

Excuses

A Message for All Faiths Unitarian Congregation

By Rev. CJ McGregor

Delivered on March 28, 2021

I thought I could really get away with something this morning. I thought maybe I'll release myself from the responsibility of researching and writing a sermon and come up with a great excuse. Wouldn't that be a great example? Would I need to say anything else? Then integrity came to mind which usually ruins everything. There is one thing I need to say before we dive into a sermon about excuses. We all make them, have made them, and will continue to make them. Ain't reality grand. I, for one, would like to deny this, but just as the truth I experience on my bathroom scale, I cannot deny this truth. I guess I could which would be an excuse and prove my point. None of us are immune to giving and receiving excuses. There. Now that I've shattered your image of self-perfection we can move on.

We've all made excuses. As someone who has supervised people since I was 18 I've received a few dilly's too. In my research I found categories of excuses and this list I know you will enjoy. Many people have an excuse for not attending church services each week. If you were to take those excuses and apply them to other things we do (for example -- eating), those excuses might look like this top ten.

10. I was forced to eat as a child.
 9. People who eat all the time are hypocrites; they aren't really hungry.
 8. There are so many different kinds of food, I can't decide what to eat.
 7. I used to eat, but I got bored and stopped.
 6. I only eat on special occasions, like Christmas and Easter.
 5. None of my friends will eat with me.
 4. I'll start eating when I get older.
 3. I don't really have time to eat.
 2. I don't believe that eating does anybody any good. It's just a crutch.
- and the # 1 excuse for not eating.....
1. Restaurants and grocery stores are only after your money.

I want to put the excuses that I'm talking about this morning in the context of releasing someone from a duty or requirement. We've used excuses to get out of work, social commitments, and

sometimes to release ourselves from growth and living more meaningfully. Blogger Adam Sicinski Okay, we've all been there. Something just doesn't work out, or something doesn't quite go the way you had expected. Just maybe you failed to hit the target you had in mind.

When things don't quite pan out as you had imagined, do you typically take ownership? Do you take responsibility? Maybe you're the kind of person who takes initiative? Or maybe you are the kind of person who just makes excuses?

Yep, excuses are great. After all, they make us feel much better about ourselves. Making excuses means that it's easier to live with our failed expectations. As a bonus, we win the sympathy of others, which in turn helps us to create deeper bonds with those around us. We're not perfect after all, in fact, we are quite flawed and achieving our goals and objectives is tough work.

Excuses provide us with reasons that help us explain away why we just aren't good enough.

Many of us have big dreams and aspirations. This is of course wonderful. However, the reality is that many people don't end up achieving the big goals they set for themselves. And it's not that people aren't capable. Many of us are more than capable of achieving things beyond our wildest imaginations, however for most, this never actually becomes a reality because people just kind of get in their own way. The way we kind of get in our own way comes through the excuses we consistently make for not having enough, for not achieving a goal, for not handling a problem, or for not making the most of the opportunities life throws our way.

Excuses such as I'm just not educated enough. I just don't have enough money. I just don't have enough time. I'm just not confident enough to do this. I just don't have enough experience. I'm just not ready yet. I just don't know where to begin. It's just too difficult. I'm just not good enough. I just don't have any luck. It just isn't the right time. Nobody believes in me. People are holding me back. I'm afraid what others might think. I'm afraid of making a mistake. I fear failure would crush me. I just don't know the right people. It's just too risky. I've tried, and it just can't be done. I just can't deal with all these problems. I'm just not creative enough. Some of these I recognize for myself. I wonder if any of these resonate with you. All these excuses keep us stuck. They keep us from happiness, meaning, and achievement. Our best excuses can be our worst enemies.

I want you to understand that what I'm about to say isn't an excuse for excuses. Rather it's a kinder, less judgmental, and compassionate way to manage and understand excuses that we receive from others. As I said earlier I've been supervising people and teams for a long time and I learned an important lesson about excuses the hard way. I once supervised a man, Greg, who had a lot of responsibility and influence in our organization. We had been developing programs and systems that would be used state-wide to support immigrants working in the human service field. At that time in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts a high percentage of human service workers were not from the United States. The needs of these workers were different. The way we communicated and trained these workers were different. We were do to make a very important presentation that had been organized by Governor Patrick Duvall and his staff. About 40 minutes before the presentation I received a voicemail from Greg that he wouldn't be able to make it because he had some personal business to attend to. I panicked for three seconds. Paced in anger for a minute and thought of what I would say when I terminated him in the morning. I did pull myself together. Gave the presentation and now the Commonwealth has an organization that assists immigrant healthcare workers called Genesis formed with great support from the Governor.

The next morning came. I left a note on Greg's door that said see me immediately if not before. Greg and I sat down. He must have known I was more than frustrated because he had put my reputation and that of our organization at risk. I simply opened our conversation saying what the hell? And Greg offered his excuse. Early on the morning of the presentation Greg and his wife brought their daughter to the doctor. They received some results of testing. Greg told me that, unknown to anyone, his daughter was being sexually abused by a man in their neighborhood. It was on that morning that they were told that as a result their daughter was HIV positive. The family was devastated. Though no longer a death sentence, being told that you or a loved one is positive is always a sinking heart and spirit thing to hear. That was Greg's excuse.

And so, I understand excuses as not being inherently bad. There is a kinder and more compassionate way to deal with excuses we are given. There are people out there where excuses become pathological. When we get an excuse we personalize it. We become frustrated and maybe angry. We judge people for offering excuses. I suggest we look at excuses differently. Not all of them. When you receive an excuse I wonder what you would feel like if you sat back and considered the possibilities for the excuse. First understand that it isn't about you. Next ask yourself, "What does this person need that they are giving me an excuse?" Think of Greg. Perhaps they just couldn't satisfy just one more obligation because they are exhausted, realized they don't have the passion they thought they had when they made the commitment. Maybe they have something deeply personal happening and cover it with an excuse. Maybe something really did come up. Maybe the family is out of control at the moment but this fact is masked by an excuse. Maybe they received bad news. Maybe their adult children are sick or getting a divorce. There are a lot of maybe's.

Who cares about the excuse. What is really happening behind it. Before we get our knickers in a twist we need to step back and ask, "Does this person need something from me or my congregation?" Let's face it, stewing over excuses is a colossal waste of time. Access your Unitarian Universalist self and choose the kinder and more compassionate road. There is a big difference between an excuse and a reason. Often we will never be given the reason. That is our work to do. To discern if there is a reason and respond with love and support, not frustration and judgement. That is our spiritual way. That is how we've decided to live. May we practice what we preach, walk the talk, and hold one another up as much as each of us deserves to be held up and supported.

May it be so.