

**3/17/2019 - Sermon**

**Journey of Souls**

**Rev. John T. Crestwell, Jr.**

Thank you Sara... That song takes me right where I want to be because I want to get mystical today and the song Stardust is just that—it's a mysterious tune about lost love—remembering someone you love that is no longer present. The writer describes his song as “a memory of love's refrain...” Love—the most powerful and potent force on this planet, beckons us and when we love someone or something it does not let us go. The memories are there—always. Break-ups—we get over them eventually—but when we are talking about someone who has died whom we have loved greatly—the yearning to see them never leaves. In this congregation, we've lost so many people over the last 4 years. And if I'm honest, in my heart I know they are not gone. I'm not talking about JUST their memories though. I believe their essence—their personality is not dead. I hope/expect to see them again one day. But that's me, and **I'll come back to that...**

This morning I want to talk about death and life—and the space in between, and the possibility that we do live forever—that nothing ever dies—rather things change, transform, or transmute.

To get us started, watch this video about a young boy who believes he was a WWII fighter pilot. This was the first video I watched ten years ago that led me down the mystical path of studying things deemed “otherworldly”. Watch this...

<https://binged.it/2JD4b40>

I am a skeptic, like many of you; but this video made me think this could be true. Since watching it, my search has sped up expeditiously, particularly after tragically losing a close friend about 4 years ago (he was 51 at the time). The day William died, I felt his presence in his hospital room. As family gathered to say good bye, I felt him say to me, “John, lead my family through this.” I can’t explain it. It felt like he’d chosen me for this particular time. I felt his smile. Even Emerson (the man himself) said he could feel consciousness—or a certain aliveness in trees and plants when he was

in the woods or in a garden. I too felt and feel that vibratory presence of things seen and unseen. I cannot put my finger on it as it is elusive but there is something there for me—for us. So I continue my research.

I did not realize I'd run into our Unitarian and Universalist forebears in the process. That made me happy. I did not want to be the only weirdo. Many Unitarians and Universalists (thousands) in the mid-1800s were into the occult—which is a scary word (sounds like a bad horror movie) so you have to define it... Occult is defined as, "knowledge of the hidden". In common English usage, occult refers to "knowledge of the paranormal", as opposed to "knowledge of the measurable", usually referred to as science (WIKI). The paranormal includes most things where you attempt to communicate with the other side. In that time (the 1800s) during the rise of science and reason, many theologians were mixing the paranormal, with religion and science. Like alchemy, they were trying to merge new scientific findings with old ideas. Some perspective: in that time, the famous

Mary Baker Eddy rose to prominence and eventually founded the Christian Science church. There were more than 4-million Spiritualists (or paranormal believers) but they never evolved into one single religion. The vestiges can be found in various non-traditional religions and in individual practitioners (mediums/psychics/hypnotherapists). There is today a UU Mystics group on facebook who meet annually at General Assembly; and we UUS have had some prominent Universalists and Unitarians who were Spiritualists, such as Hosea Ballou and Theodore Parker.

Last week, a strange good thing happened. I met a Swedenborgian minister of a Lutheran church in Prince George's County. I said to him, "I think we are closely related in the church family tree?" He said, "We are through Swedenborg...Emmanuel Swedenborg influenced Emerson." AH!! I said. I later looked him up.

Swedenborg was known as 'the Aristotle of the North.' He was said to be greatly influenced by Emerson (as mentioned); as well as Immanuel Kant, William James, William Blake, and Helen Keller, among others."

After discovering this, I realized I was adding another piece on to my mystical puzzle. Swedenborg was the first man to espouse a paranormal theology in his era. Swedenborg before having a spiritual awakening was known as a genius. He was a recognized theologian, mathematician, inventor, scientist, philosopher, mystic and more—a Renaissance man who began teaching a version of mystical Lutheran Christianity that included visions of the afterlife (he had nightly out of body explorations starting at around age 50), leading him to author countless papers about his experiences—which intersects in many places with current writings on the afterlife, near death and past life experiences. The striking familiarities in his visions of the afterlife and what Michael Newton describes in his seminal book *Journey of Souls* in 1994 are stunning. Newton, an atheist, was a professional therapist who dabbled in hypnotherapy which led him to past life regression and life between lives studies of hundreds of patients. Coincidentally, he died on my birthday on September 21 a few years ago. There's a wild story connecting us that I'll share some other

time. Newton is special because he was the first to apply science toward something that was considered quackery.

The similarities with Swedenborg, Newton, and others tell an interesting story about death...

Here's what they say—and some of this, I admit, may clash with your thinking. But hear it out... *Death is not the end. We are eternal souls. We live, die, transition to the after-world to learn and then we return to earth again to learn. Like the universe, we too are continually expanding or learning—“onward and upward forever” (as it was said by Unitarian preacher James Freeman Clarke). We are consciousness or thought. You are your thoughts. Every soul is free and autonomous. The after-life is a realm of thought and manifesting those things we need for our personal growth. We choose to be here on earth—and, as it is taught in Hinduism, when we are re-born, we come back with amnesia--and don't remember our past lives because we would not be able to learn, otherwise. We are here to learn lessons. We are perfecting*

*ourselves for some higher purpose (but none of the writers know what that purpose is). Karma is real, religions are conduits for you to go deeper in to your SELF knowledge—as are the mythologies we accept. Every religious or non-religious path takes us toward the ONE. There is no judgement except for your self-judgment. Finding God on the other side is as elusive as this side. There is no HELL but there are places in the thought world where you can conjure up negative things when needed for your development. Evil people (like Hitler) do need special re-conditioning before they return, but evil is not eternally punished. All are saved. You are 100% responsible for your life every time. You attract people in your inner-circle who have been with you through many lifetimes—all playing different roles each time. Time is not linear. Suffering expedites learning. We may be living many lifetimes at once. As I mentioned, you reincarnate with the same people (in your ‘grape cluster’) and even perhaps same generations rebirth (think concentric circles)... The books ALL say you will see the lost loved-ones again you*

*choose to see again. There is only love on the other side.* The authors caution the usage of vague vocabulary to describe things, but whether it's a man and his strange dreams or a hypnotized patient, or a person who almost died who "saw the light"—the stories are the same. There's a lot more that I don't want to get into for sake of time, but this is the more benign information from the books.

It's a lot to take in. I wanted to write it off, but at that time and still today the words gave me hope. I want to believe this because it feels good. I have seen magic and miracles in my life so YES I believe this is all possible. THOUSANDS of stories that tell the same narrative makes you go hmmm... It's not scientific (yet) but some therapists are trying to figure out a way to make it mechanical. Emerson thought that Swedenborg was tapping into something that could one day be explained—he liked to use the word "mechanical". Time will be the judge; but it's been over 200 years that Westerners have begun accepting the paranormal as a part of our human experience. Easterners have believed in reincarnation for thousands of years.



Some version of reincarnation is in ALL of the major world religions if you do the research. Re-birth is a common theme in everything, especially nature. It is also interesting that religions (particularly Christianity) have accepted bodily resurrection but reject the paranormal stuff as quackery.

Rev. Kathleen you and Wayne will like this one... Did you know that the University of Virginia in Charlottesville has an entire department for studies of Near Death Experiences and childhood reincarnation—called the Division of Perceptual Studies?

Physics, and mediums (talking to the dead) still exist today as they did back then; and many people still utilize their intuitive skills.

People still and will always want answers for love that has been lost; people want to see the ones they love again after death. This out-of-the-box stuff might be a gift to us. Surely it has been taken advantage of by charlatans over the years—which makes it that much harder to share this information with you. I took a risk sharing this. But I actually didn't share the juicy stuff. My personal experiences. The

ongoing stories that have made me believe more and more. FYI, I did share those stories for 2 hours, months ago, at a Unity church here in Annapolis. I've chosen a more cautious approach with my message to you. Why is that? Honestly, sometimes I feel UUism is not a very FAITH- FULL space for conversations about personal spirituality. We love to wax poetic on the issues—but what about the religious stuff? What about personal piety? And contemplating the big spiritual questions, whether atheist or agnostic or Christian, it's still important work. Many joke that you go to the Unity church for spirituality and the UU church for social justice. I get it. It was funny but not so much anymore. We can be a place for deep spiritual questing. If our people can get acupuncture, reiki, and “do” yoga we can also explore the metaphysical arts.

UUCA can be a congregation that talks about the ethereal, and the earthly—a place that holds sacred religion and science. Remember our six sources. One source says: \* Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which

moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life; and another reads: \* Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit. Those two sources almost cancel each other out (you may not get that right away). It's sort of funny. But the point is we must test our ideas but we must also leave room for AWE! I have been awed in life many times and it has changed me.

(EARLY ENDING HERE) I am not trying to convert you to be a paranormal, metaphysical practitioner, I'm simply trying to get you to remember as you journey through this life you are a part of something BIG, beautiful and awe-inspiring. Stand and stare and remember that you are it and IT is you. May it be so. Amen.

(EXTENDED VERSION BELOW)

I have one last story that may AWE you. It's a sad but happy story about a man, his father and his son. I wrote this true story in my

latest book, *You Were Made for So Much More*. May this true story spark a flame in your curiosity, awe, and ever-expanding reality:

I decided to start spreading the word, so I began by emailing information to my close friends and associates. One of those messages was sent my long-time buddy John O, who had recently lost his 5-year-old son. John visited me during one of my AWAKE worship services. I expected that he would say something about the email message, but he just said he needed to “tell (me) something” after the service. So, afterward we went to my office. Both of us tried to speak first, but my friend insisted that I should begin. I said, “Johnny, I don’t think we ever die. Have you ever read *Journey of Souls*?” He laughed in disbelief, saying, “Rev., I came here to ask you the exact same thing!” I said, “That’s because I emailed you some information about this just a few days ago.” But he insisted he’d never received the message. We just sat together for a few minutes, thinking about all this, and he became teary-eyed. Finally, my friend, John said, “You know, losing our son, and now my dad, has been so

hard for us. It's been the toughest time in my life. We spoke to a medium - a good one - and we've made connections with our son, my dad, and other family members. Everybody's fine, but I miss them."

He asked, "Have you ever talked to a psychic?" I told him I had not and that it was a bit on the 'hocus pocus' side of things for me.

However, because so much was happening with these signs in my life, I listened and believed him. (John said) "Well, you might want to check my psychic out. She's good.... But right now (John said), I'm just freaking out over this Superman poster you have in your office."

Puzzled, I asked him to explain, and he told me an amazing story related to the death of his father... "Rev., the day my dad passed, my sister and I sat together in his home, waiting on the funeral home to come for him. We got to talking about the good times we had with him. My sister had a cellphone video of my dad dancing in this Superman costume he got for Father's Day. As usual, he played it up for the camera. Even then, we still got a chuckle out of watching it. Later that night, after the funeral home people had come and gone, my sister felt the urge to sleep in our dad's home, in his bed. As she

and my mother stood in his closet, going through his things, the bedside radio inexplicably began playing. Now, my father did not have the technical ability to set the timer or alarm, so the radio turning on by itself was definitely unusual. Odder yet was the music playing on the radio at that specific moment. It was the theme to the Superman movie, something not typically played on the radio. To this day, we believe it was a sign from my father—that he was okay. Even though his body lay in a funeral home 8 miles away, his soul was very much alive somewhere else... So today, I come in your office and you tell me that you are reading a book that I was planning to tell you to read; and, directly behind you is this Superman poster. Man (he said to me), this is not a coincidence!” And I say to you: This is not a coincidence. Amen.