

People have gathered in a church in this place each Sunday for almost 300 years. That sounds like a long time, but if you look at all of time, it's not that long.

A church was here longer than there's been a United States of America. Our town has had several names, and our church has had several names. We did not start out as a Unitarian Universalist church. Part of our history is how we became one.

We can talk about people time – how old you are, how old I am, how old the church is. But there's another kind of time, Earth time, that makes our human time seem really short.

One of my favorite things in Arlington is in the Smith Museum at the Jason Russell House. Outside it, have you noticed what looks like the outline of an elephant, in lights? It's not an elephant, but a mastodon, and it's there in honor of a huge tusk in a case in the museum. A mastodon was a giant hairy sort of elephant that lived here long ago. There haven't been any mastodons for about 11,000 years.

That tusk sat at the bottom of Spy Pond for ages and ages. It's about 40,000 years old. In 1959 a fisherman caught his line on it, pulled it out, and it wound up in the museum. You should go and see it!

There were people living here when there were mastodons. They not only had to watch out for mastodons, but for saber-toothed tigers, and cave bears, and dire wolves, who could and certainly did eat people. For many thousands of years people lived here, hunting and fishing, falling in love, raising their children, singing and dancing, telling stories, and trying not to be eaten.

Long before there were people there were dinosaurs, for about 135 million years. We may think dinosaurs were not very smart because they all died off and became extinct, but people have only been on earth for two million years so far. We have to last another 133 million years to be as successful as the dinosaurs!

Before the dinosaurs there were smaller creatures, mostly in the ocean, and before that the earth was forming for a really long time with no life at all. The Earth is about four and a half billion years old. Now that's an amount of time our brains just can't understand. We can say the numbers, but we can't really get how impossibly big they are. So you see why we can say that 300 years is not much time at all.