

**Thin Line Between Saturday Night and Sunday Morning  
Unitarian Coastal Fellowship Zoom Worship**

**May 23, 2021**

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**The Thin Line Between Saturday Night and Sunday Morning.** In the middle of his song “Fruitcakes,” Jimmy Buffett says “there’s a thin line between Saturday night and Sunday morning.” What kind of line *is* that? And how do we hold that line – or make it disappear?

**Message:**

Jimmy Buffett sings the bemusement of the common folk – trying to navigate the inconsistencies (some would say hypocrisies) between work and play, between what people say and what they do, between the workaday world and Margaritaville – between Saturday night and Sunday morning.

Because Saturday night is when people let down their hair, let down their guard – let go of all those “shoulds” imposed by work, by society, by responsibility, by adulthood – and do things they wish they could do all the time. Have a party, have a drink, misbehave – live a little!

And Sunday morning is the time of reckoning. *Mea culpa* – it’s my fault; I am guilty. And so, on Sunday morning, I will rein myself back in, confess my sins, show up in church, and pretend that this sober and pious me is the *real* me – and that Saturday night me is an unfortunate aberration, or a side of me that I am trying to disown or reform or redeem – or maybe my evil twin!

Jimmy Buffett voices – and then he skewers – the widespread view that religion is somehow separate from real life. That the preachings and the teachings of Sunday morning are about resisting the temptations that bedevil us on Saturday night. Are about that line that separates right from wrong –

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though walking it demands a close watch on our hearts; demands eyes wide open all the time; demands turning the tide that ever threatens to engulf us.

The god's honest truth is: it's not that simple.

“Simple” imagines a world where good and evil are distinct and separate – imagines a line between them that can be walked; that can be held. Simple imagines an ongoing struggle in the universe, in human nature, in every human soul. Simple hopes that evil can be rooted out, defeated, overcome by the power of good.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn lived and wrote the complexity of that line between good and evil. In 1970, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his truth-telling. In 1973, in The Gulag Archipelago he wrote,

“Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart—and through all human hearts. This line shifts. Inside us, it oscillates with the years. And even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained. And even in the best of all hearts, there remains ... an un-uprooted small corner of evil.”

Solzhenitsyn goes on to say:

“Since then I have come to understand the truth of all the religions of the world: They struggle with the *evil inside a human being* (inside every human being). It is impossible to expel evil from the world in

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its entirety, but it is possible to constrict it within each person.

[<https://fee.org/articles/aleksandr-solzhenitsyns-forgotten-lesson-on-good-and-evil/>] (FEE = Foundation for Economic Education)

Evil is not “out there,” somewhere else, *someone* else. It is so tempting – so simple – to imagine that evil is “other;” that we can bind it or disown it; banish it or defeat it entirely. Nor does “in here” have a special claim to goodness – even to goodness cultivated, or redeemed, or restored by confession, or by grace. In truth, both are within us and between us in every day, in every action, in every breath – on Sunday morning no less than on Saturday night.

In truth, sometimes evil and good are hard to tell apart. Perhaps you know this Taoist story of an old farmer...

Every day, the farmer used his horse to help work his fields and keep his farm healthy. But one day, the horse ran away.

All the villagers came by and said, “We’re so sorry to hear this. This is such bad luck.”

And the farmer responded, “**Bad luck. Good luck. Who knows?**”

A few weeks went by and then one afternoon, while the farmer was working outside, he looked up and saw his horse running toward him. But the horse was not alone. The horse was returning to him

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with a whole herd of horses. So now the farmer had 10 horses to help work his fields.

All the villagers came by to congratulate the farmer and said, “Wow! This is such good luck!”

And the farmer responded, **“Good luck. Bad luck. Who knows?”**

A few weeks later, the farmer's son came over to visit and help his father work on the farm. While trying to tame one of the horses, the farmer's son fell and broke his leg.

The villagers came by to commiserate and said, “How awful. This is such bad luck.”

And the farmer responded, **“Bad luck. Good luck. Who knows?”**

A month later, the farmer's son was still recovering. He wasn't able to walk or do any manual labor to help his father around the farm. A regiment of the army came marching through town conscripting every able-bodied young man to join them. When the regiment came to the farmer's house and saw the son's broken leg, they marched past and left him where he lay.

Of course, all the villagers came by and said, “Amazing! This is such good luck. You're so fortunate.”

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And you know the farmer's response by now... **“Good luck. Bad luck. Who knows?”** [<https://blog.mindfulness.com/meditation/are-these-bad-times-or-good-times-the-story-of-the-zen-farmer>].

In truth, we are not well served when we demonize others – or parts of ourselves. When we declare our adversaries – or our own impulses – to be *persona non grata*; to be Public Enemy Number One; to be “The Problem.” And then convince ourselves that if we could only vanquish that evil other, then we would be fine. We and the world would be free. Would go forth and sin no more. The god's honest truth is: it's not that simple.

It's not that simple in the spheres of international politics, or domestic politics, or social justice, or family dynamics. It's not that simple within our own souls, television preachers notwithstanding. No strategy that is based on separation, on division, on either/or, serves us well. The universe is complicated – more intricate and mysterious than we can ever comprehend. Life is complicated; we are complicated. Good luck? Bad luck? Who knows?

Solzhenitsyn knew, and he wrote it. All the religions of the world know it: beneath the dogma and the popularization and the over-simplification, they remind us that we, ourselves, are complicated – every human one of us.

**And** – the simple, simple god's truth – religion reminds us that we are connected: to something larger than ourselves; and also connected *within* ourselves. Strong **and** vulnerable. Generous **and** self-absorbed. Virtuous **and** fallible. Angry **and** forgiving. Victim **and** perpetrator. Wise **and**

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foolish. Saint **and** sinner. Saturday night and Sunday morning – every single day of the week.

Our work, then; what's going on, then – since Jimmy Buffett asks – is exactly the work of embodying that connectedness. The work of befriending those parts of ourselves that we are tempted to disown; of learning to understand that even those parts have goodness in them, have evil in them; learning to accept that each aspect is tempered by the presence of the other. Our work is to learn how compassion flows from woundedness healed, and to learn to offer compassion to ourselves and to others. Our work is to learn how injury follows from the closed fist of fear; to disengage from the fist that would pummel us; and to unclench our own fists that we may extend to the world an open hand. Our work is to learn ways to constrict the evil within each person – others no less than ourselves – and to know that ultimately we will never know good from bad.

Our work, then – the work of our lives and of our living every day – is religious work: the work of resisting the urge to sunder, to separate, to split off and condemn, and instead to bind together all that we are. Our work is to be not just one thing – never one thing – but always all that we are: complex, fallible, imperfect, always working towards wholeness.

Let this song by singer-songwriter May Erlewine take us out of words and into music. *Never One Thing* was inspired by the Walt Whitman verse, “I am large. I contain multitudes.” [<https://genius.com/May-erlewine-never-one-thing-lyrics#about>].

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*Never One Thing*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJcIXwzxDJo>

Tom shares screen

May it be so.