



**Leap of Faith**  
**Glenetta Krause**  
**First Unitarian Church of Cincinnati**  
**536 Linton Street**  
**Cincinnati, Ohio 45219**  
**513.281.1564**  
**February 28, 2016**

*"To have faith requires courage, the ability to take a risk, the readiness even to accept pain and disappointment. Whoever insists on safety and security as primary conditions of life cannot have faith."*  
*-Eric Fromm*

**Call to Worship:**

**Every fourth** year is a leap year, as a rule of thumb. But that's not the end of the story. A year that is divisible by 100, but not by 400, is not. So 2000 was a leap year under the Gregorian calendar, as was 1600. But 1700, 1800 and 1900 are not leap years. "It seems a bit arbitrary," says Ian Stewart, emeritus professor of mathematics at Warwick University. But there's a good reason behind it.

"The year is 365 days and a quarter long - but not exactly. If it was exactly, then you could say it was every four years. But it is very slightly less." The answer arrived at by Pope Gregory XIII and his astronomers when they introduced the Gregorian calendar in 1582, was to lose three leap days every 400 years. The maths has hung together ever since. It will need to be rethought in about 10,000 years' time, Stewart warns. But by then mankind might have come up with a new system.

From the BBC News Magazine PM  
<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-17203353>

When I was just a little girl, I remember someone telling me that if you were born on February 29<sup>th</sup>, you would only have your birthday once every four years. In the example, someone might look 28 years old, but in fact they would be celebrating their 7<sup>th</sup> birthday. To me, this seemed like some kind of tricky way to quadruple your lifespan. When you were a hundred, you'd actually only be 25. And while of course you might enjoy fewer birthday cakes over your years, you'd have more years. You could escape death for quite some time. These little tricks of the calendar and clock have always fascinated me. Sometimes I sit in a movie theater astonished that the whole audience agrees on the definition of "7:30" and we

understand it to mean that we drop everything we are doing so that we can watch a romantic comedy together. History books lead us to believe that everything changes with a flip of the calendar's page. There is 1776 and not much of interest happening before that. There is a world before 9/11 and there is a world after.

New Year's Eve is another trick of the calendar. As a girl, I would stay up until midnight on New Year's Eve. Then in that first minute or hour or day, I'd think of all the chances I had to do something again for the first time. *This is the first time I've laughed in the New Year. This is the first peanut butter sandwich of the New Year. This is the first time I said "aluminum" in the New Year.*

As we get older, the calendar and the clock start playing tricks on us. The supple body of our youth that could bend and twist and dance and run turns into a bloated sac that holds our stiff skeleton in painful bondage. And a brain, smarter than it has ever been, watches it all happening—age spots, far-sightedness, bunions. With some amazement and some disgust. I went to several doctors this summer and it was finally determined that I have arthritis in my hips. My ball and socket scrape against one another, bone touching bone. The socket is slightly misshapen, and they call it dysplasia, something I thought only happened to German shepherds. As a matter of fact, my doctor told me, "You have the hips of a 70-year-old woman." That tricky calendar again. If this 70-year-old woman had been born on Leap Day, I'd have the hips of a 280-year-old woman. And if she were a German shepherd, I'd have the hips of a 10-year-old.

Everything old is new again after a trick like that. *This is the first time I've gone to physical therapy. This is the first time I've considered surgery. This is the first time my body scared me. This is the first time I felt helpless.*

In yoga, the practice ends with corpse pose. It is exactly what it sounds like. You lie flat on the floor, eyes closed and release all the tension in your body. Your palms open to the ceiling, your toes fall the side. You try to think of nothing. You know from our experiences with meditation here that it's harder than it looks. *Don't think of how tired you are. Don't think about what you're going to eat when you get home. Don't think about your impending death. Think of nothing. Think of nothing. Just like you will during your impending death.*

Corpse pose caps off your yoga practice because your practice is supposed to mimic your life. You are born at the beginning of the practice with the warmth of sun salutes. The practice is more vigorous in the middle, just like your life. Towards the end you slow down. The practice and your life become more reflective. And finally you lay down on the earth as it comes to an end.

Osteoarthritis has made yoga harder for me. And a few years of trying to figure out why things hurt so much—*maybe I need to rest? Maybe I need to run? Maybe this just isn't for me anymore*—has gotten me out of my yoga routine altogether. Which is another one of those ironic tricks the calendar plays. The pain makes you avoid your practice. The lack of practice makes you depressed and lethargic. All of the sudden it has been months since you were at the studio and you don't want to go back where you'll feel fat and old next to all those supple young bodies. Bodies that may or may not actually be young. Maybe the trick is that they do yoga so much that they appear young. One of my teachers was seventy. Just like my hips.

It's tricky. Time plays tricks and so does my hip. I can walk down stairs or a sidewalk and if my leg "gives out" the trick's on me and I'm lying on the curb. And the fear of that happening again makes me stiffen up. I don't jump up from these occasional falls as fast as I used to.

Recently, I heard Steve Harvey speak in a YouTube video. He hosts Family Feud of all things and he gives a pep talk to his studio audience after the show. He said that if you are going to be successful in this life you are going to have to climb up the rocky ridge of your life and you are going to have to jump. With no plan of how you'll safely land. He used examples from his own life. He spoke of a friend who had the lowly job of detailing cars. But he was gifted. He trusted his gift and jumped into business. His gift for auto detailing—for cleaning dust and grit from cars with a Q-tip—made him prosperous. Steve Harvey says that man trusted that gift, jumped into it fully, started his own business, and now makes \$800,000 a year.

Steve Harvey's gift is telling jokes. Lots of us do that and we love it. And maybe we think, wouldn't it be great to do that for a living? Steve Harvey DID it. Steve Harvey started doing stand-up everywhere. Imagine what his parents might have thought. He's the son of a coal miner—a coal miner who might have thought "Wouldn't it make more sense to have a sensible job, maybe in an office somewhere and just tell jokes on the side?" But Steve Harvey didn't. He made the leap into movies and a TV show with his name on it. And all he does is what he loves. He trusts in the gifts he has been given.

Had Steve Harvey himself not jumped, had he not left his old life in Welch, West Virginia, had he not leaped towards his new life in Hollywood, why, he never would have become a successful game show host. His pep talk was laced with religiosity. He said that God places you on that cliff and he gives you everything you need to get down. I ignore some of that because if you follow that line of thinking too closely the reasonable conclusion is that God pushed you off the cliff. But his main point is that you have to trust that you have the gifts you need to make it to the ground. Your gifts, your talents may seem lowly. After all, what gift is required in order to be a great game show host? It's telling jokes, which we all have done but we are scared to do for a living.

How do you trust in your gifts? How do you believe that you're going to be able to make it all the way down to flat, safe ground when your wings are made of jokes and Q-tips? Sometimes being a Unitarian makes it hard to make that leap of faith that other religions seem to encourage. We pride ourselves on our skeptical doubt. We have trained ourselves to see past the fallacies. It makes it hard to know who to trust. I tell you, sometimes as a Unitarian, you can't even trust yourself. Because you're so tricky.

When I was about 20, I came home late to my parent's house. I had served Big Boy platters all evening to farmers and their wives at Frisch's in Marion, Ohio and my polyester uniform smelled like french fries. I walked across the front yard, bedraggled, tired. I looked up and saw one million stars. They shine so much brighter where I grew up than they do here. And I heard a voice, not with my ears but cutting through all the chatter and grog in my brain, and it said, "I made this all for you." I have always thought of that as the time I first heard the voice of God. Now, I don't think that God sat down next to me and he certainly didn't

set any bushes on fire. But the universe needed me to know something right then. I took it to mean that everything—the polyester, the Big Boys, my family in the house, the stars I stood under, the galaxy, the universe, EVERYTHING was made in order that the unique gifts I had could plug in to the empty spots the world had. My less-than-minimum wage job, my greasy uniform, would need to be left behind so that the 20-year-old I was then could become the 48-year-old I am now. I would just use my gifts and make the jump.

Can you believe at the time I was avoiding a career in teaching? I didn't want to do it. I thought maybe I liked teaching just because that's what women were trained to like. I ignored for some years that this was something that was more fun and brought me more satisfaction than any other job I ever held or could ever imagine.

I suppose some could have interpreted those words—*I made this all for you*—as a call for world domination or at least God's invitation to me to run for president. I come from a humble stock, so that was a leap too far. It interests me that presidents and presidential candidates have high, sometimes clinically-diagnosable degrees of narcissism. They KNOW the world is made for them. They have a sense of ownership, of entitlement, of privilege that does not come natural, in most situations, to me.

I do think that when you're about to make the jump from that rocky ridge of your life, to jump with no plan of how you'll land, you have to be clinically-diagnosably crazy. To leave what is good and solid and leap into nothingness and change. You'll fall. You'll probably fall many times. You'll find yourself on the sidewalk, your hip playing tricks, and you'll wonder how you're ever going to get up, stand up, and climb up that God-forsaken mountain one more time. When we see someone's success, when we see someone hosting Family Feud, we think that he must know what he's doing, he was made for this, he never failed. I thank Steve Harvey for practicing and honing his gift, for giving it to us, and then for recently hosting the Miss Universe contest and accidentally naming the wrong woman the winner. Then he had to take the crown off her head and then put it on the right woman's head. And then he had all of Twitter making fun of his failing for weeks. It was good for me to see that, to see him fail and get right back on the trail to start climbing up again. He didn't lose his job. He has the contract to do it again next year. And I bet he'll make a joke about it then because that is his gift.

So I tell you all this to share with you that I recently took a leap. Yoga hurts. Walking hurts. Exercise hurts. Water aerobics doesn't hurt, not as much at least. So I joined the gym near my school that has a pool. It actually has a warm water pool at Mercy Healthplex, especially for people with arthritis. It has warm water and benches right in the water and bars to hold on to. There are people who take physical therapy there, in the water. It's usually me and a bunch of old ladies and a few old men. And there are sometimes little kids there, taking swim lessons. We are quite an assortment.

Now you're allowed to jump in the deep end of this pool, but because we are either scared children who must be coaxed or we are bloated sacs that hold our stiff skeleton in painful bondage, we don't usually jump. We take the stairs into the shallow end of the pool. There's a plastic laundry hamper near that end of the pool and I wasn't sure what it was for. It's where you can drop of your cane as you climb into the pool. You won't need your cane in the water, in the deep end. You have to let it go.

I march and trudge my laps across the length of the pool for an hour. I bend and twist and dance and run in the water. And it doesn't hurt. It's hard, and it might hurt later. But essentially, it doesn't hurt.

At the end of every swim, I lie back in a dead man's float, corpse pose if you will. I rest, eyes closed, supported by the water. I lie back and listen for the Unitarian voice of God but it's muffled by water and echoes. Here, rested, I can hear only the voice in my head, in my brain. My brain and I lay back and trust the water to hold us here, somewhere between the bottom of the pool and the sky. We try not to think of our impending death.

As I was preparing this "Leap of Faith" talk, I tried to find "leap day" music and "leap day" quotes. There aren't many of them. Certainly there are lots of things about faith, but not a lot about the leap you have to make to get there. I did find that some places have traditions and legends about Leap Day. There is a story from Ireland that Saint Brigid struck a deal with Saint Patrick in order to bring more balance to the genders. So, on Leap Day in Ireland, women are allowed to ask men to marry them. Because one day every four years seemed plenty enough time to bend the rules of gender for Saint Patrick. I wonder if you had to wait another four years for his answer. And I wonder who asks whom now that gay marriage is lawful in Ireland.

And of course, there is the reading today that is one of the most interesting things I found, something I knew but I'm seeing again. The math isn't quite right on Leap Day. Our year is 365 and  $\frac{1}{4}$  days—almost. And that the scientist or mathematician or calendarologist—whatever his job is or whatever his gifts are—knows that in 10,000 years our calendar will be off so badly that no one will be able to agree on whether the 7:30 movie starts today or tomorrow or if we should just skip the movie and stay in tonight. But he's sure, somewhat sure, that humanity will have figured out how to work it out. His own leap of faith for humans.

Another tradition I learned is that some people challenge themselves on Leap Day to try something new. To make a leap. A BBC publication put out the challenge a few years ago to readers, asking them to share what they did. They made amends with family. They challenged themselves to speak Mandarin all day. And, someone climbed the rocky ridge of their life and went skydiving. They truly leaped.

What might you do, with this one extra day we have tomorrow? What might you leap into? Close your eyes and imagine for a second what it might be... I won't make you say it out loud but I really want you to think about the things that might need to change in your life. And no matter how scary they seem, I invite you to jump towards them. Jump away from what's safe and do something different tomorrow. Because if you don't do it soon, that tricky calendar will flip again and it will all be over.

It can be anything. I jumped into the pool at Mercy Healthplex, and certainly my feet barely left the floor. But, I have made a leap and someday I will soar. And it will be the first time again.