

'Tis a Gift to Be Simple

Order of Service for Sunday, November 2, 2014

Rev. Sara Huisjen, Worship Leader

Jim Fisher, Worship Associate

Gathering Music	Marta Rieman, Guest Musician
Welcome & Announcement	UUCE Board Member
Ring of the Bell	
Prelude	Quiet Reflections II by Bart Clayton
Call to Worship	Rev. Sara Huisjen
* Opening Hymn	#16 'Tis A Gift to Be Simple
Chalice Lighting	Jim Fisher, Worship Associate

Dawn Skjei Cooley

We light our chalice this morning, grateful for the love that we experience in this beloved community. May the flame light the way for all who seek such abundance.

Time for All Ages	<i>Henry Hikes to Fitchburg</i> , by D.B. Johnson
Offering	Quiet Reflections I by Bart Clayton
Justice Moment	Kay Wilkins, PASA Committee Member
Joys & Sorrows	
Spoken Prayer	
Musical Offering	'Tis a Gift to Be Simple on bowed psaltery Jim Fisher

Sermon Part 1A: **Enough is as good as a feast** Jim Fisher

Let us pose a question. When do we have enough?

We are an acquisitive species.
We gather about us necessities and niceties.
The stuff that fills our homes, garages,
top right drawers

and fills our aspirations
with catalogs, shopping trips and
virtual trips through Amazon, Ebay
Facebook, and where did the time go?

We build our fortress
with more and more
and yet a little bit more.
And pray our house of cards
will not come a tumbling down.

Enough is as good as a feast.
Enough already.
Enough Is Enough.
Enough of that.
Had enough yet?
Enough said.
Never enough?

Some among us have so many things,

they just weigh us down.
The one thing we want
lost in piles of monogrammed detritus

Our spent dreams and forgotten ecstasy
A half-price bargain neatly wrapped
And tucked away for another day
You never know when it might come in handy.
Join us for a dialogue
About sufficiency
Ideas for living simply
With each other

Sermon Part 1B: Burden of our Possessions

Rev. Sara Huisjen

For what are you most grateful? And for whom?
I've been thinking about these questions,
pondering with Jim and on the pages
of my notebook & journal, wondering how
it is that '*knowing* I have enough' is, in fact,
a part of *being* and *becoming* more grateful?

[I'll give a brief, extemporaneous explanation about the theme
for this month being Gratitude: *the practice of knowing you have enough.*]

Assuming your basic needs for food, shelter, clothing,
security, and a sense of belonging are met—and I know
not *everybody's* are, but *if* these basic needs *are* met,
as they are in *my* life, would you say that you're
good at *knowing* you have enough? that you *are* enough?
A further extrapolation from one of Jim's *inferred* questions is this:
how do you know when enough of whatever
it is that you have, is actually *enough*?
We live in a culture that encourages consumerism,
that tells us, all that time, in subtle and not so subtle ways,
that *more* is better,
that having an *abundance* of things, rather
than a reasonable and sufficient amount
is what will make us happier, more grateful and secure.

[possibly reference Brene Brown's quote here, that we are
"a nation [full of people] hungry for more joy
because we are starving from a lack of gratitude."

This past Monday, I finally took time to clean my home office ,
and do laundry, and create some *order* out
of the chaos that had taken root in many places.
That's when I realized I currently own 21 pairs of shoes,
most of them tucked away in a closet; just 4 or 5 pairs
the ones I *actually* wear with any regularity.

In cleaning up, I also found 18 copies of our church directory—
several duplicates *and* from several different years,
including one from 2001, *long* before I ever

even walked into this church in Ellsworth.

Because I can, I choose *not* to tell you exactly how many *hymnals* I found, several tucked away on shelves, and in bags; a couple hidden under things in the hatchback of my car. (I *will* say I've brought all but *one* of them back to church now, I promise.) AND, all of *this* is to say, to *acknowledge* and *own*, perhaps with some of you here, that there's something about *having* stuff, and getting and collecting *more* stuff that I tend to think, rather *mindlessly*, will make me feel *better*; feel more secure, *be* happier, feel *more* grateful for my life and all I have, and in truth, that's very, very seldom, if ever, the case.

And so we wonder *with* you this morning:
What is *it* in your life that creates & nurtures a sense of gratitude within you?
For what and for *whom* are you most grateful?
What choices have you made about *how* you'll live that are impeding or enhancing your ability to feel grateful and appreciate the gift of being alive?

SILENT MEDITATION

[I'll introduce this time of silence with a few words, letting people know we'll be silent for 2 minutes together. I'll begin & end the silence by ringing the singing bowl.]

I may use these two quotes here or elsewhere:

"Piglet noticed that even though he had a very *small* heart, it could hold a rather large amount of gratitude." A.A. Milne

"This is a wonderful day.
I've never seen this one before." Maya Angelou

Sermon Part 2:

Two Paths to Living with Less

Jim Fisher

Paths to happiness may be paved with less retention.
Consider two vignettes for finding peace though disconnecting from ultimate consumerism.

Camp

(From Memorial For Margaret Winslow Fisher 07/14/12)
Blue Sky! A clarion call across the camp
echoing through the spruce forests of downeast Maine
Come and get it! Three girls and four boys crawl out of sleeping bags,
kept tight overhead lest bats should tangle in our hair.
Water boys, bring the buck-buck-bucket!

Scrambled eggs and bacon cooked on a wood stove.

Mid-August, yet cold enough that the oldest takes his place
By the wood stove and others arrange in pecking order
Breakfast is served.

An hour's work building a fire, cooking and serving vanishes in minutes.
Thanks mom. Bang, slams the door and as
a mountain of dishes wait in the cast iron sink.
What remarkable optimism
to wake seven children ages 2 to 18 to breakfast with such cheery words.
Blue Sky!

Many of us have fond recollections of going to camp. It's an American tradition and a centerpiece of Maine culture. In the early days of industrialization and steam powered transportation, our part of Maine become a popular spot for "rusticators", Well to do urbanites like the Rockefellers ventured downeast to escape the tumult of modernity and relax in the company of family. They colonized scenic coastal Maine during the warmest months of July and August, bringing urban society to a rural refuge. Others have made the move from complex urban lives to be closer with nature as a more deliberative process.

Our need to connect with woods, water, mountain are articulated by great Unitarian Universalists like Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Wald Emerson.

"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms."

— [Henry David Thoreau \(Walden: Or, Life in the Woods\)](#)

Emerson wrote:

"The earth laughs in flowers." [Ralph Waldo Emerson](#)

"Live in the sunshine, swim the sea, drink the wild air." [Ralph Waldo Emerson](#)

"When it is dark enough, you can see the stars." [Ralph Waldo Emerson](#)

More recent work by Richard Louv in his best selling book "Last Child in the Woods" takes this point further, arguing that children may suffer Nature Deficit Disorder if they do not have adequate time with nature.

Perhaps one benefit of time spent with nature is time spent away from all our stuff?

The trees, rivers, mountains are public goods. We can let go of our stuff long enough to appreciate all that is beyond us.

Another benefit, it seems, is to share nature with others on a more personal level. One recent study finds that children placed in a camp with other children and without any screens, cell phones, radios or other electronic devices quickly learn to better judge how other people are feeling, to be more empathetic. Being engaged in nature and being engaged with other people, is one path to simplifying our material world.

Renunciation as a stage of Life

De materializing is inherent in the course of our lives. As new-borns we have no concept of ownership or possessions. Our life course may be a process of accumulation, like the slow crescendo of music that inevitably must resolve into silence. Our decrescendo may be gradual as we shed the second car, the sports equipment, the house that has grown too large. Whether by conscientious determination or by physical infirmity we simplify what we can maintain and what we want to maintain.

Hinduism has a long tradition of material accumulation and renunciation. In the Sanskrit texts called the Ashrama (or stages) – we pass through four major phases in our life course.

[Brahmacharya](#) (student life) – Birth to age 24 – From birth our focus is nurturing by the family and mentoring by mentors (guru)

[Grihastha](#) (household or family life) – 24 to 48 (arguably older with our greater life expectancy) – A period of accumulation. We balance our time between the obligations of family and work. We provide sustenance for children and for elderly.

[Vanaprastha](#) (retired life) – 48 to 72 (or older) – “After the completion of one's householder duties, one gradually withdraws from the world, freely shares wisdom with others, and prepares for the complete renunciation of the final stage.”

[Sannyasa](#) (renounced life) – We completely withdraw from the world for spiritual pursuits. We practice meditation or prayer to that end. This is our last opportunity to seek moksha – or enlightenment to escape the endless cycle of life.

These are “ideal types” and like all ideals, most of us deviate. Still, in my time in India it was common to meet older men and women wrapped in dhotis and saris of simple cloth, living by alms and devoting their days to meditation and prayer. People in earlier stages of life gained merit by providing alms to the sannyasa, a gesture akin to our asking for others to pray for us. The material poverty of the Sannyasa nevertheless carried with it honor and respect. By comparison, elderly that continued to accumulate wealth and seek power gave up some honor and respect in the bargain. For the most ardent believers, the elderly that retained their devotion to material wealth might expect to be reborn somewhere further down the ladder by way of divine justice.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashrama_\(stage\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashrama_(stage))

Summation

These are just two of many paths to simplifying our lives. Finding gratitude by disconnecting from our hyper-communicative, wired network to reconnecting with nature or with our inner spiritual being may happen without conscious effort or even our desire, but for most of us the process is going to take some initiative.

Fortunately these practices are not complex. They are so utterly simple that we may not see them for what they are. We may not believe that they can help us. The process may be as simple as being grateful for the cool air of an autumn morning. The Reverend Jonathan Fisher, established minister in Blue Hill from 1796 to 1836, once noted the joy he found late in life at eating a freshly cooked potato.

“Cultivate the habit of being grateful for every good thing that comes to you, and to give thanks continuously. And because all things have contributed to your advancement, you should include all things in your gratitude.”

— [Ralph Waldo Emerson](#)

MEDITATIVE HYMN #18 *What Wondrous Love is This*

Jim Fisher

Please remain seated and join in singing a meditative hymn,
#18 in your hymnal *What Wondrous Love is This*.

Sermon Part III

Practicing Gratitude

Rev. Sara Huisjen

How we live our lives matters.

The choices we make *do* make a difference—

Do we make a point, when and where we can,
more of the time, to walk to Fitchburg

and take in the sights? To enjoy

the way we are spending our day?

Or do we stay busy, busy, and work

harder, longer hours *more* to make
the money we need to get there *faster*?
And what about the blackberries?
When do we stop & eat the blackberries—
or the apples, as it may be, in *this* season?

David Steidl-Rast is a Catholic Benedictine monk,
now in his 80s, who has studied & practiced
Zen Buddhism many years. In addition to being
an interfaith scholar, he's written extensively
about gratitude and how we might go about
living lives that are grounded *more* of the time
in a real and *abiding* sense of gratitude.

In one of his more *recent* Ted Talks called
“Want to be Happy? Be Grateful,” Steidl-Rast
begins his remarks by acknowledging
that *all* human beings *want* to be happy,
that although how we *imagine* our happiness
differs across peoples and cultures,
wanting to be happy is, in fact,
a universal, human longing & condition.

In his talk, he goes on to speak about the
Relationship between happiness *and* gratitude
by considering these few questions:
Is it true that when we're happy, we're most grateful?
Is it really *happy* people who are grateful?
Or is it, more likely, as he suggests,
the other way around: that people who
are grateful, experience more happiness?
That being grateful is a pre-requisite of sorts
of being and feeling happy?
We've all known people, after all, who have
difficult hard lives and still iminate a sense of
calm groundedness, a kind of gratitude.

[I'll be saying more about Steidl-Rast's 'simple formula'
for being and becoming more grateful: STOP. LOOK. GO.]

What are the daily practices & efforts that
you make every day (or mean to make every day)
to become a more grateful person,
more appreciative of you life, of your things,
of the people in it, and the beauty of the world around you?
Even when things are hard,
you're hearts heavy and not interested really
in being told to be grateful, what are a few of the
things you've learned to do & practice?

Surely making time to be in nature is something

We might each do, at our camps, as Jim suggests,
Or in our backyards, or at the base of some small mountain
We see each day, or a shoreline to a pond nearby or the ocean.
Making time to be out there;
To step away from our possessions;
To experience beauty and time in an easier,
More present way, all of this gives birth
to more of a lasting & rooted sense of gratitude in our lives.
Feeling grateful is, at least in part, the result of
Feeling a sense of awe for what we have and are given,
And a part of; the essence of life happening,
Unfolding around us.

[might mention the hospice patient years ago
who wanted to smell the tomatoes in august;
that was her wish, what made her life better..]

Google “practices to nurture gratitude” and you’ll find
there are hundreds, if not thousands, of websites,
article and research finding that list
things you can do to feel more grateful.

[I’ll put more here, flesh it out and then cut the whole section way back.]

Buddhism has much to offer and teach us about gratitude
and living more grateful, present lives, but it starts with suffering.
As you likely well remember and know the Buddha tells us:
life is inherently unsatisfying. The Sanskrit word he used
is *dukkha*, d-u-k-k-h-a transliterated.
It means stress, uncertainty, discontent, suffering.
The Buddha said, life is *dukkha*.
Being a human being means being discontented,
not every moment but a lot of the time.
Being human means feeling stress.
It means suffering,
wishing things were otherwise than how they are.
Buddhism starts here. It says, this is how it feels to be human.
But it doesn’t *end* there.
Buddhism says, we don’t *have* to be this way.
We don’t have to be stressed out all the time.
We don’t have to be discontented.
We don’t have to let suffering dominate our life.
Because what we are meant to be is *joy*.
Pure joy.
The goal of human life is *joy*.
The goal of the religious life is joy.

Now, Buddhist teachers tell us we *get there*
through discipline, through study and committed practice.
It doesn’t just happen—at least for most of us!
It takes commitment.
But the goal is freedom and joy.
Even the Dalai Lama says so: the goal of life is to be happy!

It's not wrong or foolish to be happy—
it's the most sublime state there is.
Joy is not a vaguely disreputable byproduct of the religious life—
it's the whole point!

And gratitude is one of the fundamental practices that lead to joy.
Obviously it's not the only one, but it's pretty powerful.
We all know this.
When we feel grateful,
we are touching joy.
One Tibetan Buddhist teacher says,
gratitude opens our heart "like a satellite dish."
We open up to send our thanks out to the world,
and in that state of openness
we're able to notice all the blessings that surround us, always.

Albert Einstein said once, at least we're told it was him
and I like to hope it was,
"There are two ways to live your life:
one is as though nothing is a miracle,
the other is as though everything is a miracle."

When we decide to practice gratitude,
this is how it is.
This is how everything is.
We strengthen our mind and our senses
to experience a blessing in everything that is.

The Rev. Galen Guengerich is the senior minister at All Souls UU Congregation in Manhattan, New York. In an article he wrote for the UU World back in the spring of 2007, he made a point about the value and need for a central spiritual practice in Unitarian Universalism if we're to *live* our faith in engaged ways that *transforms* us—our consciousness, the way we live and the world around us for the better. These are his words, the questions and interesting answer he suggests:

Unless our [Unitarian Universalist] faith is mere intellectual affectation ... the defining element of our faith must be a daily practice of some kind. What kind of practice? For Jews, the defining discipline is obedience: To be a faithful Jew is to obey the commands of God. For Christians, the defining discipline is love: To be a faithful Christian is to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself. For Muslims, the defining discipline is submission: To be a faithful Muslim is to submit to the will of Allah.

And what of us? What should be our defining religious discipline? While obedience, love, and even submission each play a vital role in the life of faith, my current conviction is that our defining discipline should be gratitude.

Musical Response *'Tis a Gift to Be Simple* on bowed psaltery Jim Fisher

Hymn #354 We Laugh We Cry

*** CLOSING WORDS** (If time is short – then just the first verse or the first and last work)

T.S. Eliot: The Little Gidding (1942)

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

Through the unknown, unremembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple-tree

Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.
Quick now, here, now, always--
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)

And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flames are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.