

Sermon on the Amount : 2023

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The Unitarian Universalist Society of Laconia, NH

As you heard from Don and Bev, this morning is Kick-Off Sunday - the beginning of our pledge drive for the continuation of our congregation's mission and vision and its work in the world for the next fiscal year.

For those of you who are new to us, our pledge drive is the main source of income for our congregation, with other sources of income including fund-raising

(Bless our Fund-Raising Committee, led by Jeri Bothamley and Patte Sarausky!)

– and other sources of income, including rental income and generous donations..

The theme of this year's pledge drive is “growing stronger together” We grow stronger together when we put our values, beliefs and faith into action.”

Within our congregation I believe that we find like-minded folks with whom we share common values, beliefs, and faith.

With each other we can talk openly about what we truly believe spiritually, religiously, and explore together our individual and communal searches for truth and meaning.

So many people tell me when they sign our membership book, becoming a member, becoming officially a UU, is like coming home – a home that some, perhaps many, have been searching for much of their lives.

Thus, our congregation is a treasure, to be valued and cared for, for our own benefit now, and for the future generations to follow.

Part of the treasure of our congregation is our connection to the national movement of Unitarian Universalism.

Currently on a national level our UU congregations are considering a revision to the By-Laws of the UUA.

The section focused for revision is called Article II, which was sent out to each of you over the internet a few days ago.

If you did not receive this email, I have a few copies with me this morning.

I want to use this opportunity of stewardship Kick-off Sunday to bring to our attention this possible revision to Article II.

At this year's General Assembly in late June, delegates from UU congregations across the continent will come together and discuss this proposed revision.

Article II today contains our Seven Principles and Purposes, which are changed and incorporated differently in the revised version.

The following year in 2024 at General Assembly there will be a vote on whether or not to accept these revisions to the current Article II.

A two-thirds vote is needed for the proposal to pass.

It is my sincere hope that we will each study the proposed revision, and that we find the time this spring to have some conversations with one another about how we perceive these changes to Article II.

Perhaps we can form some small groups to talk to each other about these changes.

**I also hope that we will have two delegates to General Assembly
this year from our congregation
who will listen to our congregation's discussions
as well as their own consciences - -
and be prepared to share with the other delegates across our UU faith
any possible changes or affirmations of these proposed changes.
Our congregation will pay for the fee
for two delegates to attend General Assembly,
either on -line or in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in person.**

**This morning I wanted just to introduce the proposed revision of Article II
to all of us, as I believe it will take some time for each of us
to study and reflect upon the meanings
of these possible changes within our faith.**

**Personally, initially, these proposed changes were too much for me -
I thought –“Oh, no, that’s too big a leap for me.”
I became a UU in 1965, over 58 years ago – hard to believe, but true,
and the Seven Principles and Six Purposes have guided my life for all those
years.**

But change is inevitable, yes?

**So, I have softened my original reactions and now am open
to exploring with all of us and other UUs
what this new revision will mean and why it’s important for us
to study and consider its passage.**

Within the new version of Article II we find the word “covenant.”

This aspect of our faith is, it appears, a permanent part of who we are as UUs. As we heard from our Children’s story, God said to Noah: "I will make a deal with you, a promise—a covenant. My covenant is with all the beings of the earth, not just the people.”

Thus, this idea of covenant is found in the early history of Christian and Jewish thought. This idea of covenant travelled through time from Noah to the early Puritans, many of whom founded Unitarian churches here in New England.

Recently UU minister Ellen Spero writes of covenant that:

*Covenant is an ancient practice,
traditionally between God and God’s people,
found throughout the Bible.*

The Puritans’ earliest covenant was simple:

*“We covenant with the Lord and one with another;
and do bind ourselves in the presence of God to walk together in all his ways,
according as he is pleased to reveal himself unto us in his blessed word of truth.”*

Rev. Ellen continues that for the Puritans “nothing less than their eternal salvation was at stake in this binding together as a worshipping community, awaiting God’s continuing revelation of grace.¹

This morning we find this word “covenant” continuing on within our own congregation. Salvation today, for many of us, is focused on what we can do, here, right now, in the world to make the world a better place.

¹ Ellen Spero. *Salvation Through Covenant* from the New England Region, UUA, February 23, 2023.

So, at UUSL we covenant together when we say every Sunday morning:

**Love is the spirit of this church,
and service is its law.**

This is our great covenant:

To dwell together in peace,

To seek the truth in love,

And to help one another.

As UUs we don't have a creed that we say.

**But we do believe in covenanting with one another
and with other UU congregations.**

**We need such a covenant to bind us together to face
the many challenges in the world today and within ourselves.**

Within the current Article II of the UUA we find "covenant" front and center:

**We covenant as member congregations
to affirm and promote our seven Principles and six Purposes.**

**Within the proposed revision we find the word "covenant" also in the
beginning:**

*As Unitarian Universalists, we covenant, congregation-to-congregation,
and through our association, to support and assist one another in our ministries.*

*We draw upon our heritages of freedom reason, hope, and courage,
building on the foundation of love.*

Love is the power that holds us together and is at the center of our shared values.

*We are accountable to one another for doing the work
of living our shared values through the spiritual disciple of Love.*

**Six values are listed as central to our faith, values we covenant to hold:
Justice, interdependence, equity, transformation, pluralism, and generosity.**

Since this is stewardship Sunday,

let's look at this core UU value of generosity:

Here is a description of generosity from the revised Article II text:

***“We cultivate a spirit of gratitude and hope. We covenant to freely
and compassionately share our faith, presence and resources.***

***Our generosity connects us to one another in relationships
of interdependency and mutuality.”***

We are thus called to cultivate a spirit of gratitude.

What is a spirit of gratitude?

**For me, it's knowing that we have everything we need right now,
at least in this very moment.**

And being thankful for what we have.

**Our prayer of thankfulness by Rev. Eugene Pickett this morning
is one way we can express our gratitude.**

There is so much to be grateful for within our congregation.

**Everywhere I turn, I am thankful for each and every person
who does what he, she, they can do to help us
be the beloved community we envision.**

Cultivating a sense of gratitude can lead to a sense of joy –

A joy I feel when I listen to our choir sing,

or when I walk by our garden, especially in the springtime.

**The joy that arises when we listen well to a person's stories,
or when at times we are delighted by some of our children's comments.**

And, we can find joy in knowing that caring is given to those hurting.

A sense of gratitude about anything in life,

and especially this morning about

our congregation can birth within each of us positive feelings –

such as love, joy, compassion and hope.

A sense of gratitude can also help us turn a situation around –

from seeing a situation through a negative lens,

to seeing a positive perspective – when we notice what's right,

rather than what's wrong.

We can find hope in being grateful for what we have.

I am hopeful, for example,

that we will indeed have a successful stewardship drive.

This hope is dependent on each of you

valuing our faith, valuing this congregation, and giving as freely as we can.

One of the aspects of our congregational life together

is that giving is not defined solely by giving money

to the pledge drive or the plate.

Giving comes in different forms - yes, of money,

but also in terms of talents and time.

To be a member of UUSL we do not need to pledge anything –

although I do hope we will pledge something in terms of money, if we can.

Some of our members unable to pledge, give of their time and talents-

volunteering their services to help us.

And for this, we are so very grateful!

Being grateful can lead to, generosity.

Within our US culture material wealth is highly prized.

To let go of holding on too tightly to such wealth can be a spiritual practice or spiritual discipline.

Being generous can be of benefit to each of us.

As our revised Article II statement says: *generosity connects us to one another in relationships of interdependence and mutuality.*

However we give to UUSL, whether through time, talent or goods, such giving is an expression of our valuing our religious home.

Such valuing includes our understanding of how interconnected our lives are with one another, day in, day out.

Such valuing may lead us to see that we are connected not only in the daily ways we relate to one another, but in a larger way – as sacred human beings, journeying together in this lifetime, working together to love mercy and walk humbly with what or whomever is the highest source, the ultimate reality within each of our lives –.

Unitarian Universalist financial advisors to our congregations tell us that “*Giving to a religious home such as UUSL often springs from a motivation and calling that differs somewhat from giving to other secular causes and organizations².*”

² Generosity Principles for Unitarian Universalist Congregations. <https://www.uua.org/finance/fundraising/generosity/185421.shtml>

This is certainly true for me.

**Each year I give the largest part of my giving pie to UUSL,
primarily because of how much I truly love and value this congregation.
I feel so very fortunate to be the minister of this congregation,
where efforts are real and genuine to sustain this beloved community
of liberal religious seekers here in the Lakes region.**

**The history of our larger faith of Unitarian Universalism
and the history of our congregation itself
–calls each of us to remember and honor those who came before us.**

**Our own congregation began with a small band
of twenty three charter members who were Universalists
gathering in 1838.**

**Then Unitarians carried our faith forward,
building a huge cathedral on Union and Hanover St in 1867.**

**And next in 1938 after a fire destroyed the Unitarian sanctuary on Union St,
we gathered as Unitarians in this current building,
with the merger in 1961 we became Unitarian Universalists.**

**Today we are the keepers of this heritage of our UU faith –
A faith sorely needed here and everywhere.**

**We as UUSL today are the holders of our faith for the future to come -.
providing sanctuary for all of us, and especially for those who are in need
of a safe place - a place to call “home,”
a place where we can be whoever we are
without fear of being rejected, criticized, judged.**

**So, I sincerely ask each of you to give whatever financial pledge you can
to this year's stewardship drive
so that we can fulfill our congregation's dreams
for the coming year – so that we can continue
the long tradition of our faith here in the Lakes Region.
We stand on the shoulders of those who came before us.
Even within my short time here,
I often feel the presence of those who worked hard to preserve and nurture
our lives together as liberal, religious seekers: -people like
– Denny Bothamley, David Bownes, Martha Chandler, Bill Zeckhausen,
Peter Baldwin, Tom Howe, Gerald Knight,
and so many others – each gave generously.
of their time and talents and goods.
We have inherited their passion and love for our congregation.**

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**So, let us move forward into the unknown coming year
realizing that we are now the keepers of our faith.
May we do so with love, hope, compassion and at this time in particular,
generosity.
Peace and love to you.**

Closing Hymn # 358

