareth. What is it that we preach about Jesus as Unitarians?

Rev. Channing at the end of this sermon he addressed this directly to his new colleague, he looked at him, maybe pointed out his finger, and he said: "The best way to vindicate your sentiments, is to show, in your preaching and life, their intimate connection with Christian virtue." That is Rev. Channings Kerygma, an intimate connection of sentiments, virtue, preaching with words and life.

Kerygma has been claimed by evangelicals and catholics, but Unitarians in our passionate disagreements about theology have forgotten what is it that we preach. Call it elevator speech, a tweet, a small coffee conversation. Kerygma is more important than catechesis, because we cannot teach what we don't preach. Catechesis is only mentioned nine times in the New Testament, while Kerygma outnumbered it sixty one times.

III. What do we preach now?

If our tradition comes out of dissent. Let's remember who have been preaching with their lives and words about dissent. Unitarians rejected Trinitarianism, and just like Michael Servetus, many suffered the flames of persecution. Ours is Rev. Olympia Brown, one of the first female ordained ministers in the United States. Unitarians supported the female suffragist vote, people like Henry David Thoreau preached about civil disobedience. Ours were the support of causes like abolitionism and the Civil Rights Movement. Let's preach dissent to any form of oppression, division and the sin of discrimination. We have found, through reason, that theological debates around the nature of God, the virginity of his mother or the immaculate conception are not relevant. Ours is a faith of proclaimers of change.

Let us preach that community is our chalice and love is our fire. Let us preach about a man that lived hundreds of years ago to teach us that God was near. That the kingdom of heaven is near. Let us preach about the role of pollinators in

the survival of flowers, or the importance of Roe vs. Wade and the Civil Rights Movement. Preach, preach because Jesus cannot be kidnapped by evangelicals. Let us share our faith, coffee after coffee, so that we bring near what Jesus proclaimed as his. A kingdom that is not a building, but a beating. Your own hearts.

In this text: As you go, proclaim the good news, *'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'* *But don't leave behind the rest of this passage: Cure the sick; raise the dead; cleanse those with skin disease; cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.* Who are the sick of your families? Who needs a word of consolation so that they feel raised from the dead? Who, community, needs your hands to cleanse what needs to be cleansed and who or what is it that you can cast out that is harming your family? Is it hate? Is it fear? What is the demon that has taken over your peace at night? Preach about love, or act out with love, and you will find it multiplied. Don't charge interest, don't expect it back as if love was a boomerang. Love as God gives the sun for everyone, love as if this Summer is your new chance to do what Winter denied you. Maybe, your love is the only sign your community will have to experience how near the kingdom is.

In Matthew 16:13 Jesus asked his disciples: Who do people say that the Son of Man is? And I wanted to ask you this too, community, Unitarians, who is Jesus for you? Dear Noah and Violet, dear Charlie and Lawson, dear each one of you under the age of 25, and those who don't count your age anymore. Who do you imagine Jesus is for you? Proclaim, preach the good news that the kingdom of God has come near, where two or three gathered, loving our neighbor. Near, despite the horrors of the latest news, near as if you could feel its noise like mowing the lawn in the distance. Not coming from the skies, near as your hearts are from your head.

A Unitarian Universalist Kerygma is an invitation to be a radically loving community. And we are invited each Sunday to learn from Jesus so that we can follow him on Monday.

Amen and happy Summer.

Now let me introduce you to the next part of this service to something called the flower communion.

(Short silence)

Flower Communion

A Little Bit of History

A little more than one hundred years ago, there was a minister named Rev. Norbert Čapek. He was born in a place called Bohemia, in what is now the Czech Republic.

Rev. Čapek and his family lived for a while in the United States, where they discovered Unitarianism. Later, they returned to Europe and helped create a church where people could ask questions, think freely, and learn from many different religious traditions.

The people in Rev. Čapek's church were very different from one another. Some had been hurt by churches before. Some believed different things. Rev. Čapek wanted to create a ceremony that everyone could share without asking them all to believe exactly the same thing.

One Sunday in June 1923, he invited everyone to bring a flower to church.

When they arrived, each person placed a flower in a large vase. There were flowers of many colors, sizes, and shapes. Each flower was beautiful in its own way, but when they were placed together, they created something even more beautiful.

At the end of the service, each person received a different flower from the vase. They brought one gift into the community and went home carrying the gift of someone else.

Years later, dangerous leaders called Nazis took control of Rev. Čapek's country. Rev. Čapek spoke against their cruelty and defended freedom and human dignity. Because of this, he was arrested and sent to a concentration camp, where he died in 1942.

Our tradition remembers that even in prison, Rev. Čapek encouraged people to notice small signs of beauty and life. In a place filled with fear, a flower could remind them that cruelty could not destroy all hope, courage, or love.

His wife, Mája, brought the Flower Ceremony to First Parish in Cambridge in 1940. From there, it became a beloved Unitarian Universalist tradition.

I became a Unitarian Universalist when I attended a Flower Communion at First Parish in Brookline. The flowers reminded me of home, and they helped me understand that there was a place for me in this faith.

Today, I bring this Flower Communion to you. Flowers remind us of Jesus, who asked people to look at the lilies of the field. They also remind us of resurrection and of life returning after a long winter.

Every flower is different. Some are tall, some are small, some are bright, and some are quiet. Each flower needs its own kind of soil, sunlight, water, patience, and care.

People are like that too.

Each of us is different. Each of us has something special to offer. And when we come together, we create a beauty that none of us could create alone.

I will bless the flowers, and then you will be invited to receive one from the communion vase. You may choose a flower different from the one you brought.

You do not have to take a flower if you do not feel comfortable. You may stay in your place and think about beauty, new life, and what it means to belong to a community.

Let us pray:

Blessing of the flowers

Dear God of beauty, I invoke your presence. “The rose is without ‘why’; it blooms simply because it blooms. It pays no attention to itself, nor does it ask whether anyone has seen it.” I pray for the flowers here present, each one of them, reminders of the beauty of the beholders that will take them.

Beloved God, when we assemble and meet together, we also blossom without why or whether we are seen or not. We thank you for this congregation as we implore your blessing for the times ahead of us, the drought and fires, the heat and the warming of our planet. Bless our families, gardens of your love. Amen.

You may come to take a flower or, if you can't come do a sign to me.

(Small silence)

Blessing at the end of the flower communion

Dear God of shared beauty, we thank you for this flower communion. May the flower each one of your beloved hold in their hand remind them that there is no why in God's mind to love us. That God loves without why, because God is love and love blossoms where love wants. May we remember that flowers have a limited life, a reminder that what we do with ours is an invitation to do it faithfully, courageously and passionately. Amen.

The last Hymn is Hymn number 1 Our God, Our Help in Ages Past.

Pastoral Prayer

By Unitarian minister Norbert Fabian Capek, preacher of the good news in Czechoslovakia and martyr of the Unitarian faith:

Infinite Spirit of Life, we ask thy blessing on these, thy messengers of fellowship and love. May they remind us, amid diversities of knowledge and of gifts, to be one in desire and affection, and devotion to thy holy will. May they also remind us of the value of comradeship, of doing and sharing alike. May we cherish friendship as one of thy most precious gifts. May we not let awareness of another's talents discourage us, or sully our relationship, but may we realize that, whatever we can do, great or small, the efforts of all of us are needed to do thy work in this world.

Blessing

By Rev. Amy Zucker Morgenstern, UU minister at Palo Alto California.

(Dear God:)

Within the heart of the flower, the fountain of beauty
Within the heart of the community, a fire that warms and dances
Within the heart of each of us, a spark of the spirit of life.

Holy,
holy,
Holy.

(Amen)