

The Miracle of Ordinary Things

Rev. Dr. Roger Jones

Circle Service on Mother's Day, May 11, 2025

Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento

Introduction

Our Soul Matters theme for the month of May is imagination. In that spirit, our service today is a celebration of everyday life, especially the physical objects of our lives. On Terrie's altar you can see a variety of objects from around the office.

I will start with a reading from a book of poems by Brian Doyle entitled *A Book of Uncommon Prayer: 100 Celebrations of the Miracle and Muddle of the Ordinary*. Doyle lived in Oregon and died in 2017 at age 61. He was a husband and father and a lifelong Roman Catholic. Each of his poems is written as a prayer. Doyle speaks to God as ... inventor, designer, light, and inspiration. This poem is entitled Prayer of Thanks for Suntan Lotion (p. 65).

Prayer of Thanks for Suntan Lotion. Which smells good; which smells like relaxed; which smells like giggling children/ in peculiar and hilarious bathing suits; which smells like not-working; which evokes summer; which smacks of the beach and sand and gulls and terns and salt air and beer; which comes in bright colorful containers; which sometimes needs to be lovingly ladled on the backs of lovely spouses and children, a moment that always gives me the happy willies; which never actually expires but can be used 11 years later after you find a nearly dry container in the very back of the medicine cabinet; which finally/ just by the faint scent of it/ reminds me most powerfully and movingly/ of my children. So thank You, Light. And so: Amen.

Homily

Located in rural northeastern Vermont, on Dry Pond Road outside the village of Glover, is located the Museum of Everyday Life. It is housed in a big old barn of weathered wooden siding, You park your car on a gravel drive, get out, pull open the barn door, and turn on the light switch. It is a self-guided museum. There is a box for cash donations as well as a QR code for giving by CashApp or Venmo. It's on the honor system. The museum is a few hundred feet from the farmhouse of Claire Dolan, who established it. She's an artist and writer, a registered nurse, and based on my visit there last July, a gardener of vegetables, fruits and flowers. Dolan is a former member of Bread and Puppet Theater, a radical arts collective in that rural area.

The museum is participatory. Visitors are invited to write comments or leave their stories related to the topic of each exhibit, some of which are permanent exhibits. One temporary exhibit a few years ago was entitled *Toothbrush/ From Twig to Bristle in all its Expedient Beauty*. The museum aims for its exhibits to "evoke the mysterious delight embedded in the ... beloved objects we touch every day." Of course, much of the interest comes not from the objects themselves, but from the stories behind the objects, or the stories they remind us of. And as we heard from Jennifer, beyond their practical purpose, objects can symbolize aspects of our lives; they can inspire us to contemplation and creativity.

Another exhibit included a visual history of the safety pin, with safety pins from around the world. We can learn that

in the United States, a mechanical engineer named Walter Hunt invented the safety pin in 1849. He also invented the sewing machine among other items. In fact, while visiting New York City to promote his inventions, he invented the gong used on trolley cars to warn people. Walter Hunt sold his invention patents early to companies, so they got rich from his inventions, but he did not.

SLIDE UP-TELEPHONE. On this slide is an example of an old land line telephone. It has a rotary dial and a handset connected by a curly phone cord. After decades of being sold in basic black, phones came out in a variety of colors beginning in the 1950s. This made them into decorative items for your home.

When I was growing up, many households had only one phone; it might have been sitting on a table in the hall by the front door. This meant that wherever you were in the house, you had to get up to answer it. *Ring, ring.* “Jones residence.” This is a picture of a phone mounted on a wall in a kitchen, which made the kitchen the hub of communication. SLIDE DOWN

Once as a boy I was in the kitchen of my Aunt Mary and Uncle Roger’s house when their son Greg made a long-distance call to them. He was in the Navy in Southeast Asia. Long-distance calls were expensive and often brief. We crowded around the phone and took turns talking to Greg, each with just enough time to say “Hi. How are you? I’m fine. Okay, here’s Carolyn. Love you.”

These days, thanks to the mobile phone, the cell phone, few of us are tethered to one spot; we can talk anywhere; we can see who’s calling before we answer, and we can even see one another on the screen of the cell phone. I wonder what stories we will tell about *this* everyday object a few decades from now.

Since the mid-20th century, I think, the mass production of cheap, disposable goods has lured us and led us to take for granted the objects that make up our everyday lives. After all, if we can throw it out and replace it easily, why bother appreciating it? But if we pause and recognize one of the everyday objects we use and even depend on, we might breathe a sigh of appreciation for its presence in our life.

PLATE SLIDE UP. RJ PICKS UP PLATE. This is a dessert plate manufactured by the Pfaltzgraff company. Its design features a floral pattern in blue on an off-white background. It’s from the Yorktown series, which they introduced in 1967. It’s still being sold. In my 20s, when I got my first apartment, my mother decided to buy for me several place settings of this design: dinner plates, dessert plates, bowls, coffee cups and saucers, plus a serving bowl and a platter. She got my sister-in-law to take her to buy them at a beloved Indiana department store up the highway from us. The store was part of a chain that no longer exists. SLIDE DOWN

This plate feels cool and weighty. In spite of its sturdiness, all that remains of my place settings are this plate, a coffee cup with a broken handle, and a saucer. All the other pieces have broken over the past 40 years. Bowls, dinner plates, cups—one by one, dropped, cracked, broken. I kept the packing boxes the dishes came in and repacked them every time I moved from apartment to apartment over the decades, but they didn’t break during moves. They broke from being *used*.

Since then, of course, I’ve bought mugs, pottery and plates from other places in other designs, which have appealed to my tastes, so I have no desire to replace the Yorktown dishes. Yet sometimes the coffee cup with the broken handle is the perfect size for the small amount of ice cream I want to eat.

PICK UP. *This plate* is just right for a piece of toast. And if I am not in a rush, and am paying attention, every time I use this, it causes me to think of my mother. I think of her generosity. I also think of her certainty that *she knew how* a young man should take up housekeeping and what he should *own* for that. And in spite of her controlling nature, I think sometimes she was right.

Ordinary objects can be a connection between the past, the present, and the future. As we heard in the reflection by Crystal, they can connect us to people around the world, people we will never meet, yet people we on whom we depend and who depend on us. This inter-connection, this inter-dependence--I call it the ordinary miracle of being human.

As we go through our days, let us take the time to notice and perceive these connections, to reflect and wonder about them, and give thanks. So may it be. Amen.

Ritual

Next we invite you to do such a reflection using the format you will find in your Order of Service. If you're on Zoom, we invite you to type your appreciation of an object in the Chat. You can click on the order of service to find this format.

You will need a pen or pencil, an ordinary object that a neighbor might lend you or a Greeter can bring to you if you raise your hand. If you're online I hope you have one handy.

Using the format of a cinquain [CINKain], write a short poem about an object that you appreciate or one that connects you to a memorable story. As you can see, it's five lines long. First, a single word; second, 2 descriptive words; third, 3 action words also known as verbs; fourth, a 4-word phrase, and at the end, another single word. Here's my example: Lawnmower. Gas, electric. ETC.

Write one or more CINKAINS during the next three minutes or just enjoy listening to the music which Iriana will provide. Then we will invite a few of you to read aloud what you have written. Let's begin. [see the format at the end]

Ritual

We will ask 10 of you to volunteer to come up here and read your poem from the pulpit. On Zoom, feel free to type it in the chat and Rev. Lucy will read a few of them. If you are not able to come up here, Andy will bring the mic to you.

Blessing

Thank you. During coffee time or in the Zoom room, I hope you will ask someone you don't know to read you their cinquain [CINKAIN].

And now for the blessing:

In the days ahead, may we pause to consider the everyday objects in our lives. Let's appreciate the stories behind them. Let's recognize how an ordinary object reflects the connections among us, around us, and all around the world.

May we celebrate the everyday miracles in which we live and move and have our being. And may we give thanks for every good gift. Blessed be.

Write a **cinquain** poem about an everyday object – one that you appreciate or one that connects you to a memorable story. Write as many as you like.

Format

1 noun (a single word) _____

2 adjectives (descriptive words) _____

3 verbs (action words) _____

a 4-word phrase _____

a single word _____

For a sample, here's a cinquain about a lawnmower by Rev. Roger:

Lawnmower
Gas, Electric
Riding, Pushing, Sweating
This teenager made money
Vroom!