

## Minilogue

Some years ago, when I was asked to deliver an invocation at my congregation's Oktoberfest fundraising dinner, I recalled the keen and profoundly cynical observation made by the brilliant, mad German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche: "The trick," he said, "is not to arrange a festival, but to find people who are able to enjoy it."

In Nietzsche's view, the forces of modernity have stripped us of our innate human capacity to truly experience the kind of deep joy that ought to characterize our festivals, and our lives.

We tend either to turn away in cynical and self-righteous refusal – how can we enjoy ourselves when there is so much chaos and suffering in the world? -- or we turn to some more superficial form of fun and entertainment, as a way of distracting ourselves for a time before returning to what we think of as the *real* work, the *serious* business of the world.

To be sure, there is no shortage of pseudo-festivity in the world, in both relatively harmless and sometimes more sinister forms: traditional feasts contaminated by commercialism; artificial holidays created in the interest of merchandisers; ceremonies of coercion, decreed by dictators the world over; festivals as military demonstrations; joyless 'celebrations' empty of spiritual significance.

The true spirit of festival is something much different, much deeper, and much needed in the world today. We need something more powerful than simply 'cheering each other up.'

In his wonderful little book entitled, *In Tune With the World: A Theory of Festivity*, another German thinker, the Jesuit theologian, Joseph Pieper, wrote that: "The highest form of *life affirmation* is the festival; the holding of a festival means: an affirmation of the basic goodness of the world, and an agreement to live out and fulfil one's inclusion in that world, in an extraordinary manner, different from the everyday." True festivity, he says, is the very origin of culture, its inmost and ever-central source.

Pieper's phrase, 'life affirmation,' is a pretty good description of how I view 'worship' in the Unitarian Universalist tradition. Worship need not be an escape from the responsibilities of life and the demands of social justice. On the contrary, the true spirit of celebration can enliven and transform our communities in ways that more serious and 'sober' approaches sometimes fail to do. To paraphrase what Emma Goldman famously said about revolution, "If I can't celebrate, I don't want to be part of your worship."

The deeply world-affirming attitude signified by festival is very much a Unitarian Universalist value. Even as we acknowledge and seek to overcome suffering and injustice in the world, we recognize that sources of joy also abound. Our liberal religious tradition holds both of these truths in creative tension as we gather to fulfill our mission.

My prayer at that Oktoberfest dinner concluded simply: "as we enter into the spirit of festivity, may we be willing to allow the spirit of festivity to enter into us." I believe even more strongly than ever that we must open ourselves to the spirit of festivity and to cultivate our capacity for enjoyment, our ability truly to celebrate together.

In good and festive fellowship,

Rev. Bruce