

The Unitarian
Congregation
of Taos
April 2021
Bulletin Board



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| Sun., Apr. 4 | Service: <i>Famous Last Words</i> Rev. Gary Kowalski |
| Sun., Apr. 11 | Sharing Circle: <i>Best. Birthday. Ever.</i> (via email) |
| Sun., Apr. 18 | Service: <i>Food for Thought</i> Rev. Munro Sickafoose |
| Wed., Apr. 21 | Men's Group, 4:30 p.m. |
| Sun., Apr. 25 | Sharing Circle: <i>Best. Birthday. Ever.</i> (on Zoom) |

On My Mind

Rev. Gary Kowalski

Though I've studied religion all my life, I'd never heard of the Mandeans until last week. Centered in Iraq and Iran, they are remnants of a lost world. Their language is a dialect of Aramaic, the tongue of Jesus. Like Jews, they call their spiritual leaders by the title *Rabbi*. Like Christians, they practice baptism, but weekly, more in the manner of the vanished Essenes from the Dead Sea community of Qumran. They revere John the Baptist—not Christ or Mohammed—as the last and greatest of the prophets. They derive from those misty times when Christianity had not yet fully emerged from the milieu of apocalyptic Judaism and the mystery religions of the ancient Near East. Their name derives from *manda*, which in Aramaic means “knowledge,” analogous to the Greek *gnosis*. Scholars regard them as offshoots of Jewish Gnosticism: the same schools of thought that produced the *Gospel of Thomas*, later made famous in caricature in Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*. They are variants and alternatives to what became Christian orthodoxy and mainstream Judaism. Today, Mandeans number in the tens of thousands, persecuted in their homeland and largely living in diaspora. But it is not too hard to imagine a parallel universe where Mandeans became a populous world faith. History is full of accidents ...

Like my accidentally stumbling over mention of the Mandeans in a news report about the summit between Pope Francis and Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, both calling for peace and an end to religious hatred. They met in the Iraqi city of Najaf, on the plains of Ur, the natal home of Abraham, father of three great world religions. In this season of Easter and Passover, signaling renewal and release from bondage, I find it courageous and encouraging when old barriers and boundaries are breached in the name of friendship and understanding. It's a small planet after all.

Fanaticism must end. Divisions that arose from the accidents of history can be overcome by healing intention. Compassion is a message common to every great teaching. I am not a Christian, a Jew, a Muslim, nor a Mandaean. But I respect them all.

Jesus says, in the *Gospel of Thomas*, “If two make peace with one another in one and the same house, then they will say to the mountain: ‘Move away,’ and it will move away.”

The ground shifts whenever people dare to step across the fissures. This spring, there is more than ever reason to believe.

—Gary

Famous Last Words

Rev. Gary Kowalski

Easter Sunday, April 4

Parting utterances and deathbed goodbyes reveal character. They express a lifetime's worth of gratitude or regret. What final words of blessing or admonition would you wish to leave behind? Try to distill your decades of living into one single sentence. This morning Gary reflects on the last words of Jesus and other wise guys from history. Ladies (and gentlemen) are invited to wear their bonnets.

See your weekly email for the Zoom link.

Food for Thought

Rev. Munro Sickafoose

Sunday, April 18

Fifty-one years after the first Earth Day, another Earth Day is upon us. What have we learned, or failed to learn, in those years? What needs rethinking? Some thoughts on a movement after two generations.

See your weekly email for the Zoom link.

SHARING CIRCLES*

Best. Birthday. Ever.

Sunday, April 11 & 29, 11 a.m.

What was your favorite birthday? Were you a giddy seven-year-old? Did you go on a special outing? Did you get that bike or go-cart that you wanted? Or were you a gleeful septuagenarian? Did you go on a special outing? Did you get that bike or car that you wanted?

Join facilitator Sally Savage in this exploration of how we've each marked our most unique personal milestones.



APRIL BIRTHDAYS

- 3 Sid Bender
- 22 Marianne Furedi
- 25 Bette Myerson

UCOT Men's Group

April 21

The UU Men's Group will meet Wednesday, April 21, at 4:30 p.m., via Zoom. To receive a Zoom invitation, contact Dennis Scott at bridge4fun@mac.com.



Happy Spring!



Music Committee News



Happy 88th birthday to Willie Nelson
(b. April 29, 1933)

Still performing and writing songs after 66 years, Willie Nelson has a distinctive voice blending country, jazz, blues, rock and folk. His activism has focused on farmers, animal welfare, biodiesel fuels and politics. The story of his 1969 classical Martin guitar is remarkable as described in these two short videos. With the restoration and maintenance expertise of Luthier Mark Erlewine, Nelson still plays this guitar.

"Trigger," his classical Martin guitar:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhQuJTc5yFY>

Willie Nelson and "Trigger," narrated by Woody Harrelson:

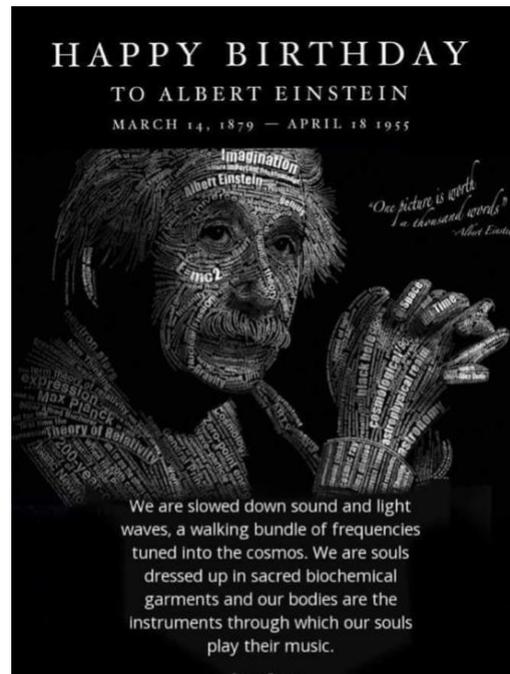
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b6IB0trJoJU>

Enjoy this soulful duet with Ray Charles:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8A9Y1Dq_cQ

Remembering Albert Einstein

Gael Minton thought it apropos to recognize the violin-playing genius on the anniversary of his birth and death, which straddle the months of March and April. May his memory, and this beautiful quote, ignite your brilliance. ✨



The President's Corner

After listening to Munro Sickafoose's reflection on the stranger, I had a reaction that we need to widen the lens of the issues involved. Our usual way to approach the question of who is the "stranger," is to think about other humans in need of help in some way. That is certainly an important place to start. Let me tell a story from my recent experience.

On a family trip to Western New York a couple of years ago, I took a nostalgia drive through some of the countryside I grew up in. These were rural roads through fields of hay for the winter, and crops for the season. As I was driving along a familiar road enjoying the memories, I spotted a large turtle slowly crossing the road ahead of me. I slowed to crawl, turned into the other lane to avoid the turtle, and continued on my way. I looked in the rear-view mirror and saw the turtle still in the road. I pulled over to the edge of the road, got out and walked back to the turtle. It was a large snapping turtle, so I carefully picked it up by the sides of its shell. I walked over to the edge of swampy area on the east side of the road and carefully set it down, assuming that it wanted to head into the wetland. I waited for a few minutes as the turtle moved down the slope and into the water. I hope that I had prevented the critter from being crushed by a car before it made it to safety. I did not think about it at the time. Later I realized that a simple decision to help a turtle to safety was the "right thing to do." It reinforced my awareness to be able to help even in the smallest of situations.

On a much larger scale, as I became increasingly aware of the environmental issues of our time, Rachel Carson had a significant impact on me. Her research and writing on the damages DDT had inflicted on our natural world and her advocacy in exposing the chemical industry's role in promoting the widespread uses of DDT were the first "big deal" of the environmental movement. One of the most significant impacts of the large quantities of DDT in the entire natural food chain was the steady decline of bald eagle populations across North America. While I doubt that Carson knew all the details of the impacts of DDT, research by ornithologists demonstrated that traces of DDT in the prey of bald eagles made the shells of their eggs more fragile, leading to much lower survival rates of eagle chicks, and a long-term decline in bald eagle populations. The "strangers" in this story of caring for the creatures around us were the bald

eagles who were disappearing due to the impacts of DDT.

As we think about the need for providing hospitality to people around us, I would suggest that we widen our perspectives to include the world of nature around us.

—Bob Aubrecht