*A Sermon on the Amount: We’re Here For You -* March 2, 2025

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The Unitarian Universalist Society of Laconia, NH

It’s Stewardship Sunday!

Time for me to preach my annual sermon on the amount.

-which brings us to our scripture this morning,

an excerpt from Jesus’ *Sermon on the Mount*.

More than two thousand years ago Jesus stood on a hillside

and preached this famous sermon,

-a sermon which has touched

billions of Christians and others across generations.

Our scripture is from chapter 5, 1-10 found in the Gospel of Matthew.

Traditionally these verses are called *The* *Beatitudes*.

These particular verses lift up the marginalized and the oppressed.

Jesus blesses those who are poor in spirit, grieving,

meek, hungry for justice, merciful, pure-hearted, and peacemaking.

For many of us as Unitarian Universalists *The Beatitudes* resonates

with our first UU principle of the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

We recognize the need for our first principle,

especially in regard to those pushed to the edges of our society.

Jesus so long ago blessed those who were vulnerable,

and he blessed those who worked for justice.

Today our UU commitments to our values of equity and compassion

fit well with Jesus’ call for people to lift up the oppressed

and work towards bettering the lives of all.

Jesus’ message over two thousand years ago was radical,

opposed to the current authorities of his day,

and offered hope to those oppressed.

Today in our country we, too, are called, as part of our faith stance,

to work for justice for those marginalized, those targeted as less than,

those whose very lives are disrupted by those in power.

*The Beatitudes* call us through the verses’ prophetic voice,

whether we are Christian or not,

to hold radical compassion for those marginalized.

There are so many marginalized around us – in the news

and living right here in the Lakes region, including those unsheltered.

My heart broke this past week with the sudden death

of a homeless man in his late 40s from a heart attack,

He had come to see me over the past two years, about once a month.

He was living in his car, and I learned he suffered from muscular dystrophy.

He was extremely polite and even caring about me,

when he came for help.

I am haunted by his last looking at me,

smiling through the car window, as a friend drove him away.

I learned that on Tuesday morning of this past week,

he donated his organs for the benefit of others.

He is in my prayers. I only hope that our little monthly donation to him

alleviated some of his suffering during his too short life.

I was able to help him through your generous contributions to my Minister’s Fund.

Today we hear on the national news of different groups of people,

and even individuals, being targeted as not being okay,

as less than, as not worthy of inherent worth and dignity:

-undocumented immigrants,

some of whom have lived in America for over 30 years;

- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer plus folks,

-leading members of our military, fired for being black or speaking out

for diversity, equity, and inclusion within our military.

For me, power and greed appear to be the main drivers

of what is happening today, which is not unlike what was happening

in Jesus’ lifetime.

Jesus’ message in the Beatitudes

and in the rest of his Sermon on the Mount

calls us to boldness in our response to injustice.

Faith, Jesus is saying, is not meant to be hidden,

but to be lived.

Jesus’ list in the Beatitudes does not include the rich as blessed.

nor are the powerful blessed.

-Instead, Jesus, if he lived today, most likely would be calling us

to help the refugee seek safety, not exportation;

-Jesus might be reminding us to work as allies

with Black and Brown communities fighting for justice;

-Jesus might be calling us to help those Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer youth, searching for belonging;

-and he might be asking us to work for peace in a world addicted to violence.

Jesus’ teachings in The Beatitudes is asking us

to not only be in sympathy with those at risk,

but his is a call to action.

We are the ones to bless those who are poor

or grieving through our actions.

We are the ones through our actions who do the blessing-

working for justice, and through our daily acts of compassion.

The Sermon on the Mount is a blueprint for a radical love,

for a different world than the one we are living in today.

A world where the poor and the grieving are helped.

A world filled with justice and mercy.

A world where love triumphs over fear.

There is so much more to say about *The Beatitudes,*

and the *Sermon on the Mount*,

whose spiritual themes are reflected well in other world religions.

However, I bring the brief thoughts I have spoken to you this morning

about *The Beatitudes* because I think these verses exemplify

in many ways, one justification,

we have for there being our UU congregations.

And why, especially,

it is more than worthwhile to support this congregation’s Stewardship drive.

For, we are a religious community with our principles and purposes,

and our UU values of interdependence, equity, transformation, pluralism,

generosity, and justice.

These ground our faith in the living tradition of Unitarian Universalism.

Instead of a blind faith,

ours is a faith that invites us to trust in love – a radical love,

in community, and in justice, rather than fear and scarcity.

Our UU values invite us to cultivate such spiritual practice as mindfulness, gratitude, and living simply.

Rather than living our lives solely as individuals,

we come together in religious community,

to work for the greater good in our lives and in society.

We strive to work as a force for good, and to transform ourselves

into being more and more, a blessing to those in need.

We, as UUs, are called in our congregations to bless the world

with lovingkindness, equity and peace.

This year’s Stewardship theme of “We’re here for You”

is right on target for the turbulent time we are living in today.

I view our UU congregations as sanctuaries

for those seeking safety from being targeted in the wider society.

And just as importantly, traditionally, our congregations are places

where people come to celebrate new births, dedicating their children,

as well as celebrating marriages and ceremonies of commitment.

Our UU congregations are places where those who are grieving

come to speak about their loved ones and find support in their grief.

Pastoral care is offered to those in need.

Inspiring music and sermons and discussion groups provide stimulation

for each of us on our spiritual journey to grow and transform

our UU faith from knowing, often when we enter into this faith,

what we don’t believe,

into cultivating and growing what we do believe spiritually, religiously.

And there are, within most of our UU congregations,

active social justice committees,

working to transform our world for the better.

We’re here for you, in these and many other ways, within most, if not all,

of our UU congregations across the continent and wider world.

Which brings me to our own congregation,

the Unitarian Universalist Society of Laconia, NH.

We are here for you in the ways I just spoke about in our other UU congregations, yes.

And, I have found in my almost eight years as your minister,

additional bonuses for being part of our congregation.

First, we strive to know who everyone is,

and we work to care for one another.

We want to be here for you, if a need arises that we can meet,

(given our small size).

In spite of the limitations of our size, we often work hard

to find ways to help those of us in need of help.

Our Pastoral team helps me know when different needs arise.

Secondly, our Membership Committee is working mightily

to help us renew our commitment as a Welcoming Congregation.

We will be voting on whether or not to renew our commitment

at our annual meeting, the first Sunday in June.

My ask right now is that we vote yes, to do so.

Thirdly, We’re Here for You, in best learning how to deal

with the climate crisis, and ways we each can reduce our carbon footprints.

For the size of our congregation,

our commitment to our Green Sanctuary Program,

is impressive and has positive results, including our putting solar panels

on our roof this year, our community plastic drives,

and in other ways reducing our congregation’s carbon footprint.

Fourth, we are blessed to have our wonderful choir,

under the direction of Noelle Beaudin, our Music Director.

The choir and Noelle provide us with music

that lifts our spirits on Sunday mornings and other times of celebration.

Such music is an integral part of our worshipping together.

And thank you, Miles Sargent, for your playing our music this morning.

Fifth but not in anyway, the end of what makes this congregation unique,

is our congregation’s work in social justice.

Right now, our Social Justice Committee is working

on finding ways to help us challenge social injustices.

We’re here for you in terms of social justice work by having our Social Justice Committee:

-informing us of protests,

-inviting us to write letters to the editor,

-helping us connect with our legislative leaders in Congress and the NH legislature.

- by providing all of us with information about how to defend our democracy and its rule of law.

There are so many other ways that We are Here For you –

-the beautiful flower arrangements each week lift our spirits.

-the very generous hospitality offered during coffee hour nourishes our bodies,

And within Coffee Hour, the often hour-long conversations

strengthen our knowing each other better.

Importantly, our congregation provides a safe space

where people of like mind

can gather safely and speak their own truths.

I want to lift up Inez Andrews for always being ready, each Sunday,

for the possibility of children coming to our worship services.

When the children come, we are so grateful to Inez’s caring for them.

It is my hope and the hope of many of us that more children

will come and be part of our religious life here at UUSL.

So, here’s to a successful Stewardship Drive.

I know we can do this – meet this goal of $ 103, 000 in pledges.

I know we can do this, because we truly are working to be here for you.

And we are here working to be a blessing for those in need

outside our congregation’s walls.

In conclusion may we as religious liberals find the strength

to keep our hearts, especially open to those who are marginalized.

May we continue to commit to walking a path of compassion and courage,

helping those in need in times of crisis.

May we acknowledge that sometimes, just being present to another person, simply holding a space to hear their concerns and joys, is all that is needed.

May we become, as the Sufi master Rumi taught, “a lamp, or a lifeboat or a ladder. Being there to help someone heal.”

May we remember the blessings of our world

belong not to the powerful,

but to those who help those suffering,

and those who seek justice.

May we find the wisdom to act with lovingkindness.

May we work to make our world more inclusive and less divided.

May we not lose our faith in the vision of beloved community,

for ourselves, our congregation, and the wider world.

Peace and Love to you.