

**UUCE Sunday Worship Service
August 5, 2012
UU're Rapture**

James Fisher

**Your silence during the prelude, offertory and postlude is greatly appreciated.
Large print hymnals and assistive listening are available. Please ask the ushers.**

Gathering music:	Wayne Smith
Welcome, Announcements, Welcome Visitors:	Board Member
Ringing Bell:	James Fisher

“On a Sunday morning the bells of the three churches in the village called all to come to meeting, for the church was still spoken of as the meetinghouse. The bells did not interfere with one another; whichever bell started ringing first would pause after two or three minutes and let the others take up the summons. All three bells had individual tones easily identified. The loungers on the hotel steps, who never went to church, not only recognized the notes of each, but were able interpret what they said. According to their insight, the Methodist bell shouted ‘Repent! Repent!’ The Presbyterian bell urged ‘Church time!’ Church time!’ Only the Universalist bell held out a cheerful promise. ‘No hell! No hell!’ it said. The loungers felt safe in staying where they were.”

Anne Gertrude Sneller

Prelude:	Wayne Smith
Call to Worship Morning #438	Responsive Reading

Morning - Clinton Lee Scott

From the East comes the sun, bringing a new and unspoiled day
It has already circled the earth and looked upon distant lands and far away people.

It has passed over mountain ranges and the waters of the seven seas.
It has shone upon the laborers in the fields, into the windows of homes, and shops, and factories.

It has beheld proud cities with gleaming towers.
And also the hovels of the poor

It has been witness to both good and evil, the works of honest men and women and the conspiracy of knaves.

It has seen marching armies, bob-blasted villages and "the destruction that wasteth at non-day."

**Now, unsullied from its tireless journey, it comes to us, messenger of the morning,
Harbinger of a new day**

Chalice lighting

Congregation

*We light this chalice, for the light of truth,
We light this chalice, for the warmth of love,
We light this chalice, for the fire of commitment.
We light this chalice, as a symbol of our faith, as we gather together.*

Opening hymn: #188 Come, Come, Whoever You Are

A Time for All Ages – Experiments in Flight

James Fisher

Can anyone tell me what Gravity means?

Gravity has a couple meanings.

- Science: the attractive force between two masses
- Gravititas: Seriousness, solemnity

How many of you, young and old, every tried to fly?

How did you do it?

My sister and I used an umbrella. We started indoors, jumping off of chairs hoping to float down. When one umbrella and a short jump didn't work, we went to the back yard and ran off a hill with the two biggest umbrellas we could find.

Not the little collapsible umbrellas you see today, but great big black Mary Poppins umbrellas. I think once it worked, at least a little. After that I was hooked.

I jumped off of progressively higher branches in the trees and leading up to ankle bending jumps off the barn roof. Gravity always won.

That's all gliding down, slowing the force of gravity.

How about trying to go up?

What would help you to fly up?

Hot air experiment:

Readings

First letter of Paul to the Thessalonians: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape."

"Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else." (excerpt **1 Thessalonians 5**)

<http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/2012/05/02/one-in-seven-thinks-the-end-of-the-world-is-coming-soon-poll/>

Nearly 15 percent of people worldwide believe the world will end during their lifetime and 10 percent think the Mayan calendar could signify it will happen in 2012, according to a new poll.

The end of the Mayan calendar, which spans about 5,125 years, on December 21, 2012 has sparked interpretations and suggestions that it marks the end of the world.

"Whether they think it will come to an end through the hands of God, or a natural disaster or a political event, whatever the reason, one in seven thinks the end of the world is coming," said Keren Gottfried, research manager at Ipsos Global Public Affairs which conducted the poll for Reuters.

"Perhaps it is because of the media attention coming from one interpretation of the Mayan prophecy that states the world 'ends' in our calendar year 2012," Gottfried said, adding that some Mayan scholars have disputed the interpretation.

Responses to the international poll of 16,262 people in more than 20 countries varied widely with only six percent of French residents believing in an impending Armageddon in their lifetime, compared to 22 percent in Turkey and the United States and slightly less in South Africa and Argentina.

But only seven percent in Belgium and eight percent in Great Britain feared an end to the world during their lives.

Hymn: #87 Nearer My God to The

Spoken meditation

James Fisher

#599 Sikh - Tegh Bahadur (Tegh Bahadur)

Why do you go to the forest in search of the Divine?
 God lives in all, and abides with you too.
 As fragrance dwells in a flower, or reflection in a mirror,
 so the Divine dwells inside everything;
 seek therefore in your own heart.

Silent Meditation and Musical Response

Joys and Sorrows

Ours is welcoming community where we find connection;
...a spiritual community where we find meaning;

Ours is a sharing community where our joys are amplified;
...a caring community where our sorrows are lessened;

We take this moment to reflect on our joys and sorrows and acknowledge the mutual support of our community;

If you would like, you may share a personal joy or sorrow. Please save political statements or announcements for coffee and conversation following the service.

We light this candle for all the joys and sorrows left unspoken. Please join me in reading the congregational response.

Congregational Response: Thus do we weave our lives together.
We mourn. We rejoice. We will remember.

Offering

Let there be an offering to sustain and strengthen this place which is sacred to so many of us, a community of memory and of hopes, for we are now the keepers of the dream.
If you are a first time visitor, please let the plate pass you by. Your presence is gift enough.

Congregational response: For these and all gifts of our community, we are grateful.

Sermon “UU’re Rapture”
Defining Rapture v. The Rapture

James Fisher

Rapture

1. the state of mind resulting from feelings of high emotion; joyous ecstasy
2. (*often plural*) an expression of ecstatic joy
3. the act of transporting a person from one sphere of existence to another, esp from earth to heaven

Growing up UU my understanding of rapture was wrapped up in enchantment: by natural beauty, art or music, and later by love and its correlates, and now perhaps back to nature and art.

There was no dark side in my recollection. Perhaps that was the Universalist voice. We experienced rapture either individually or collectively as a great social event.

Thinking back, most of us can recall times of personal rapture, some as crystalline moments when our hearts were set to burst with pure joy of experience. Some as a still-quiet fog, softening earthly boundaries, a buffer from the challenges and turmoil of the outer world, giving peace to reflect on our happiness. Biologists have identified specific chemicals produced by our bodies, such as endorphins (endogenous morphines), that produce a feeling of euphoria or well-being.

If we can capture the formula, we may seek to repeat the rapturous experience. For me the experience of playing music can induce rapture, or vexation when I don't hit my notes.

The risk to rapture ratio is high in my case. It is still higher for people that depend on drugs, alcohol or high risk behaviors.

This is not to say that Unitarian Universalists don't recognize enormous natural and man-made challenges – or tribulations – in the world: overpopulation, environmental degradation, climate change, racism, poverty, hunger, intolerance. The plague of frogs or locusts may have been vanquished, and we may be trying to restore the frogs, but other plagues are seemingly beyond our control. Environmental, social, economic and health apocalypses are near at hand.

The Rapture

I will preface my remarks with an apology. Debate about The Rapture involves a great deal of detail. My short foray cannot do justice to the many competing beliefs about “The Rapture”.

The Bible does not provide a great deal of information about this concept. Yet, being a book filled with parables, obscure concepts further obscured over time by translation and interpretation.

As I quoted earlier, Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians predicts that God will come like a thief in the night to catch up those who have died and those who have led a righteous life.

The Bible is a complex document, and provides fodder for a great many religious creeds.

Eschatology: a part of [theology](#), [philosophy](#), and [futurology](#) concerned with what are believed to be the final events of [history](#), the [ultimate destiny](#) of humanity—commonly referred to as the "end of the world" or "[end time](#)".

The **Great Tribulation** refers to a time of trouble described during the "[signs of the times](#)", first mentioned by [Jesus](#) in the [Olivet discourse](#).^[1] Preterists believe this happened in the past. Futurists, with whom I am concerned today, believe that this will be a seven year period of increasing strife and conflict.

"**Rapture**" is derived from [Middle French](#) *rapture*, via the [Medieval Latin](#) *raptura* ("seizure, rape, kidnapping"), which derives from the Latin *raptus* ("a carrying off"). For the uninitiated, the rapture is a moment when “faithful” are caught up, fly up, disapperate, or are beamed up to heaven. They leave this world behind for a kind of utopia. Those “left behind” are consigned to

years, sometimes thought to be seven and other times though to be 1,000 in a dystopia filled with tribulations.

Armageddon (from [Hebrew](#): [הַר מְגִדּוֹ](#), *Har Megiddo*, lit. *Mount Megiddo*; [Ancient Greek](#): Ἄρμαγεδών *Harmagedōn*,^{[1][2]} [Late Latin](#): *Armagedōn*^[3]) is, according to the Bible, the site of a battle during the [end times](#), variously interpreted as either a literal or symbolic location. The term is also used in a generic sense to refer to any [end of the world](#) scenario.

An **apocalypse** ([ancient Greek](#): [ἀποκάλυψις](#) *apocalypsis*, from [ἀπό](#) and [καλύπτω](#) meaning 'un-covering') is a [revelation](#) of something hidden. In religious contexts it is usually a revelation of hidden meaning - hidden from mankind in an era dominated by falsehood and misconception. In the [Revelation of John](#) (Greek *Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰωάννου*, *Apocalypsis Ioannou*), the last book of the [New Testament](#), the revelation which John receives is that of the ultimate victory of good over evil and the end of the present age; and so many people have used the word *apocalypse* very loosely to refer to any [End Time](#) scenario, or to the [end of the world](#) in general.

If you search the internet for information about the Rapture, you will find an immense number of books, movies, sermons, essays, pictures, you name it. Cyberspace has helped to build a significant if scattered following.

You will also find UU commentary on the rapture. Rev. Lone Jenson Broussard of Birmingham, Alabama writes:

The story and movie Left Behind are based on the concept that there will actually be two comings of Christ, the first of which is secret and called the “pre-tribulation.” The theory is that in the pre-tribulation rapture Christ comes to take the saints and the true believers to heaven so that they can be spared the terrible judgments that are to take place for 7 years until the final coming of Christ occurs.

(She goes on to write)

It is not a new theory, this idea of an end time where our world will be destroyed and a new Heaven and Earth created, many early Christian communities established after Jesus’ death and under constant threats from the Roman authorities believed that Jesus would return in their life time. It was also in those times of extreme persecution and fear that the book of Revelation was written. Some scholars believe it was really written in a kind of code with Roman governors and the emperor Nero depicted as evil creatures to give the beleaguered faithful a small measure of hope. But the version of Pre-tribulation and Rapture that is depicted in these books and movies is not ancient and was made popular in 1830 by a Scottish woman named Margaret Macdonald in the Catholic Apostolic Church. It is not an accepted Catholic doctrine.”

Perhaps more influential and a little prior to Margaret Macdonald, London-born evangelist John Darby and members of the Irish-born Plymouth brethren adopted the idea of Judeo-Christians being “caught up” before a period of strife.” Darby evangelized throughout Great Britain and the United States in the 1830’s to 1870’s. He is by some accounts the father of Christian theory of the rapture.

His message, though not a central theme of the bible, become an important element of the 1909 and 1917 *Scofield Reference Bible* also called the [study Bible](#), mixed translated bible verse with interpretations and cross references. The author [Cyrus I. Scofield](#) embedded the concept of [dispensationalism](#) (the seven eras between the coming of Christ and the Apocalypse with the [Protestant King James Version](#) of the Bible).

The Scofield Bible was very popular and no doubt legitimized Darby's heretofore controversial interpretation.

I'm in over my head. Debate about "the rapture" is complex. Looking in from the outside, as it were, I would not have imagined the level of detail about how things are predicted to occur.

This is not one term here that is not debated among the believers, let alone an unlikely secular humanist.

One example will suffice, that is the order in which the rapture might occur. Recall that Paul's letter to the Thessalonians provides very little detail of the course of events. The question arises, and is still debated among believers as to whether the rapture begins prior to the tribulations, during the tribulations or at the end of the tribulations. Obviously for believers it would be well for it to occur "pre-trib". Others argue that the tribulations are part of the filtering process, if you like, to determine who will be caught up. Paul suggests that the righteous that die will be taken up first, an assurance for those that might die during the tribulations, perhaps.

Social Theory

Admittedly, I am not a historian. My sermon, as it were, should rest on stronger sociological grounds. The **Thomas theorem** is a theory of sociology formulated in 1928 by [W. I. Thomas](#) and [D. S. Thomas](#) (1863–1947) states, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" The Rapture, it seems, has been very real in its consequences, at least for several significant subcultures, religions and sects.

Whereas my child's notion of rapture was a bit like the Universalist creed that all people are saved by a higher power defined as love, "The Rapture" is has clear winners and losers. My sociological question, then, is what risks do we bear as a society when we accept the notion of a cosmic triage?

Sociologists look at society through many lenses, and these may help to illuminate consequences and unintended consequences. I would enjoy providing a lengthy lecture about functionalism, conflict models, critical theory and symbolic interaction as they apply to the rapture, but as the sun shines and the coffee perks. I will narrow down to one of the most intriguing areas of sociological analysis, so called Collective Behavior.

Collective behavior emerges in the moment, often in crowds or in crisis situations. In these crises, norms are unclear, or contradict each other.

New Religious Movements, Cults and Christianity

- “Rev Jim Jones founded the **Peoples Temple** in 1955. By the mid-1970s, the People’s Temple included over a dozen locations in California including its [headquarters in San Francisco](#).

It is best known for the events of November 18, 1978, in [Guyana](#), in which 918 people died at the [Peoples Temple Agricultural Project](#) (informally, and now commonly, called "Jonestown") and nearby airstrip at [Port Kaituma](#), and [Georgetown](#) in an organized mass suicide/killing.

The mass suicide has many hallmarks of collective behavior, supported by a charismatic leader (who was in declining health) and a committed cadre of enforcers called the red brigade. Audio recordings made during this horrific event suggest that followers were presented with the choice of dying now with dignity for latter facing severe abuse, so shall we say tribulations, by a fascist government. The choice was false, but the actions were true in their consequences.” (Wikipedia)

- Branch Davidians
David Koresh (born **Vernon Wayne Howell**; August 17, 1959 – April 19, 1993) fought his way into the hierarchy of the Branch Davidian sect, eventually leading one member group. He believed himself to be its final [prophet](#). A [1993 raid](#) by the U.S. [Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives](#), and the [subsequent siege](#) by the [FBI](#) ended with the burning of the [Branch Davidian ranch](#) outside of [Waco, Texas](#), in McLennan County. Koresh, 54 other adults and 28 children were found dead after the fire. Some, like Koresh died of self inflicted bullet wounds. (Wikipedia)
- Heavens Gate
Heaven's Gate, an American [UFO religion](#) based in [San Diego, California](#), founded and led by [Marshall Applewhite](#) and [Bonnie Nettles](#).^[1] On March 26, 1997, police discovered the bodies of 39 members of the group who had committed suicide^[2] by ingesting an overdose of Phenobarbital in order to reach an alien space craft which they believed was following the [Comet Hale-Bopp](#), which was at its brightest. The suicide was systematic, with members dressed in identical outfits, lying in bed with purple squares of cloth on their faces. (Wikipedia)
- **Harold Egbert Camping** (born July 19, 1921) is an American [Christian radio](#) broadcaster. Camping predicted that [Jesus Christ](#) would return to Earth [on May 21, 2011](#), whereupon the righteous would [fly up to heaven](#), and that there would follow five months of fire, [brimstone](#) and plagues on Earth, with millions of people dying each day, culminating on October 21, 2011, with the final destruction of the world.^{[6][7]} He had previously predicted that [Judgment Day](#) would occur on or about September 6, 1994. (Pre-trib rapture)

“One engineer spent most of his retirement savings on publicizing Camping's predictions, only to see them fail to materialize. Another former believer in Camping told the reporter, "I think I was part of a cult.”” (Wikipedia)

On May 21st skeptics congregated outside his church with signs reading, “Honk if I can have your car, post rapture” “The end is far away” “Judgment day is cancelled”

It is somewhat surprising that Camping worked so diligently to fix a date for the Rapture. Rapture believers generally subscribe to Paul’s letter saying that Jesus will come as a thief in the night.

More prevalent among the technically savvy believers are various metrics to discern the coming of tribulations. One of the more developed metrics is the Rapture Index found at www.raptureready.com.

The Purpose For This Index

The Rapture Index has two functions: one is to factor together a number of related end time components into a cohesive indicator, and the other is to standardize those components to eliminate the wide variance that currently exists with prophecy reporting.

The Rapture Index is by no means meant to predict the rapture, however, the index is designed to measure the type of activity that could act as a precursor to the rapture.

You could say the Rapture index is a Dow Jones Industrial Average of end time activity, but I think it would be better if you viewed it as prophetic speedometer. The higher the number, the faster we're moving towards the occurrence of pre-tribulation rapture.

Rapture Index of 100 and Below: Slow prophetic activity
Rapture Index of 100 to 130: Moderate prophetic activity
Rapture Index of 130 to 160: Heavy prophetic activity
Rapture Index above 160: Fasten your seat belts

The Rapture Index

1. False Christs	3	18. Ecumenism	5	35. Date Settings	4
2. Occult	3	19. Globalism	4	36. Volcanoes	4
3. Satanism	3	20. Tribulation Temple	3	37. Earthquakes	4
4. Unemployment	4	21. Anti-Semitism	4	38. Wild Weather	5
5. Inflation	4	22. Israel	5	39. Civil Rights	4
6. Interest Rates	3	23. Gog (Russia)	5	40. Famine	4
7. The Economy	5	24. Persia (Iran)	5	41. Drought	5
8. Oil Supply/Price	4	25. False Prophet	3	42. Plagues	3
9. Debt & Trade	5	26. Nuclear Nations	5	43. Climate	5
10. Financial unrest	5	27. Global Turmoil	5	44. Food Supply	5
11. Leadership	5	28. Arms Proliferation	4	45. Floods	5
12. Drug abuse	5	29. Liberalism	3		
13. Apostasy	4	30. Peace Process	2		
14. Supernatural	2	31. Kings of the East	4	Rapture Index 183	
15. Moral Standards	5	32. Mark of the Beast	3	Net Change unch	
16. Anti-Christian	4	33. Beast Government	3		
	5		3		

Updated Jul 30,
2012

17. Crime Rate

34. The Antichrist

2009 High	169	2010 High	174	2011 high	184	2012 high	184
2009 Low	157	2010 Low	168	2011 Low	172	2012 Low	176

Record High 184
8 Aug 11

Record Low 57
12 Dec 93

- **Mayan Calendar** December 21, 2012 phenomenon has become another point of debate for [eschatological](#) events. The end-date of a 5,125-year-long cycle in the [Mesoamerican Long Count calendar](#) resulting from astronomical alignments and numerical formulae. The Mayan and pre-mayan religions do not suggest that the Rapture will occur on this date, but note that this is an opportunity, then end of an era, to reflect.

I may be stretching the concept of collective behavior in some of these cases. Jim Jones had his followers rehearse their mass suicide more than once. Heaven's Gate followers did not act spontaneously, but rather in a planned and organized fashion. The question, in all these cases, is by what set of social norms these unfortunate followers were operating. How far had the norms established by their charismatic leaders and their fellow believers deviated from larger social norms? Were they grounded in social or religious cues provided by wider society?

Society does not dictate our behavior, but it is an environment in which we operate and our choices are to some extent circumscribed by dominant values, mores and laws.

Conclusion

I started this sojourn with thoughts of rapture, our emotional response to beauty and joy. Our world is not a perfect place, and we can expect to confront challenges large and small every day.

The Rapture would appear to be a sad case of our desire to escape this world to a permanent state of utopia, to vindicate our choices and leave those with whom we have differences behind.

Dr. Suess captures this elusive nature of utopia beautifully in *I Had Trouble Getting to Solla Sollew* - "where they never have troubles / at least very few". The protagonist goes through many tribulations, only to discover that he did not have entry to utopia.

In the end we will need to muddle through.

"Universalists believe that all of us are going to end up together in heaven, so we might as well learn how to get along with each other now."

Gordon McKeeman

Finally, from Douglas Adams Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy, a story that practically begins with the complete destruction of the earth. There is a pre-apocalyptic rapture in which all of the dolphins fly up to heave, leaving their parting words: So long, and thanks for all the fish.

Beam me up Jonathan.

Closing Hymn: Up Up and Aware (Words in your order of service)

Artist: Jimmy Web, The Fifth Dimension

Title: Up, Up And Away

Would you like to ride in my beautiful balloon
 Would you like to ride in my beautiful balloon
 We could float among the stars together, you and I
 For we can fly we can fly

Up, up and away
 My beautiful, my beautiful balloon

The world's a nicer place in my beautiful balloon
 It wears a nicer face in my beautiful balloon
 We can sing a song and sail along the silver sky
 For we can fly we can fly

Up, up and away
 My beautiful, my beautiful balloon

Suspended under a twilight canopy
 We'll search the clouds for a star to guide us
 If by some chance you find yourself loving me
 We'll find a cloud to hide us
 We'll keep the moon beside us

Love is waiting there in my beautiful balloon
 Way up in the air in my beautiful balloon
 If you'll hold my hand we'll chase your dream across the sky
 For we can fly we can fly

Up, up and away
 My beautiful, my beautiful balloon
 Balloon...
 Up, up, and away.....

Closing Words (Joseph L. Fisher, Living Religion)

O, Past

Heavy laden with both grief and joy,
Accomplishment and frustration,
Gain and Loss.

O, future –

Bursting with promise like a spring bud,
Trembling with imagined danger,
Inscrutable.

O Man

O Woman –

Cut into the unknown waiting to be known,
Respect the world of nature and all its life,
Act with caring and with love for all humanity,
Link Past to Future, Soul with world.
Stand on the ground,
And touch the sky.

Postlude: Wayne Smith