

## “The Joy of Now”

*A homily delivered by the Rev. Dr. Stephanie May  
at the First Parish in Wayland, MA  
on the occasion of Music Sunday  
December 14, 2014*

When I was 8 years old, my family spent the holidays in Florida with my grandparents, Harold and Betty. After only knowing Christmas in the cold and snowy North of Michigan, it felt odd to be there amidst the tropical plants and warm, humid breezes.

Given the climate, the holiday tree was a tall houseplant rather than an evergreen tree. Beneath this plant were laid gifts and from its branches hung three envelopes—one with my name and the other two with the names of my brothers. To the surprise of us kids, we were allowed to open these envelopes on Christmas Eve without waiting for Christmas morning! *This was a mistake.*

Inside were tickets for Disneyworld for Christmas Day. WOW! We three kids were *so* excited. So excited that falling asleep that night seemed impossible. Crammed into the porch on inflatable mattresses, our loud whispers of anticipation lingered long past the time my parents intended for us to fall asleep. And yet, we *wanted* to sleep, because when we woke it would be time to actually *go* to Disneyworld!

Do you know that kind of anticipation—the longing for a particular moment or event to arrive? And then—the time is *now*, it’s here...you’re standing at the gates of Disneyworld, you’re waiting at the front of the sanctuary as your beloved walks towards you to wed, you’re walking out the door of high school with diploma in hand or into the new job for which you have trained years to be able to do. Finally, the time is *now*. No more waiting, no more anticipation. It is simply time to embrace that for which you were long waiting.

Taken from the Christian Bible, the text of today's cantata<sup>1</sup>, expresses such a moment. After waiting, longing, and dreaming the moment has now arrived. Now, now is the time. Wake, sleepers, wake! Now is the time for joy—the moment is here . . . wake, don't miss it. Wake, sleepers, wake!

I don't know about you, but I am full of anticipation for today's cantata. But I do have to confess that as a feminist, I'm not a huge fan of all the lyrics in the cantata. "Come claim thou thy bride" seems a bit like woman as property to my ears. You may have heard the joke about why Unitarian Universalists are such bad singers . . . it's because they're always reading ahead to see if they agree with the lyrics. While there may be some lyrics today that jar, I encourage us to look beyond *this* word or *that* and to listen instead to the journey of the music. To listen for the expression of *joy* that erupts as longing finally connects with the focus of its desire. And in the listening, I hope that we may all be able to recall such an experience of joy in our own lives.

Of course, as the cantata's English title "Sleepers Awake" reminds us, even the most ardent person can still fall asleep while waiting with great excitement—just as my brothers and I *did* eventually fall asleep on Christmas Eve. But in the cantata, sleep is interrupted as the call to *awake* rings out—now, now is the time! Don't sleep. Wake. Notice. See the moment. Feel the joy! The joy is *now!*

As we wait, there are many ways we can fall asleep—not only in mind, but also in our perceptions. The rhythms of our lives can lull us into a kind of mindless daze as we move from one task until the next. We can become so focused on the next task, the long list of to-do's, the presents not yet bought or gifts still unwrapped, that we fall asleep to the wonder of the world all around us. Sometimes we need a call, a gentle nudge, or a big shake to wake us up—to remind us to look, to notice, to see and to feel the joys of now.

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<sup>1</sup> Cantata No. 140, *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, 1731, Johann Sebastian Bach.

And so as we enter into this time of music and sound, of bowing bows and joyful singers, let us wake up! And let us be here and now in the moment of song. Let us be in the moment of music—to remember Alan Watt’s [words](#) that “the playing itself is the point.” As we lean into the music, let us hear and feel in the music the joy of *now*.