

FIRST UNITARIAN  
CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY  
**BROOKLYN**  
A UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION

**Transforming Lives**

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(Member since June 7, 2015)



The first time I went to church, any church, I was 7 years old. As we would say in the UU vocabulary, I grew up “unchurched,” and if you asked my parents what religion we were (which I did, because it was pretty unclear) they would just shrug and say “Christian?” as a nod to the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant cultural inheritance that didn’t have much influence on their spiritual lives. We weren’t even the kind of family that went to church on holidays; we never went. But one spring Sunday morning, while on a family vacation to visit my cousins in South Carolina, we accompanied them to services at their Baptist congregation. I sat with my family in a worship space I can still imagine perfectly in image, but remember none of the content, and I joined my cousins in their Sunday School classes, which I can also recollect visually, but the audio file has been lost. Most likely, I had no frame of reference for what was talked about, no foundational theology, and, whether to my benefit or detriment, all the messaging simply passed me by like a breeze. I did not receive The Word that day.

I did, however, receive a plant. Or rather, a seed. In our Sunday School class, my cousins, their friends, my brother and I were given red Solo cups, soil, and some seeds, and planted them to celebrate the newly arrived spring. We added water, covered the cups in plastic wrap to help the seeds germinate, and a few days later I watched our cups bouncing around in the sunlight from the backseat of our car on the drive home to New York. Much to my parents’ delight I’m sure, I spent the long drive sitting quietly and watching attentively for signs of life to sprout.

My seed never sprouted. After about a week, I was still optimistic, and decided to double my chances by trading some toy or game with my brother in exchange for his red Solo cup of soil, thinking I could substantially increase my odds of carnation cultivation. Neither plant ever grew, and while I convinced my parents to let me stubbornly hold out hope for several more weeks, eventually both cups of dirt were thrown out.

For a long time, this is how I thought about religious faith itself. Because religious practice was not a fully grown plant I had inherited, it was something I would need to build myself. I thought

it was a matter of assembling parts: soil, water, seed, sun, Solo cup. Out of the cup, faith would grow. I thought I would be able to feel the presence of God and finally understand what everyone was talking about; if I just got the ingredients together, a relationship with God and the certainty of faith would come together as quickly as a cup of Instant Noodles.

When Reverend Ana asked me to give a testimony, the *several* times that Reverend Ana asked me to give a testimony, I thought I didn't have enough of a compelling story, because in many ways I still can't help but think of "ideal" Faith as the kind that comes easily and rapturously, a Faith like Instant Noodles, Grace like a Chia Pet. Mine is just an everyday kind of faith that's not as exciting to hear about, but it's the kind of ordinary, hard-earned faith that I at least hope is relatable. You see, there was another ingredient I had considered, but underestimated: time.

Time, spent in community with one another. Time, listening to sermons and homilies and testimonies, and time alone reflecting on them. On the surface it can seem like nothing is happening, though there are ordinary joys along the way: making new friends, celebrating our little victories together, seeing babies blessed and new members covenanted, listening to the insights and wisdom and heartaches and triumphs of the congregation and feeling strangely proud of people I barely know. Feeling proud of myself. And out of nowhere, faith grows. Slowly and imperceptibly, unnoticed completely until it fills the room. Out of Time, faith grows. Through ordinary days and ordinary events, faith grows, and you rise up to greet it with that mix of surprise and comfortable familiarity, like running into an old friend.

Hold fast to your cups of dirt, my friends, even through the winters and the long drives home, through the cups of coffee we share in fellowship and through the sometimes dull, sometimes delightful ordinariness of days – something may yet be stirring.

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