

# Easy UU Worship Resources for Evolution Sunday

Compiled courtesy of Jon Cleland-Host, UU Fellowship of Midland MI  
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*Note by Connie Barlow:* "Evolution Sunday" refers to any Sunday in February chosen to **honor the anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin (February 12, 1809)**. Because that is precisely the date and year of U.S. President Abraham Lincoln's birth, and because the U.S. federal holiday of President's Day is the third Monday in February (16 February in 2009), churches participating in Evolution Day are choosing **a February Sunday that best meets their particular needs**. The 2009 Evolution Day is especially significant, as it signifies **the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Darwin's birth**.

Because **24 November 2009 marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of Darwin's landmark book, *On the Origin of Species***, if your church cannot celebrate evolution on a Sunday in February of 2009, you may wish to do so in November. (Gratitude for learning, thanks to Darwin, that we have a very big family, a deep ancestry here on Earth, and that we are all part of *the interrelated*, as well as interdependent, web of life would make evolution a very appropriate theme for Thanksgiving Sunday, too.)

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*By Jon Cleland-Host (JCH):* Here are some **quick and easy resources for putting together an Evolution Sunday service, or indeed any UU worship service about evolution**. All numerical titles can be found in the UU hymnal *Singing the Living Tradition*. Most of the resources on this page can be freely used without concern for copyright. This is because they are either items in our hymnal, items with copyrights that expired long ago (Walt Whitman and Charles Darwin), or items by Connie Barlow or Jon Cleland-Host, who grant permission to use or quote from sermons/letters for the benefit of your congregation. Thus, you can simply copy many items directly into your service – that's why we call this an **easy** list of resources!

## **Order of Service Cover:**

Public domain images for your order of service cover can often be found online by googling "public clip art \_\_\_", with the blank filled in by whatever you are looking for, such as "Nautilus", "fish", "ape" or whatever.

## **Opening/Closing Words**

- 417 (Gaia)
- 428 (The Dark Earth)
- 529 (The Stream of Life)

Note: Many short quotations (suitable for Opening or Closing Words or the Reading for any evolutionary message or sermon grounded in religious naturalism) can be accessed freely at these urls:

<http://www.thegreatstory.org/ClassicQuotes.pdf>

<http://www.thegreatstory.org/morequotes.html>

[http://www.thegreatstory.org/what\\_is.html](http://www.thegreatstory.org/what_is.html)

Here are two widely used quotes from Darwin himself:

"It is interesting to contemplate a tangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent upon each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us. These laws, taken in the largest sense, being Growth with Reproduction; Inheritance which is almost implied by reproduction; Variability from the indirect and direct action of the conditions of life and from use and disuse: a Ratio of Increase so high as to lead to a Struggle for Life, and as a consequence to Natural Selection, entailing Divergence of Character and the Extinction of less-improved forms." — Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (1859)

"There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed [by the Creator] into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved." — Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, 1859

*Note on the bracketed phrase in above quotation:* In the first edition (1859), Charles Darwin did not include the phrase "by the Creator." Editions 2 through 6 (the final edition), did include this phrase.

## **Chalice Lightings**

- 451 (Flame)

- "We call upon the power which sustains the planets in their orbits, that wheels our Milky Way in its 200 million year spiral, to imbue our personalities and our relationships with harmony, endurance, and joy. Fill us with a sense of immense time so that our brief, flickering lives may truly reflect the work of vast ages past and also the millions of years of evolution whose potential lies in our trembling hands." — (Australian deep ecologist) John Seed, *Thinking Like a Mountain*, 1988

- With heat and light, the Great Radiance blazed forth  
With heat and light, ancestral stars fused atoms, exploding in awesome power  
With heat and light, the fire on our Ancestors' hearth cooked their food  
With heat and light, modern scientists harnessed new energy sources  
With heat and light, we light our chalice today, looking toward a sustainable future —JCH, public domain

- We light our chalice today in recognition of the energy that allows life to occur  
The energy of atomic fusion  
The energy of photosynthesis  
The energy of primitive metabolisms, still active in our cells today  
The energy of campfires, labor, and growth  
And, the energy of our community —JCH, public domain

- As we light our Chalice today,  
May its flame remind us of the ongoing process of evolution,  
Reminding us of the first gasping breath, the first clumsy step,  
The first drop of warm milk, the first curious thought—  
All these are wonders of the Universe —JCH, public domain

- We light our chalice today in gratitude for the struggles of our billions of Ancestors  
In our mutual pledge to use our evolved minds for the common good,  
And in hope for the future generations of all creatures who inhabit this Earth. —JCH, public domain

- May the fire that has illumined the Universe since the beginning, and lit up the stars, ignite a flame of possibility in our hearts and minds today. — public domain

## **Readings**

### Responsive readings:

- 651 (The Body is Humankind)
- 657 (It Matters What We Believe)
- 445 (Womb of Stars)
- 530 (Out of the Stars)
- 550 (We Belong to the Earth)

### Other Readings:

<http://www.thegreatstory.org/ClassicQuotes.pdf>

<http://www.thegreatstory.org/morequotes.html>

[http://www.thegreatstory.org/what\\_is.html](http://www.thegreatstory.org/what_is.html)

## **Offertory**

"Unitarian Universalists know that the story of evolution is not yet over. Evolutionary change at all levels — cosmos, planetary, life, culture — will continue into the future, and we humans bear a responsibility for how the story will continue on Earth. In support of our own evolving [fellowship/church/congregation], the offering will now be given and received."

## **Your Sermon**

Online at **The Clergy Letter Project** you can access **150 sermons** on evolution:

[http://www.butler.edu/clergyproject/Resources/Res\\_Sermons.htm](http://www.butler.edu/clergyproject/Resources/Res_Sermons.htm)

To help you choose which to peruse for ideas in constructing your own sermon, know that each author is identified with her or his particular church/synagogue. Thus you can search for your own denomination or any that most interest you.

For many ministers and rabbis, much of their congregation is **struggling to find satisfying ways of accepting the fact of evolution without diminishing faith**. Thus more than 80% of the sermons at the CLP address that issue or explain why creationism/Intelligent Design is incorrect. If you are looking for sermon ideas about that, there are plenty of UU sermons to draw from. Also, most of the other articles and resources on the CLP website show that a belief in God and an understanding of evolution are fully compatible.

However, if a significant portion of your congregation is past that issue and wouldn't benefit much from hearing it again, then you have the opportunity to **delve into a wide range of richer topics on evolution**.

- **Historical reviews** and sometimes **Darwin's own life** are covered in sermons by Kathryn Schreiber, Mary DeWolf, and Cal Frye.
- The **divine wonder and awe** inspired by our full evolutionary history is conveyed well in sermons by Rex Hunt (2006), Paul Sprecher (2008), George Fisher, Jon Cleland-Host, Paul Kottke, Megan Hoffman, John Gibbons, and Gary Kowalski.
- Using evolution to **understand our own minds** is covered in sermons by Ledyard Baxter and Diane Teichert.

Lastly, **Michael Dowd** and **Connie Barlow** have posted online a dozen sermons delivered to Unitarian Universalist congregations (all audio; one also in pdf), which can be accessed or downloaded at:

<http://www.thegreatstory.org/UU.html#audio-uu>

## **Hymns**

- #021 For the Beauty of the Earth
- #123 Spirit of Life (our preferred way to end a service)
- #163 For Earth Forever Turning
- #175 We Celebrate the Web of Life
- #203 All Creatures of the Earth & Sky
- #298 Wake Now My Senses
- #301 Touch the Earth, Reach the Sky (especially for "Death" program)
- #303 We Are the Earth Upright and Proud
- #304 A Fierce Unrest
- #309 Earth Is Our Homeland
- #319 Ye Earthborn Children of a Star
- #331 Life Is the Greatest Gift of All
- #343 A Firemist and a Planet
- #360 Here We Have Gathered

## **Closing Words**

(See the Opening/Closing words section above, and the links for readings.)