

3/13/11 Sermon

“The Potter’s Wheel”

Rev. Paul D. Daniel, Minister

Each of us has come to this canvass time in UUMAN’s history with different hopes, dreams and expectations. Your decision on how much you are moved to financially support the various ministries we offer each other and the community we are creating will determine whether those aspirations will be met. This canvass is ultimately about setting priorities for your own life. The simple truth is, not funding this year’s budget has the potential to disappoint you and your deepest longings.

Imagine for a moment you are a potter with a lump of raw clay you have placed on the wheel. You stand back and look for the essence of what you hope to create. When your foot presses the pedal to spin the wheel and your hand touches the clay for the first time, the process of creation begins. So it was when you first came to UUMAN. Perhaps you can still feel the excitement of that moment – and still do when you engage in the work your life calls you to. Each of you, by your presence here today, contributes a unique creative spirit to the clay. Some have a deeper impact than others for they have been here longer – perhaps a founder or a long time member. Others are newcomers or friends who have brought a fresh energy, vision and enthusiasm. Each of us will change the nature of this community and its future. Whichever you are, you have already made sacrifices to support this community.

We need each other to help make things work out in the ways we hope, so that we keep something spiritually vital and important alive: that opportunity to create something transcendent that touches the holy and connects us to others in a meaningful way. The person sitting next to you today needs that and the stranger who enters our doors next week hungers for what we offer, or they would not come.

Realistically, this Canvass is about choices. It is about why you are a member of UUMAN and whether you will honor your commitment to each other to work together to create something larger than yourself.

Our staff – Toniann who directs our Religious Education programs, Huu Mai who leads our great choir, and Suzy who keeps the wheels of UUMAN humming along – each has staked their future on UUMAN’s success in living its mission. We all have in various ways.

I staked my personal and financial future when I accepted your call to serve as your minister. I came cross country and became a stranger in a strange land because I wanted to be your spiritual leader. We all have risked much and now, like some of you, I move between hope and fear for our future, sometimes at lightning speed.

But know this ... I have no regrets. I am here because I want to be. I have abiding hope in our future together; for I know a life worth living is full of challenges and also presents opportunity in the face of adversity to grow. I know we are up to the task, so I do not despair. I have trust in myself, my faith and especially in you and the covenant we share. That trust tells me that we will do the right thing for ourselves and UUMAN.

Each of us – founder, new member or visitor – will shape the future of UUMAN. We will do that by doing our best to honor the financial commitment we made to this current budget and by helping with additional dollars if we can. We will take to heart the value this congregation has for us when we consider our pledge for the New Year. That value is far more than bricks and mortar. You only have to look at the person sitting next to you to know that truth.

I am not just asking you to be a steward of this church but of each other, the planet and all your brethren. We must be about the business of building relationships in a way that acknowledges the web of existence and the value of each person in that web. Membership is about bringing to life our faith for ourselves, our children, as well as for the stranger.

Money is only a sub-text for what is really important at UUMAN. Your pledges provide sacred space and a forum to engage each other in a heartfelt civil manner. Perhaps more than sex and politics, money is hard to talk about because it has power over us and embodies a mystique around issues of influence and prestige, status and even vulnerability over the struggle to acquire it, hold on to it, spend it and not lose or waste it.

Strangely, though money is also about love, for we financially contribute to what we love, our families and children, social welfare organizations, our faith and church. Money is a tool that enables the longings of our heart to become effective in reaching out to others to repair a broken world. It empowers us to live out our values and faith. It offers us a place to plumb our spiritual depth and to build and maintain building and provides staff to accomplish lasting deeds.

We drink "Fair Trade" coffee to help farmers in Central America earn a living wage so they can feed their children. We offer pastoral care when our members are hospitalized.

Money, when properly focused, allows us to embody our values more effectively. Over times, we have learned that when the congregation unites, we have greater power to effect change in the world than we do as individuals. The institutional church lends purpose to our lives and allows us to focus our attention not on the dollars but on how money empowers us to serve people who have great need.

We have an opportunity right now to be great. As a congregation we have sometimes been like a diamond in the rough – we see our own potential, but have not quite focused on why we exist or what purpose we serve. We have not always done that well with spiritual purpose of money because our focus has been on the nuts and bolts of running a church, often at the expense of our real mission and vision that you see each week on the front cover of our Order of Worship.

Sometimes we forget that we are a community dedicated to each other, even turn on each other when the challenges feel overwhelming. But what gives me hope is that I have also seen members come back together, acknowledge their breach of our covenant, put their differences aside and work together for the common good. We have found that when we use money wisely, we can do all these things and more and, in so doing, open the door to the greatness hidden within each of us – the call to serve humanity.

We would do well to remember that we actually minister well to each other with pastoral care and worship that can meet our spiritual needs. We have successful lifespan faith development and adult enrichment programs that serve all ages with a variety of programs. We are beginning to find a new focus for our social justice outreach. We are supporting and spreading the good news of Unitarian Universalism. We can be justly proud of our accomplishments, yet humble in the knowledge that there is much more we can do.

Like the potter, we can step back, take in all we have created and then take the next step in refining our vision into something we would be proud to share with the world. We are limited only by our vision of what we can achieve. That is why we would fund this canvass.

The shape of UUMAN is incomplete, as we all are. The next step for us is to redefine who we want to be in this community and then live that into reality.

Like the potter we stand at the wheel – experiencing and feeling the clay and working to shape it into something grand, containing all the colors of our dreams – which to us is the sacred vessel we know here as UUMAN. What we imagine and create with our hands will contain all our hopes and visions for a better tomorrow; that will serve our spiritual need to bend the arc of the universe toward justice and compassion.

This is not a time of despair, for out of challenge and adversity hope is born anew. All is possible if we are willing to boldly act on our dreams. This is our moment of greatness if we take all the good that has come to us through our participation and support of UUMAN and apply it to the present and into the future.

Through your time, your talent and your treasure, you are building something of true worth and dignity that exemplifies the best in us – in the service to humanity. Here we are linking hope to action. We do that when we come together because we need each other when we seek to heal and would be whole. We need one another when we come to grieve and die, and when we celebrate and laugh together. Our lives take on greater meaning when we share it with others in a place such as at UUMAN.

May what your hands have created reflect the vision of your heart.

Blessed it be!

May it be so!