

"Grateful"
Stewardship Appreciation Sunday
May 2, 2021
"GRATEFUL"
STEWARDSHIP APPRECIATION SUNDAY
Reverend Dave Franks, Sally Otto and Bill Norsworthy
May 2, 2021

I like the old story about the guy who went to worship services with his family. As they were driving home, afterwards he was complaining about everything. He said, "The music was too loud. The sermon was too long. The announcements were unclear. The building was hot. The people weren't all that friendly." He went on and on, complaining about virtually everything. Finally, his very observant son said, "Dad, you've got to admit it wasn't a bad show for just a dollar."

Today is a day to be grateful. It's a day we take some time to really celebrate and acknowledge what an amazing accomplishment you have all just went through, a very successful showing of your commitment to what you're all about as Unitarian Universalists here in Clearwater.

There are certain sermons that have remained with me over the years that have help guide me in my life. One of those was preached years ago by Rev. Don Shelby who was the pastor was a pastor in Santa Monica, California. They're ones that I couldn't help but recall when thinking about what I want to share with you this morning. Let us begin with his thoughts.

We will not be measured by our intellect and our knowledge, important, though they be. We will not be measured by our possessions, our professional achievements, our social status, or leadership standing in the community, no matter how significant they may be. We will not be measured by our religion nor our beliefs, no matter how mature and informed they may be. We will not be measured by the social causes we have championed or the struggles for the human good we have engaged, no matter how pivotal they may have been.

No, we will be measured by the love we have given out in simple ways, in the caring concern we show the next person we meet, in the gestures of kindness and goodness we offer. We will be measured by how reachable we are, by how much pain we ease, by how much loneliness we dispel, by how many burdens we share, by how much joy we create for others.

It's that kind of giving of self that lies at the heart of what I understand is the way we go about trusting in life. You all have just come through a very engaging stewardship drive, a

"Grateful"
Stewardship Appreciation Sunday
May 2, 2021

successful one indeed. As I reflect upon Rev. Shelby's words, I want to frame that success as your willingness to trust, even through disagreements and hardships like pandemics.

I've met a good number of folks in my years both in pastoral ministry, as well as, within the spheres of corporations, non-profits, and government. Some of those folks in those arenas have bank accounts with a heck of a lot more money in them than the total budget of this congregation.

(Tell the story of the contractor who paid for a new foundation and roof). He didn't ask for a detailed analysis of the congregation's viability, sustainability, or its mission statement. No, he simply wanted to offer some goodness and joy to this young minister who came with hat in hand for the welfare of a small group of worshippers. He trusted that his giving would somehow matter.

How we give, not so much the amount we give, is a measurement of our willingness to trust. I've asked Bill and Sally to be part of this morning's message. As pivotal leaders in your stewardship drive, I wondered how their experience with you all in that drive informed them about the trust level you all have for one another. So, Sally, Bill...what did you learn?

* * * * *

Our giving teaches us something about our willingness to trust. There is a second lesson I've learned in the way we give. We learn in our giving what we finally value. And it is that which ultimately is the joy that sustains us through disagreements, and yes, pandemics. I try to value people more than I do my possessions. Like you, I'm sure, I go through cycles of downsizing. Some days I'm abhorred by all the possessions I own even though I've now living in a space of 745 sq. ft. But is having no possessions the answer? I don't think that's the answer. But I do believe the key is not to become possessed by one's possessions. Who we are is more important than what we have.

It seems to me that the more my giving is born out of my love rather than out of my desire to have, the more joy enters my life.

MOTHER TERESA STORY: Mother Teresa visited Australia. A new recruit to the monastery in Australia was assigned to be her guide and "gofer" during her stay. The young man was so

"Grateful"
Stewardship Appreciation Sunday
May 2, 2021

thrilled and excited at the prospect of being so close to this woman. He dreamed of how much he would learn from her and what they would talk about. But during her visit, he became frustrated. Although he was constantly near her, he never had the opportunity to say one word to Mother Teresa. There were always other people for her to meet. Finally, her tour was over, and she was due to fly to New Guinea. In desperation, the friar had his opportunity to speak to Mother Teresa. He said to her, "If I pay my own fare to New Guinea, can I sit next to you on the plane so I can talk to you and learn from you?" Mother Teresa looked at him. "You have enough money to pay airfare to New Guinea?" she asked. "Oh, yes," he replied eagerly. "Then give that money to the poor," she said. "You'll learn more from that than anything I can tell you." The problem was the young man wanted to experience a feeling when he needed to simply learn by doing.

Sadhiqua Ahamed makes the plea, "Take me to the place where humanity is more respected than money." There are days when we echo Sadiqua's plea, we wonder if such a place even exists in the midst of a world, a country, bent on a consumerism that devalues those who are not in possession of wealth, and the goods such wealth brings. Those single folks who live below the poverty line in this country of \$12, 880 or a family of four trying to make it on an income of \$26,500 a year, those indigenous people who make up 25% of those living in poverty in this country, Blacks at 21%, Hispanic at 18%, White and Asians at 10 %, Children at 16%.

Take me to the place where humanity is more respected than money! And yet I hear those words of long ago, that echo Mother Theresa's simple teaching of doing to that young man, those words that call me back to the joy that claims me is where and to whom I give, "Where your treasure is so there will your heart be." That's the place where humanity is more respected than money...it's in where our heart lies. Bill and Sally....in the conversations, you and the stewards, had over the past few weeks, as people looked into their giving, what have you learned in where people's treasure, their hearts lie at UUC?

Bill/Sally introduce the slide of scrolling names and Stewards Covenant.