

50TH ANNIVERSARY SUNDAY AT UUFSD

Wow, we can sure resonate with the phrase of Unitarian poet e.e.cummings: “thank you god for most this amazing day...” the memories and meanings of this day have truly met all our expectations. And, yes, thank you Great Spirit for graciously throwing in such wondrous weather as well.

I find it intriguing that this week we’ve also celebrated the 200th birthday anniversary of two celebrated Americans—Abraham Lincoln and Charles Darwin—persons who, like ourselves, have been soaked in religious liberalism. Clearly, our Fellowship founders were following in the footsteps of such freethinkers as Lincoln and Darwin, when they launched this religious tribe back on February 15, 1959.

Lincoln rejected creeds, and so did our forebears. And Lincoln described democracy using words that could well resemble the mission statement of our Fellowship founders: “of the people, for the people, and by the people...” and, of course, you know where Lincoln got those words? Directly from a sermon of our own Unitarian giant, Theodore Parker, back in the 1850s.

And surely, Lincoln’s sense of justice, sense of compassion, and sense of humor...all resonate deeply with our own San Dieguitan pioneers!

And Darwin dwells in our spiritual lineage as well. The son of a physician father and a devout Unitarian mother, young Darwin was headed for a career in the church. But first, he seized a chance to travel on a five-year journey of the HMS Beagle, which took him to the southernmost tip of South America. He then waited twenty years to publish the theories he began to develop in South America, painfully aware of the worldview he would unsettle.

Never forget that Darwin's *Origin of Species* was the last classic scientific text to engage theology directly, not the first to dismiss it. He anticipated religious questions and concerns at every turn and responded carefully to them. Darwin didn't shy away from words like creation, reverence, grandeur, and wonder, always embracing the universe with intellectual and spiritual passion. Just like our Fellowship founders did!

Yes, precisely as you and I sit this morning upon the broad shoulders of our own San Dieguitan pioneers, so these same founders sat upon the shoulders of religious progressives such as Lincoln and Darwin.

You see, my friends, we can never properly celebrate the present, let alone chart the future, without cherishing the past, without actively remembering who we are and in whose debt we dwell. As Maya Angelou rightly puts it: "We are here, because somebody has loved us enough to make sure that we're still here... yes, we're here, because someone paid for us." And now it's our time to pay back, it's our turn to pay homage to those who've gone before us and our turn to pay forward for those coming on ahead.

It's our time now; it's our turn now.

And what a joyous duty it is, what a blessing it is to suit up and join in, at this crucial passage in the 50 year history of this beloved Fellowship. Indeed, what an honor! It's clearly too late to be called a pioneer, and most of you may never serve as a Fellowship President, but every one of you can become a full-fledged partisan and pacesetter...indeed, we need, more than ever before, for you to do just that: to become a full-fledged Fellowship partisan and pacesetter. We really do!

And now, won't you join me in three hip-hip-hoorays for all San Dieguitans who've gone before us, for all those present today, and for all those who soon will be following in your footsteps.

Hip-hip-hooray, hip-hip-hooray, hip-hip-hooray!

Tom Owen-Towle

February 15, 2009