

IT'S NOT ABOUT THE MONEY
The Rev. Julie Stoneberg
Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough
November 12, 2017

OPENING WORDS *Open Our Hearts With Love* (Adapted for Remembrance Day) ~Naomi King

When violence shatters the joy of a moment
We pause and reach out for the hands that remain...

We open our hearts with love.

When hatred and anger rage
We bend to pick up the wounded, to bind ourselves up and...

We open our hearts with love.

When fear whispers "build more gates" and "the blessed are those who defend themselves," we rock those fears to sleep as...

We open our hearts with love.

And with the same voice, we offer gratitude to those who have served our nation, who have made a difficult decision to serve, who have given their lives, made great sacrifices and witnessed unspeakable destruction...all in the name of a better world and a greater peace. For their service and their suffering...

We open our hearts with love.

We lift up the injustice that some of these same service people ...those who are aboriginal, first nations, and metis...have not been welcomed home in the same way or given the same benefits. We live with courage and hope that a wider and wider circle of force will bend our lives and our country toward justice, and...

We open our hearts with love.

Hatred never ceases by hatred, but by love alone can be healed. This is the truth we affirm, and...

We open our hearts with love.

Here is a true thing: just by being born you are loved. There is something within you and every person that is deserving of love, so...

We open our hearts with love.

In love, we pray for those families, those individuals, all the persons here and everywhere who are desperately sure that there is not enough love in the world for them to have some, who are desperately sure that they do not matter.

We turn to answer that desperation with assurance: you are loved, you are loveable, we will and do love you.

So as we gather this morning, let us attend to our life's work: to love. It's the only legacy that matters.

STORY FOR ALL AGES

Pumpkins

~ Mary Lyn Ray

(A man does everything he can to save a field that is about to be developed. He and the field work together to grow pumpkins to make the money to buy the field.)

READING

The Guy on the Bus

~ Bill Neely

This reading comes from a sermon of the same name by Rev. Bill Neely, a sermon that won the UUA's Stewardship Sermon award this year.

When I was in the later years of grade school I began taking the bus to the mall on weekends. I loved to watch movies, so I'd get the local bus schedule and see when I'd need to be at the bus stop to catch the one that went to the mall. I'd plan on seeing a movie and playing a few video games and look at the schedule again to see which bus I would need to catch home. We lived in an apartment complex that was sort of in the suburbs where the busses did not run very often at all. Everything had to be timed out, or you could end up waiting a long time; possibly hours, for the next bus to come your way.

And the bus fares, which were cash only then, had to be figured out in advance as well. The fare getting there was pretty simple; I either had it or I didn't, and if I didn't I couldn't go anywhere to begin with. But once at the mall, I was always worried that after the movie, some snacks, and some video games, I wouldn't have enough cash for the bus fare home. I worried that I would accidentally spend down into that return fare, and that I would be stuck at the mall.

So I got in the habit of, before I even left home, putting enough bus money for the ride home in my left pocket, and never using it while I was at the mall. I could spend what I had in my right pocket down to the last penny if I wanted to, but I would never spend what was in my left pocket. It was always the fare plus a little extra, just in case. It was never to be spent until it was dropped into the little metal and glass container next to the driver who would drive me several miles before delivering me a few hundred yards from my home. It was my safety blanket; that little bit of money in my left pocket. It meant I could get home, quickly, easily, and safely.

And so you can imagine the startle that I felt one day, after watching the movie Ghostbusters (the original), having some popcorn, and playing Pole Position, my favorite racecar game, at the arcade, when I stepped aboard the bus and reached into my left pocket for my bus fare and found the pocket empty. There was no money there. I knew there was no money in my right pocket either, but I stepped out of the way of the people behind me and checked anyway. I checked my back pockets and my jacket pockets and there was no money anywhere. I had no idea what to do. The line had cleared by then and the driver was watching me, frantically patting my pockets for money. I was ready to wave him on and start a long walk home that would end with my parents probably being quite hesitant to let me keep taking these trips to see movies; trips I really enjoyed.

But before the driver could close the door, the last man to board the bus,

who was still standing close to the fare box, looked at me and said, "I got you." He was dressed in jeans and a brown work shirt. I remember thinking that he probably worked maintenance at the mall and was headed home. And he saw and registered the mess that I was in, and with a simple "I got you," he put my fare in the box so that I could go home. I said "Thank you so much" to him, to which he replied, "No Problem," and he did that smooth, quiet, head-nod thing that made him seem really cool to me. He then sat down and read a book, while I sat opposite him on the bus. We didn't say another word to each other until we reached his stop, which was before mine. As he stood to leave, I said, "Thanks again," and he gave another cool guy head nod, and that was the first and last time I saw him.

MESSAGE

Once upon a time, there was a community. It was a particular kind of community (Unitarian) in a particular place (a synagogue), and it lived in a town where there were all kinds of people with both joys and sorrows...who had a plethora of talents...a diversity of beliefs...with many different dreams and visions. And this one community had some of all of that.

And inside this community there lived many people who loved it.

About once a year, a sign appeared in the community. It said: "Annual Pledge Campaign."

The people knew what that meant. Canvassers. Emails. Sunday announcements. Requests for money. A few of the people cried. But, most of the people knew there was a deeper purpose.

The man in today's story had a dream. His particular dream was preservation...land conservancy...protecting untouched nature...resisting development. And he was willing to do almost anything to follow that dream.

This community also has a dream. The dream of a beloved community where everyone's gifts...of time and abilities and resources...are accepted gratefully and put to good use. The dream of a place where we return again and again to touch a deep source of love and connection. The dream of a community all abuzz with meaningful service projects and learning. A place that both anchors and challenges our values and commitments. A place where we are fed and supported so that we can better navigate the challenges of our daily lives...where our children and youth are treasured and seen as whole beautiful beings...where we sing and pray and laugh and cry together.

A few weeks ago, I wrote an impassioned email to our Committee on Ministry, the team whose mandate is to attend to the vitality of the life of this congregation. I was frustrated with Sunday attendance, grappling with the difficulties of scheduling teams to meet and feeling that commitments were low. I admit that I was beginning to take it personally. I needed some perspective.

I needed to be reminded of all that's going on. And that conversation helped me to take a step back and see the field.

A month ago, we hosted a beautiful weekend...a community celebration of spiritual diversity. Our 'undoing white privilege' team is diving deep into personal work and education, and

willing to have some hard conversations. Our Refugee Sponsorship Steering Cmte has been working behind the scenes, contributing to the very real possibility that the Afghani family we're sponsoring will arrive in Canada soon. Our choir is taking extra steps to ensure that music lives long and prospers here. The Covenant Groups that we facilitate offer a place for you to be held and supported in personal relationships of sharing and listening. The many community conversations we have held, and will continue to hold, have helped to create a congregation of deeper compassion, listening, and connection. Our youth group provides a place for young people to explore their doubts and passions, and to grock their daily experiences in a safe and accepting place. Several committed folks have been attending lovingly to our finances...participatory budget planning, pledge campaign facilitation, fundraising house concerts. A few days ago, our Indigenous Allies Working Group hosted an evening with Dr. David Newhouse, who expertly told a version of Canadian history from the indigenous perspective...one we all need to hear. And more...and so much more...

How is all of this possible? Only because of you. Only because you give your time and your abilities and your resources to make it possible. No amount of money would make all of this happen if you didn't also show up with your talents and time. No amount of your time would make it happen if we didn't also have some money and the contribution of your abilities. No amount of talent could do all of this without the help of both money and time. It takes all three. Time, talent, and treasure. And fortunately, many have us have more than just one of these at least in some measure...we have SOME time, SOME ability, SOME treasure. And among and between us, we have it all. It is in this spirit that our pledge campaign in the last years has asked you to consider what you can give in each of these three areas.

This month we are talking about legacy. And today, we're exploring legacies of the financial kind...the hardest thing to talk about.

I've heard that a legacy gift is different from another kind of gift in that it matters over time...it lasts. Well, I don't think our gifts and contributions can be distinguished from one another in that way. Everything we do matters. Our giving may differ in what and how deeply it impacts something, our giving may differ in its size and may be judged for its quality, but...everything we do matters.

So, I wonder why it is easy to speak of our time and talent legacies, but so difficult to speak of financial giving?

We easily ask you, each and every day, to give of your time and talent. We ask you to help with a project, or give someone a ride, or offer music for a service...the list of what we ask for, and your generous gifts in response, is endless.

So, what if we started asking for money in a like manner? I mean, our music coordinator could call any one of you, I suppose, and ask you to provide music on a Sunday. What? You have no talent? You have no time to prepare? Well, then, how about you pay for a musician to come?

Our Circle of Care could call any one of you and ask that you give someone a ride. What? You have no car? Or, it doesn't fit your schedule? Well, would you pay for the taxi?

Our Helping Hands coordinator asks every week if you can come and greet or make coffee or clean up. What? You're busy this Sunday? You can't physically put up tables and chairs? Can you pay for an hourly worker to come instead?

That's what our pledge campaign does...it collects money to pay for the things we can't do with time and talent alone. What you can offer, if you can offer, financially to the mission and vitality of this congregation, is no different than a contribution of time or talent. It's just more difficult to ask for it. And, for many of us, it comes with emotional baggage. The ask seems to hit us, or at least me, in a lower place...when asked for money, I can feel my survival instinct kick in...irrational fear, or even anger. Why do you think that is?

One reason, I suspect, is that while time and talent might be seen as having come to us in a random way, or as the result of grace, we've been taught that we EARN our money. We own our money as a sign of deservedness, hold our money as if it will run out, and use our money as the means of supporting our personal life-styles. Once we have it, it can be hard to let go, even though we may have a love/hate relationship with it.

You know that money is the single factor in the growing divisiveness in our communities and society. It separates the 'haves' from the 'have nots'. It's the source of rampant classism. The lack of it, poverty, creates homelessness and poor health and lowered expectations for a successful life. So, not having money is something to be feared. And, having it contributes to feeling safe and to the very real presence of options in our lives. It makes sense that it's hard to give away. And yet...if we truly hold the goal of a more equitable world, then wouldn't our values call us to part with whatever extra we have?

And what of that guy on the bus? It was just a bus fare, but for all we know, it was a widow's mite for that maintenance man. Yet, with a cool nod of his head, he said, "I got you." Here is something I can do. Here is a person I can help. Here is one thing I can do with what I have to make at least one person's life easier. Yes, maybe it means I won't have enough for tonight's hot dog, or tomorrow's bus fare, but right now, here's one thing I can do.

I got you.

This congregation's history is full of legacy stories...the legacy of social justice work left by Florence Maynes...the legacy of compassion for the underdog left by Catherine Kaye...the legacy of a passion for music and play left by John Hart...the legacy of political advocacy left by Mary Young...each and every person who has been part of this community leaves a legacy. You are leaving a legacy.

Take Bill Wiggins. If we were an organization of a different kind, or perhaps in a building of our own, I think we might have a large portrait of Bill hanging in a prominent place, or least would name a room or a hall after him. Is there anyone in the room who remembers Bill?

As I understand it, Bill was an unassuming bachelor who worked on the floor at GE. Not a high-ranking executive. Not a highly paid engineer. But, as the story goes, when writing his will, Bill had a conversation with a neighbour about where he might leave what he had. He had no children, and few relatives...and apparently this neighbour, knowing that UFP was important to him, suggested that he leave what he had to his church.

Bill died in 1991...and everyone was shocked when what he left to the congregation totalled something over \$300,000. Now, I've never heard any stories about other ways that Bill contributed to this congregation...I don't know if he ever served on the Board or headed any committees. I don't know if he offered smiles and hugs. I don't know if he led any services or hosted gatherings in his home. I don't know if he was good at making coffee or was always there to set up chairs and tables. I assume he did some of these things. Like most of us, he likely had some talent, some time, and in this case, a tidy SUM of treasure.

We'll never know what UFP would be today with that gift. Things could have gone a lot of different ways. But what we do know is that his gift made it possible for this congregation to have a permanent space to meet. It made it possible for professional ministry. And on some level, it made it possible for all that happens here every day to continue to happen... because in essence, the annual investment income we receive from his gift equals the financial contributions of about twenty-five to thirty people. It's as if there are 25 Bill Wiggins in the room every Sunday, and part of every pledge campaign each year. Bill's legacy lives on.

I don't know what dreams Bill had. I don't know if he thought he had much to contribute. But he recognized a place that mattered to him, and with a cool nod of his head, he said "I got you." I can do this.

Could that be you today? Might you have some measure of financial resources which you can hand over with a simple "I got you." This is something I can give.

Today, we are scattering the seeds left to us by Bill, by Florence, by Catherine and John and Mary...and Lois and Joyce and Muriel and Francis and Dick and Bill Jex and Alice Adams and hundreds of others. We are continuing to plant those seeds, and to watch them grow. And we harvest them, all the while planting new seeds...heirloom ones as well as creative new hybrids.

And every day, if we look, if we stand back and see the field, we see the return on our investment. We see the incredible youth growing up among us, we see leadership sprouting up in surprising places, we see a passion for justice propelling us to work together for a better world, we see suffering hearts comforted by caring companions and flailing hearts made more courageous in the process of working alongside others. We see our commitment to the inherent worth of each person and our involvement in the interdependent web of which we are a part making a real difference in real lives. This community is a living legacy.

This is a community we love. This is a community we can save for those who will follow us. We have everything we need, because every day, in every way, we've got one another.

Thank you for all of the gifts you give. May you be equally blessed in return.

Amen.

READING

#514 (*adapted*)

~ Lala Winkley

In the name of love,
in the name of all that is holy,
may we respond to all that has been given
by working to create a heaven...
where peace and justice reign...here on earth.

May there today be enough for our needs;
May we be forgiven for our weak and deliberate offenses,
just as we must forgive others
when they hurt us.
Let us resist evil
and to do what is good;
for we are held by, and grounded in, love
and endowed with its power
to make our world whole.

CLOSING WORDS

~ Joy Harpo

The stuff I need for singing by
whatever means
is garnered from every thought, every heart that ever pounded the earth...
The shapes of mountains, cities, a whistle leaf of grass, or a human bent with loss
will revise the pattern of the story, the song.
I take it from there...play through the heartbreak of the tenderness of being
until I am the sky, the earth, the song and the singer.

Go in peace. Knowing that you have enough. You are enough. Because we got each other.