

*We ask the leaf, "Are you complete in yourself?" And the leaf answers, "No, my life is in the branches."
We ask the branch, and the branch answers, "No my life is in the root." We ask the root, and it answers,
"No my life is in the trunk and the branches and the leaves. Keep the branches stripped of leaves, and I shall die."
So it is with the great tree of being. Nothing is completely and merely individual.*

—Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick

We're All In!

Welcome

Rev. Clare L. Petersberger

The Covenant

First Parish of Norwell Unitarian Universalists
(Read in unison)

**WE PLEDGE TO WALK TOGETHER
IN FELLOWSHIP AND LOVE,
TO CULTIVATE REVERENCE,
TO PROMOTE SPIRITUAL GROWTH
AND ETHICAL COMMITMENT,
TO MINISTER TO EACH OTHER'S NEEDS
AND TO THOSE OF HUMANITY,
TO CELEBRATE THE SACRED MOMENTS OF LIFE'S
PASSAGE,
AND TO HONOR THE HOLINESS AT THE HEART OF BEING.**

Opening Words

Aimee Van Ausdall

To minister to each other's needs and to those of humanity, we need to be people of resilience who can adjust to change. Our opening words are about resilience. The author, Aimee Van Ausdall, is a mother who became an activist because she said, "I realized that we could all drag each other down, or lift each other up, and that I wanted to be lifted and to help with the heavy lifting."

After events in Washington, DC this week, from Secretary of State Mike Pompeo bullying Mary Louise Kelly, host of NPR's *All Things Considered* to the Senate vote not to call witnesses in the impeachment trial of President Trump, we all need some uplift.

Aimee Van Ausdall wrote, "This morning I have been pondering a nearly forgotten lesson I learned in high school music. Sometimes in band or choir, music requires players or singers to hold a note longer than they actually can hold a note. In those cases, we were taught to mindfully stagger when we took a breath so the sound appeared uninterrupted. Everyone got to breathe, and the music stayed strong and vibrant. So let's remember the advice of music: Take a breath. The rest of the chorus will sing. The rest of the band will play. Rejoin so others can breathe. Together, we can sustain a very long, beautiful song for a very, very long time. You don't have to do it all, but you must add your voice to the song."

Chalice Lighting

(As we sing Hymn #368, “Now Let Us Sing)

Prelude

“Will You Teach Me?”

Victor C. Johnson

TUUC Choir; Dominique Hall, oboe; Tracy Hall, piano

Story

“The Drum”

A story from India

Delivered by Joyce Duncan, Credentialed Director of Religious Exploration

Today we are celebrating Stewardship Sunday. Our story is about how our generosity and kindness makes a difference in the world.

[Story summary: In the land of India, there lived a poor woman and her son. The boy yearned for a drum, but though his mother longed to give him one, she knew she could not afford it. One day as the mother returned from the market where she had sold her grain, she found a sturdy stick that she decided to bring home for her son. The stick was hardly a drum, but yet, he could use it to tap out rhythms.

And the salvaged stick enabled the boy to begin a chain of kindnesses. First, as he tapped an old pot with the stick, he heard an old woman weeping because she was unable to light her fire. Seeing her plight, he offered up his dry, sturdy stick to help her kindle her fire. In gratitude, she gave him a chapatti, a round flat bread.

Taking the bread, the boy walked on until he encountered another woman, weeping because her child was hungry, and she had no food to give him. The boy offered her the chapatti, and the relieved mother presented him a large pot in return for his gift of bread.

Walking on with the new pot, the boy came upon a couple arguing because, as they explained, the man was a laundryman and his wife had broken the large pot in which he boiled clothes. The boy, noting he had no need for the pot he was carrying, gave it to them to replace the one which had broken. And they, wishing to repay his kindness, gave him a warm coat.

The boy moved on, coming soon to a man shivering with cold. Robbers had stolen his clothes. The boy immediately handed over the coat to the man. And the man, now covered and warm, gave the boy the horse that the robbers had left behind.

The boy led the horse away, and soon found a wedding party, looking not joyous but dejected. To his inquiry about their sadness, they replied that they needed a horse to proceed to the wedding site, but the man who was to provide the horse had not arrived. The boy gave them the reins, urging them to take the horse. Wishing to reward him, they spoke to their musicians and came up with a gift. A drum.

And so the boy got his heart’s wish. He ran all the way home to share his story with his mother, and to play for her a song on his new drum.]

Hymn

#402 “From You I Receive”

Prayer/Meditation

Nan Merrill

The Reverend Melissa Carvill Ziemer

Let us continue in the spirit of prayer with an ancient prayer to nurture resilience through loss and grief.

Nan Merrill’s adaptation of Psalm 23 will be followed by a prayer by the Reverend Melissa Carvill Ziemer, who ministers with The Unitarian Universalist Minister’s Association.

“O my Beloved, you are my shepherd, I shall not want; You bring me to green pastures for rest and lead me beside still waters renewing my spirit, You restore my soul . . .”

[Read the entirety of Nan Merrill’s version of the Psalm at <https://friendsofsilence.net/quote/2010/03/psalm-23>.]

And with the words of Reverend Melissa Carvill Ziemer we pray,

“Oh beloved,
in this moment of rest
help us open our hearts to you.
Help us open our hearts
so that we may remember what matters most—
to set aside the worries and distractions
and constant demands on our lives
and remember what truly matters
here in this moment of renewal.

We gather here this day for rest and for remembering
and for honoring the gift of this life.
In recognizing the gift
may we be mindful of all of our blessings:

for it is gratitude that is the foundation of hope
and hope is essential to
carry us through our lives in this world.
From gratitude to hope
from hope to possibility
from possibility to action---
let these be the movements of our lives.
Amen and blessed be.”

Musical Interlude

“Blessings of Love”

Sufi chant/Larry Phillips, arr.

TUUC Choir

Reflection

“A Dollar in My Pocket is Just Paper”

Lora Powell Haney, Ministerial Intern

A single dollar bill sat in my coat pocket as I slid into the wooden pew-like bench at Union Station Chicago. I had just put my youngest son on the train home to Maryland after a 24-hour trip to visit me over Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday weekend. Maybe I should have handed him just that little bit extra? In addition to soup, granola bars, three apples, crackers, and cheese . . .

Then, I heard a voice: “Ma’mam? Excuse me, ma’mam?” And I look into the face of a man who could be my age, or twenty years to either side, deeply creased face, and worn-at-the-edges winter coat. “Ma’mam, I just need \$5 more to get a bed at the shelter tonight; can you spare anything?”

Did the loose change in your pocket get a little warm? The dollar in my pocket did too. “I just have a dollar, but maybe that would get you closer?” And the man, with a smile and with great dignity, took my crumpled dollar and turned to ask a waiting passenger nearby.

Suddenly, that single bill became something more than not enough for a bottle of water: it became a chance toward being warm and safe for a single frigid night in a big city. It became a tool of resilience.

A single dollar—resilience? So, maybe just one dollar anymore won’t offer much of a sense that you can bounce back or find warm shelter, but what about a community gathering such resources? More than just an amount, a goal to reach, each member of a community knowing that every member has given according to their means to support the vision and work of a congregation: that creates resiliency.

Scott Tayler [in the introduction to February’s Soul Matters Small Group Packet] wrote: “We are indeed a people of resilience. Forget solo act; think community choir! We survive our pain by having the strength to tell others about it. We find the courage to make our way through the dark only when we sense we are not alone. Internal and individual grit only gets us so far; empathy, assurance and love from others gets us the rest of the way.”

A dollar in my pocket remains a piece of paper; its potential lies in how it is used, especially in community, gathered and given with others toward a common goal.

I turned back to the man who needed just a few dollars for a warm, safer bed and said, “I found a few more when I dug deeper; would this cover you?” And handed him the five that had been tucked in my wallet.

“That would, that would,” he said with his eyes a little wider.

My son’s train left the station then. I said good-night to the man, and made my way back to my room, feeling just a little more ready to tackle more theology, having practiced my own.

Song

“We’re All in This Together” (excerpt)

Ben Lee

Stewardship

“Everybody in for the Win!”

Anita Cox, Chair of TUUC Stewardship

[The text of Anita’s remarks is not available.]

Going All In Together

Dr. Neil Porter, President, TUUC

[The text of Neil’s remarks is not available.]

Offertory

“My Spirit Sang All Day”

Gerald Finzi

Poetry by Robert Bridges

TUUC Choir

As the ushers prepare to take this morning’s offering, may each of us look into our hearts and see what is available there—how much love, how much generosity, how much faith, how much gratitude, how much hope . . .

We will now take our offering from that account. One of the ideas brainstormed in a recent Sunday Morning Structure conversation was to bring the offering up to the front after it is collected. We are going to do that today as an experiment. While we invite our guests to let the offering plate pass you, in our free faith tradition, the offering truly is a symbol of how all members support our faith community, as well as the wider community as described in your order of service.

(When offering is at the front)

For the gifts which we have received—and the gifts which we, ourselves, are— may we be truly grateful. May we be committed to using these gifts to make a difference in the world: to increase joy, love and justice; to decrease hatred and oppression; to expand beloved community; to share, and to keep sharing, as long as ever we can.

Amen.

Homily

We’re All In!

Rev. Clare L. Petersberger

During the first service, Christmas Eve, I watched as the offertory plates were brought up. I saw my sister-in-law put something in before handing the plate to my older nephew, who put something in before handing the plate to his father, who put something in before handing the plate to a friend who was visiting from Virginia,

who put something in before handing it to my younger nephew. And then I watched as my wide-eyed younger nephew stuck his hand in the plate and pulled out several bills.

My brother leaned down the row and did very clear sign language: No! No! Put your bill in the plate! Drop it in the plate!

And then I watched my younger nephew, drop the bills back in the plate, except for one he was still holding. He looked up in disappointment and confusion and mouthed the word, “Why?”

My brother motioned to put the bill in the plate—NOW. My younger nephew did and the plate moved on and all of that night’s offering went to our community and UUA partners. But my younger nephew’s question is a good one. Why? Why do we pass the offertory plate?

In the Bible, there was no offertory plate. People brought cattle, sheep, goats, lambs, and doves as offerings to the community and to God.

And in early American history, there was no offertory plate. The colonies established congregations to create citizens of good character who would contribute to the common good. These congregations were financially supported through poll and property taxes. In New England, such poll and property taxes went to support Congregational churches.

In New York, New Jersey, and Maryland, as well as Southern states, such poll and property taxes went to Anglican churches. Catholics made up less than 1% of the population in the 13 colonies and were not publicly funded.

Even after the American Revolution, even after the First Amendment of the Constitution prohibited Congress from establishing a national church, states were loath to give up their state-sponsored religious institutions. Massachusetts did not rescind its religious tax until 1833. Ultimately, congregations had to come up with new ways to raise funds, such as selling and renting pews.

We don’t do that. Other congregations used subscription books, where the total amount needed for a budget would be written in a book. The book would be passed around and members would publicly record how much they intended to pledge. We don’t do that. By the late 19th century, some preachers urged members to give based on Paul’s teaching in First Corinthians: *2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.* We don’t do that. Charles Finney, a leader of the Second Great Awakening, inspired financial giving at his revivals by preaching how God is the owner of all, and people should give for the glory of God. We don’t do that. By 1900, most American churches took up weekly offerings in worship to sustain and deepen their collective lives. We Unitarian Universalists do this.

My memories of growing up in a Unitarian congregation in the early 1960’s was that the offertory plate was passed every Sunday. I don’t remember asking “Why?”

I remember the silver plate being passed from hand to hand to hand. When it came to me, I peered down into bills and coins and the red or green velvet below as I added my dollar bill. And then I would hand it to the person next to me. I don’t remember thinking “Oh, this will go to pay the minister’s salary, and the

salaries of other staff, or to pay for the electric and gas bill, or to buy supplies for religious education classes, or to help to fund our partnership with Beacon House.” I remember a feeling. I remember a feeling much like the boy in our story today—that I was helping, that I was contributing, that my gift made a real difference to real people.

Unlike the boy, I was surrounded by others who were doing the same. We were all in this together as the plate passed from hand to hand to hand and row to row to row. And I think the person who suggested that we bring the offering plates up to the front was remembering a similar feeling of community, and that we’re all in this together.

I realize that, today, fewer people use checks and cash. More people complete financial transactions online. Our church administrator has set us up with texting our financial gifts! The ritual of passing the offertory plate in worship may seem to be almost as outmoded as bringing cattle, goats, sheep, and pigeons for offerings. And yet, I find myself still reaching for a bill when I attend worship on my Sundays out of the pulpit and the plate comes around.

Passing the offertory plate is a ritual of communion—hand to hand to hand to hand, row to row to row. Freely choosing to release our coins or bills and put them in the hands of others is a symbol that our lives are connected. As the boy learned, and, as I tried to explain to my youngest nephew after the Christmas Eve service, we never know what can come of a gift we give.

This is why I make an annual pledge to this congregation. I’m not doing so to pay the minister’s salary. That would not be logical. I believe in this congregation, in you, in those yet to come, and in our mission to deepen our spiritual and ethical lives while working for racial, social, and environmental justice. I have seen how members of this community have offered hope when hope is hard to find to each other and also to those in the wider community.

Melissa Carvill Ziemer is right. “Hope is essential to carry us through our lives in this world.” May we remember this as we pass the offertory plate each Sunday, and as we make our annual pledge to create a budget worthy of our faith, hope, love and joy.

Song

“We’re All in This Together”

Ben Lee

Closing Words

Rev. Georgette Wonders

A Unitarian Universalist minister, the Reverend Georgette Wonders, once said, “We have dreams and plans about becoming a great church, a place to grow our souls, enlarge our minds and hearts, teach our children, and from which to do good and make a difference according to our religious principles and values in the community and the world. But we have to be connected in order to do any of these things. And that means when we are invited to the banquet, we need to show up. Not because you don’t have food at home, but because when you break bread—or animal crackers—with others, you make community and the community is the source and the foundation for all the rest.

Song to Welcome Guests

“Whoever You Are, We Welcome You”

Hal Walker

GO NOW IN PEACE.