

## **Expect the Unexpected**

### **A Message for All Faiths Unitarian**

**By The Rev. CJ McGregor**

**November 1, 2020**

Unexpected joy isn't something that happens too often. For me it's like mail in the mailbox. At my house we sometimes like to be the first person to get the mail each day. I think getting the mail is exciting. You don't know what's waiting in the metal box outside, And so, each day is an exciting discovery. Well most days. Sometimes it's junk mail, more paper to recycle, or a notice from from someone demanding

my money-otherwise called bills. But other days there is something fantastic waiting. I love finding cards from you in my mailbox and I get a lot of them. During these times of isolation I feel closer to you. Finding treasures in the mailbox is a lot like finding the perfect shell or stone on the beach. It's the joy of surprise-the unexpected.

The unexpected can also drive us mad. When Richard and I lived in NYC we dropped our laundry at a shop that washed, dried, folded, and delivered our clean laundry to our apartment. When we moved to Massachusetts, we didn't

have a washer or dryer at first because we had been spoiled. We found ourselves having to go to the laundromat and doing our own laundry. Can you imagine? We went every Saturday to the same laundromat. One Saturday Richard decided that we would go to a different laundromat. I wasn't aware of the change in the program. I threw such a fit that I am now embarrassed by. You see, I had been so attached to the expected or what I thought should happen that this simple change threw me. This silly story is an example of the unexpected. It's not the

unexpected that affects us, but the idea that we must beware of the unexpected at all times and control outcomes.

So often we believe we can control and have control over what happens in our lives. I teach that this control, trying to live in the expected, only brings disappointment. We are disappointed that having control is an illusion or maybe even a dillusion, and we are disappointed when things don't work out the way we expected or the unexpected.

The unexspected is a big part of our lives shouldn't we expect it. I'm

fascinated that we rarely expect the unexpected. I'm fascinated that I just used the words expected and unexpected several times in one sentence! We believe our plans are so fool proof or that we can construct every minute to suit us that we are surprised by the unexpected. I find myself telling my family this over and over again. I know hearing me say, "and your surprised because?"

Scientists say that our universe is governed largely by randomness.

However, if there's one thing we have trouble accepting, it's the unexpected.

So, in the midst of the randomness of life, you must never lose sight of your purpose and learn to accept the unexpected. Expecting the unexpected is really about accepting the impermanence of life. That is, accepting the randomness of life. Our lives are governed by many variables and factors. Despite the fact that we take for granted that we have a firm hold on our reality, we actually are mostly in the grip of chance.

Many people live pretty much without a care in the world for years, with the feeling that everything seems to be in its

rightful place. We lead our normal lives, go to work, socialize, spend time with friends and family... and chaos seems a long way away. **Then, suddenly,**

**something happens or changes, and**

**we're suddenly face to face with**

**change and have to accept the**

**unexpected.**

These are the times when you need capacities, abilities, and mental approaches that you've never used before. Strangely, there are those who seem to be able to respond perfectly. **It's as if they've got some**

**sort of subroutine or code written**

**into their genetic code or in some**  
**hidden corner of their brain, ready to**  
**be activated in the face of**  
**adversity.** And they always seem to be  
able to respond in the best way.

There are days when the sun couldn't be  
brighter and the sky couldn't be  
clearer. **However, nothing can prevent**  
**the darkness from suddenly**  
**appearing in a matter of**  
**seconds.** Sometimes, the storm hits in  
an instant but, sometimes, you get some  
warning clouds that tell you that a storm



is on the way. Under these

circumstances, **there's no point in**

**complaining. You just have to take**

**cover.**

Sometimes, stability rules the day.

Everything on your schedule is fulfilled;

every project, appointment, trip, and

project occurs without a hitch.

However, without warning, something

unexpected can happen.

The worst thing about unforeseen events

is that they never come alone; they

usually bring more changes and

uncertainties with them. In the midst of

these situations, there's no point in

complaining, having regrets, or standing still. You have to respond and act.

**How can you accept the unexpected if**

**your brain doesn't tolerate**

**randomness?** Like my brain when you

change my laundromat. Our brains

have an almost obsessive tendency to

look for patterns and learn from

experience, in order to help us react

better and better in our day-to-day life.

It likes to have everything under control.

Any unexpected event or unknown

stimulus that it hasn't previously

encountered or experienced activates an

alarm system **and is interpreted as a threat.**

Science often tells us that life is an accidental by-product in a random universe. Let's also remember what well-known **physicist Werner Heisenberg** said: *“What we observe in matter are not things (or particles) but waves of probability”.*

This idea helped him formulate his famous theory of the **uncertainty principle**, in which he stated that it's impossible to measure or predict the

position and motion of a particle.

However, we can make conjectures.

However, even in the world of quantum physics, there's always a small percentage of chaos. In fact, something that Heisenberg pointed out is that, in an uncertain world, we must always be prepared for the unexpected.

This fact of life is neither good nor bad.

It's simply reality. There are always those who take advantage of it and have no problem accepting the unexpected and moving forward in a courageous and creative way.

**Others, on the other hand, are**

**paralyzed by the experience.**

So, **how can you deal with the**

**inevitable factor of uncertainty in**

**your daily life? take control of the**

**things that you really can control.**

Here, we're talking about your

decisions, mental approaches, and

actions.

- understand that, in the midst of uncertainty, **you'll always need to take risks.** Doing so can cause uneasiness, it's true but you really do need to take innovative and

positive steps in order to move forward.

- It's important to **awaken the skills that we all have: curiosity, creativity, and receptiveness.**

**to accept the unexpected, no matter**

**the situation, we have to be brave.** If

we simply stand still, lamenting that element of chaos in our lives, then our suffering will be greater. We must be proactive and resourceful, able to rationalize our fears and put our emotions and creativity to work in our favor.

I began this message telling you about the joy of the unexpected. As you've heard I've evolved from being rattled by uncertainty, moving toward practicing acceptance. For me, as a minister, this is so important. I know Regina, our congregational administrator feels the same way. We arrive having a predicted list of things to do, but congregational life has other plans for us. We never get to that list because the unexpected takes over. That is, each day in the life of the congregation presents us with things that we didn't plan for or weren't even on our radar. I

can confidently say I am comfortable with that.

I want to end with a story written by my first Unitarian Minister, The Rev. Dr.

Barbara Merrit. Our family loved her.

She tells a story of when her family was visiting Nova Scotia. She writes, “

The Canadian dollar exchange was so

attractive this summer that the Merritt

family decided to cross the Bay of

Fundy and explore the opposite shore of

Nova Scotia. We boarded our ship in St.

John's, New Brunswick, and arrived in

less than three hours. We drove forever,

found an inn in a tiny village, and spent



the night. When we were ready to depart the next morning, I noticed several pieces of natural amethyst for sale in the innkeeper's gift shop. I mentioned to her that the Canadian Tourist literature had made a reference to an "amethyst beach," where you could collect your own. She smiled delightedly and explained that this famous beach was their village beach, only five minutes away.

She not only gave us directions to Sandy Beach, which was down several local unmarked roads, she also gave us

a quick course on “amethyst hunting.”

She told us to look for the boulders of

black volcanic rock. On the surface of

those rocks, we’d find white lines, the

cracks where the crystals form. When

we could locate the larger cavities of

crystals, we’d be harvesting amethyst.

I’m unsure whether my children, the

rock hounds, were more excited than

the adults. We brought along a large

canvas bag to haul back all of our

semiprecious gemstones. We found the

beach with the black smooth volcanic

rock and the white lines. Using our

hammers and safety goggles, we went

to work.

An hour later we were still smashing at rocks for no apparent reason. Deep within the white crystal cracks, we discovered a lot of rock, but no amethyst. Initially I scanned the boulders for visual clues for hidden caches of amethyst. I'd make a thoughtful scientific appraisal of the area, following fault lines, looking for subtle gradations in color, listening for hollow echoes with my hammer. At each spot where I initially chose to chip away, my hopes were high. I was sure that this was it. It wasn't. Later I

decided to use my intuition. I “opened” myself to the presence of amethyst; I tried to become emotionally in tune with the geological harmony of the place. I attempted to be “guided” to the right spot. When

everything felt “just right,” I’d strike with the hammer. And lo and behold, underneath the surface, were more rocks. One can expectantly smash rocks on a beach for only so long. My husband and children had fared no better than I had. In our initial attempts, we had each made premature

declarations that we were about to break open the mother lode of amethyst. The canvas sack remained empty. Then, on the horizon, a man approached who looked like he knew what he was doing. We casually walked over, and he patiently explained the secrets for finding amethysts. He had all the right equipment and maps. An expert! Our hopes soared once more, and we watched in admiration as he showed us exactly where he expected to find the jewels. He hammered away, and in the white crack he broke open, he uncovered a lot more rocks, identical to

the ones on the surface. As we were leaving the beach, with my still empty canvas bag, I saw out of the corner of my eye, a small piece of black rock. I picked it up, turned it over, and I saw it—a faint pinkish cast to the crystals. I tucked it in my pocket and went on my way. I have heard that when something is valuable and worthwhile, you are not apt to find it lying around in great heaps. Diamonds and gold are rare. Lions do not congregate in large numbers. God is not easy to find. Truth is not easy to put your hands on. But the saints, in all religious traditions, say that

there is something about the search  
itself that instructs us, humbles us, and  
informs us. Our own lives sometimes  
appear to be empty of spiritual treasure  
but this doesn't mean that treasure  
doesn't exist. People do find amethysts.  
People do experience the reality of God.  
Having spent a little time on Amethyst  
Beach, I suspect that the ones who  
"find" are the ones who never give up  
the search.

Let us accept the unexpected in our  
lives and fill our canvas bags with great  
finds we never knew were coming our  
way.

May it be so.