

## The Future Is Ours To Create

### A sermon by Emily Richards, given February 25, 2024

Hello Beloveds. This morning we gather to lift up the good works of this community. To celebrate the ways that our faith invites us to live out our principles and values in the world.

And as these joys are shared I am going to invite you to respond in whatever way your heart is calling you to do so in the moment. You could clap your hands, or even raise them up into the air. You could shout and sing out your joy using words like, yes, preach, say it, or in a wordless cry of jubilation. You might even be moved to jump to your feet and shout hallelujah.

Who knows?

Stranger things have happened.

These outbursts of praise are welcome in this space. All of who you are is welcome here.

And if the way that you share in this praise is to simply smile or silently bring your hand to your chest, that is also welcome.

So please, allow the spirit of joy and exultation to move you this morning. Let us share in the love that it brings and let that feeling spill from our lips to fill this space with a resonating harmony that connects us all.

May it be so. Blessed be. Hallelujah. And Amen.

Sermon

You're all still here! I think we need a little bit of praise for that! I kept watching for people sneaking out the back when you all realized that today we were going to be talking about money, and, I have been watching pretty closely but I don't think I saw anyone escape. And I do have the best view from up here.

Maybe the tantalizing aroma of soup wafting from the Annex has managed to keep you here.

Or maybe it was the angelic voices of our amazing choir.

Or maybe, you, like me, are inspired by the voices of your fellow congregants lifting up the good works of this community.

Regardless, I'm grateful to see all of your faces looking back at me now.

Shall we start with some more praise?

I'm sorry, that wasn't meant to be a rhetorical question.

Shall we start with some more praise?

Let us share in praise for our 8th Principle Action Ministry (formerly the Anti-racism Ministry Team) which has offered five sessions of Living the Pledge to End Racism. To date, over 80 individuals have participated to make a pledge to end racism.

I feel grateful to have been one of them. Who else has participated in this program?

This has been made possible by a dedicated core group of individuals who are working to widen the circle and the most recent time it was offered, we reached out to successfully include members of the local community.

My understanding is that this group is hoping to offer another session this spring that will also be open to the broader community. If you have not yet participated I highly recommend it.

This is living out our 8th principle and our value of justice.

This is what you are supporting when you give to this community.

Today we have been focusing on monetary donations but I want to lift up that there are many ways to give, to be generous. We give our time by showing up and volunteering for teams, committees and programs, like Living the Pledge.

We give by sharing the good word about this community to others and inviting them in. And I cannot stress how important of an aspect of giving back to this community that this is.

And we give financially. We pledge to support this community so that we can keep these important ministries alive. So that we can pay our dedicated and amazing staff. So that we can keep the lights on and the buildings in good repair. So that we can gather on Sunday mornings and throughout the week to connect, engage, and inspire.

Past UUA President Rev. Susan Frederick Gray said

“Generosity isn’t just about giving our money or possessions. It’s also about giving our time, our hearts, our presence to others. We think about generosity as a readiness and liberality in giving, but the dictionary also defines generosity as meaning fullness, and also freedom from meanness or smallness of mind and character. Generosity is a quality of character that allows us to be open, present, listening, caring, generous with ourselves to others...”

When the first pledge season rolled around after I began serving this community as a member of the staff team I remember feeling unsure about whether I should continue pledging now that my relationship to this community had shifted. As many of you know I was a member before I took on this role. My name is in the book beside many of your own.

I asked Rev. Margaret what the expectation was for staff and she told me that it was up to me. She shared that she pledged but that the choice was ultimately mine.

And my choice was, and still is, to pledge to this church. To give some of the money that I earn from my job here, back to support this community.

Every year we have increased the amount that my family has pledged and this year is no exception.

Because this is more than just a job. This is my faith. Being a Unitarian Universalist is at the center of who I am and who I want to be in the world. Including living out the value of generosity. How could I not continue to give in this way as well?

I know that talking about money can bring up discomfort. Capitalism in many ways depends on that because it keeps us from talking to one another honestly about the deep disparities that exist in our culture.

We are told that if we are struggling financially, and I have been there many times in my life, friends, that we should be ashamed because it means we aren't working hard enough. Or that we are irresponsible and obviously wasting the resources we have on frivolous things, like coffee.

And if we are doing well financially we are told that we shouldn't talk about that either because it could somehow come across as boastful or imply that we don't care about the economic inequalities that exist because we ourselves are financially stable.

So we are caught in a web of silence and shame surrounding our economic status.

I am going to invite us to lean into this discomfort, free ourselves from the cultural constraints, and start having more conversations about things that feel challenging.

Including money.

Each of you sitting here has more to give than you realize. You have generous hearts. You show up here and give your love and support in so many ways.

And today I am going to ask you to consider that one of the most important ways that you can give to this community is to pledge.

Unsurprisingly one of the programs closest to my heart is our religious exploration for children, youth, and families. A program that has been growing. Practically every week we have new families walking in our doors.

So, let's take a moment to lift up just a few of the ways that your pledge supports our families and children.

Pledging supports our Nursery, because we all know that if anyone needs a break it is our parents with young children.

Pledging supports our classrooms, it supports events like our upcoming movie night, another time when we are inviting parents to drop their kids off in a safe loving space where we will feed and entertain them.

It supports opportunities to invite the wider community in like our upcoming Spring Celebration.

It supports exploring our roots as a pluralistic people through our Crossing Paths program which included a recent visit by our youth to the Al-Huda Islamic Center.

It supports our amazing staff, like our RE Asst Madeline, who has taken the lead on creating an All Things Baby Swap this spring so that parents in the Ithaca community can bring in items that they no longer need and pick up other supplies for free, with everything that is unclaimed going to support Babies First.

And, I am incredibly pleased to announce that we will be offering, for the first time ever to my knowledge, three weeks, plus two days, of camp for kids ages 5-12 this summer. Camp Aurora will focus on connection and community and offer themed weeks such as Building Connection, Peace Village, and Be the Change.

Registration will be open this upcoming week.

This, and so much more, is what you are supporting when you pledge a financial contribution.

We have the opportunity to not just continue, but to expand the good work that we are doing to serve this congregation, and the wider community. To work towards creating the future that we believe in here and beyond these walls.

Maya Angelou wrote “When we unite in purpose we are greater than the sum of our parts.”

Imagine what we can do when we unite in purpose. When we share the liberating love that is at the center of this faith.

All of what you imagine and more can be the future that we create, together.