

## ***The Call of Stewardship***

**October 6, 2013**

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### **Readings**

**James Baldwin, African American philosopher and novelist, wrote**

It is rare indeed that people give.

Most people guard and keep;

they suppose that it is they themselves and what they identify with themselves that they are guarding and keeping,

whereas what they are actually guarding and keeping is their system of reality and what they assume themselves to be.

One can give nothing whatever without giving oneself—

that is to say, risking oneself.

If one cannot risk oneself,

then one is simply incapable of giving.

### **Matthew 6:19-21**

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

### **Sermon: *The Call of Stewardship***

Upon telling a member of the congregation he was writing the sermon for their annual Stewardship Sunday, a colleague got this response. “What’s the big deal? This one’s easy. All you have to say is, ‘You have money. We need money. Give us your money.’ Then we can go home.” The impetus for today’s sermon is, as it was for my colleague, the start of the annual stewardship campaign. And as he did, I’ll decline that suggested message. Though money matters and I will say a few words on that subject. . .the heart, the call of stewardship, does not rest there.

“One can give nothing whatever without giving oneself— that is to say, risking oneself. If one cannot risk oneself, then one is simply incapable of giving.”

We are risk takers. We come through these doors in search, in need, in hope, in prayer. We come looking for something to make our lives better; to make the lives of our family, our friends, our neighbors better. We bring our whole selves and dare to trust that we will be welcomed in. We come for the first time or again, to give this community a try, to give it a

chance. And because we do, and because this place does make a difference, we return, we stay and we discover reasons to give, to give back.

By our gifts - whether they be our presence, our time and energy, our talent, skill, expertise, whatever they may be – by our gifts this is what we make possible here. Children learn and grow. Those who grieve are cared for. Minds are opened. Hearts are lifted. Prejudices are broken down. Self understandings deepen. Self images change. Beautiful music is offered. Fun is had. Needs within and beyond these walls are addressed. What we make possible here is simply this. We change lives and we change the world. We do this. Not me. Not you. Not them. We.

Experience has taught us we need one another. As Forrest Church said, “We choose to gather here because we know how easily we slip back into mechanical habits that blunt our consciousness. We need and know we need to be reminded week in and week out how precious life is. . . Not only for our own sake, but for the sake of our loved ones and our neighbors.

We need one another. We need the good news of this liberal religion. This community, our nation and our world need our good news - that it is about all of us. It’s not about me or what’s in it for me. It is about us. Refer to the principles of Unitarian Universalism and say we are all part of the interdependent web of existence. Quote Martin Luther King and say that we are bound together in a single garment of destiny. Remember the teaching of Thich Nhat Hanh on interbeing and say “I see you in me and me in you.” Call it how you will. It starts, says Marge Piercy "it starts when *you* care to *act*...it starts when you say *We* and know who you mean, and each day you mean one more."

Relationship is the call, the heart, of stewardship. Money helps make our relationships possible, helps build the community we want and need, and sustain it over time. We enter here bringing our whole selves, our deepest joys and sorrows, questions of meaning and faith, hopes and dreams, disappointments and pain. We bring all that here. In return, we receive support, kindness, encouragement, challenge, and other gifts of the generous and caring spirit. No, we are not perfect. We don’t always do our best. We may come to a place of regret, reach a point when we wish things were different. We may disagree with a decision, struggle with a choice or change. With time, patience, and mutual respect we recover, reconnect . . .and are reminded. . . we need one another.

Now. . .talking money in church can be tricky. It pushes boundaries of privacy, challenges values of equity and fairness, calls us to examine our personal relationship to dollars and cents. On this subject one colleague wrote “As a covenantal community we agree that everyone should be treated equitably. . . (and) no one given preferential treatment . . . It is right and good to be conscious of the power of money to come between us, to undermine our commitment to equity and compassion. . . it is not healthy for any community in seeking to affirm the value and worth of every individual to refuse to recognize the gifts of its members in whatever form they take.”

This congregation is blessed by the generosity of those who, over the years, contributed to and help grow our endowment. Income from the endowment is now dedicated to the maintenance and improvement of this building. Because of those gifts, we are able to dedicate income from the annual stewardship drive to our programs and ministries including worship, music, faith development. Over the past several years, income in the institutional budget – the building budget - has been tapped to make up the difference between the costs of our programs and ministries and the income received to support them. To begin to close that gap, our financial goal for this stewardship drive in support of the 2014 program budget is \$300,000, including a \$50,000 increase in pledges. With this increase the institutional budget will contribute just under \$41,000 in support of ongoing programs and ministries in the coming year.

Some may feel this increase is too much of a stretch. Some may be concerned we're not taking sufficient account of individual circumstance. We are stretching. Personal circumstances do make a difference. Some will be able to increase their gifts. Some will not. Some will find their life's circumstances require a decrease in their giving for this coming year. Each and every financial gift, each and every one, matters and is received with thanks.

Time and again over my thirty-plus years as a minister, I find myself full and truly amazed by our congregations. We choose to come together, to give to and to receive from each other gifts beyond measure. We could choose otherwise. And we choose this!! We choose to make of ourselves a congregation. And we choose to sustain this congregation with our loyalty, our participation and our generosity.

It starts, says Marge Piercy "when *you* care to *act*...it starts when you say *We* and know who you mean, and each day you mean one more."

If this is your first time pledging and/or if you'd like more information on the budget or our giving guide, you can find members of our Stewardship Committee at their table during the Stewardship Fair in Unity Hall following the service. If you have pledged previously, consider increasing your gift. If you are ready to complete your pledge card you may do in these next these few moments. Completed cards will be collected by Stewardship Committee members as you leave the sanctuary. Should there be any unused cards, they may be left in the pew racks.

I invite you to generous participation. I invite you to generous contributions.

Thank you!