

There is evidence that enthusiastic Universalist missionaries travelled through here in the early 1800s. They travelled from Brockville through to London, connecting with people along the route they travelled. There was a short-lived Universalist congregation in Toronto in those years... likely at least some people in the villages surrounding the city explored that earlier strand of our dual tradition. We also know that people travelled here to participate in this Unitarian congregation that was formed in 1845.

They gathered to consider what must have seemed, at the time, a daunting possibility, they gathered to discuss the formation of a Unitarian Congregation. At the time, this city was different, in many ways, than it is today. Unitarianism would have been considered a radical notion. So, the idea of founding a congregation must have seemed daunting, and the very idea of declaring yourself a Unitarian must have seemed, to some, impossible. I know that even today, there are some of you who mumble and stumble when a neighbour or relative asks you about your church. I've heard stories from members in our congregations, stories told with sadness, of relatives who KNOW, with absolute certainty that membership in a Unitarian congregation is proof positive of innate failing. If *we* struggle to talk about our faith community and if *we* run the risk of the censure of our families by choosing to be here, I can only imagine the personal price some of those early members risked. A Unitarian understanding of God, or not, and a Unitarian understanding of Jesus, would have been, at best, 'unusual'. Up until the first decade or so after World War II, Canada and Southern Ontario, in particular, was dominated by mainstream Protestantism. People assumed that their neighbours were Christian. The schools still opened each day with explicitly Christian prayers. We know many communities could be restrictive and hurtful to those who didn't fit the model of hardworking Christian. The years when Unitarians were first gathering here were still years when people got ahead through church connections. So, for those early founders, there was much to lose – the support of family, the approval of society, and business opportunities. Presumably, though, they found enough of worth, enough to sustain them; they found enough to make it worth their while. They lost something *and*

they found something. I can, from my vantage point today, only guess what it was they found – perhaps they found a sense of personal integrity that comes from being true to one’s belief, a community of sympathetic souls, and new hope for the potential of the religious impulse.

How much of that story resonates with ours today? What have we lost by becoming members of a Unitarian Congregation? What does your association with this congregation ask you to give up? As I said earlier, I know some of you have likely lost the sympathy and support of family members. Others have lost an old understanding of who they were – some have left behind an “I don’t need religion or church” identity and others have lost the faith that used to sustain them. Some of us have lost the luxury of unscheduled Sunday mornings and long breakfasts or the opportunity to sleep in. What have you lost on your road to this place, to this morning?

Some of our great religious teachers have had something to say about losing – about how it is something we need to do. They remind us that we find the best in ourselves when we lose something of ourselves. The Buddha said, “With the relinquishing of all thought and egotism, the enlightened one is liberated through not clinging.” Jesus said, “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” And Mahatma Gandhi said, “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” These three quotes all get at the same point – though from slightly different places. All three suggest that we need to let go of something if we are to find our true selves. All three suggest, alas, that we can’t have our cake and eat it too! I’m reminded of the stories that pop up from time to time, of Monkey Traps. It’s said that you can catch a monkey if you hollow out a gourd or coconut, attach it by a rope to a tree, cut an opening just large enough for an outstretched monkey paw and then bait it with some monkey munchies. Apparently, the monkey will reach in through the hole, will grasp the food and then, will continue to keep that grasp even while would-be captors approach. Unwilling to let go of the treat, the monkey loses freedom. I know I sometimes refuse to let go of something, and in the fear of losing, lose

something of myself. If I only had the courage to let go, I'd find some opportunity or insight.

If we've lost something in order to be here today, to be part of this community, we've done so because we have or hope to gain something from it. In coming here we've sought the richness that a community can bring us. Your very presence here this morning says, "I need other people". Your choice to attend corporate worship, the gathering of this group in one body, even virtually is a choice to engage with others. The late Rev. Robert Karnan, spoke about what we might find through our association with a congregation:

Our churches and fellowships exist... to give us the gift of deep and good friendships. They invite us to share our woes, our tears, our laughter and our joy. They ask to share our lost moments and our insanity as well as our found ones and our sanity. For each of us, has all of these at some time or another. They request our honest presence so that we may share the goodness that honesty brings. It is not **Truth** that they seek, but the **truths**, *of the mind and heart*. There is no more critical task for our lives than the courage to love and to be there honestly and fully for one another. Our task as a religious community is not to idolize and love God; it is to love one another in just relationship so that we make the love of God a reality and not a desperate dream or a painful despair. (Karnan, 1994)

We've all decided not to do something today and instead have chosen to join this gathering. We've made a choice, to be with one another so that together we can be present to one another, to find for ourselves and to give to one another a community that helps us strive for justice and to make manifest the 'love of God' – or as some might prefer to state it, 'to engage in nurturing, generative community'. That, to me, makes giving up a Sunday morning of leisure *very* worthwhile!

"So", you may find yourself wondering, "What does all any of this have to do with our relationship with money and generosity. This Sunday visit is, after all, billed as part of your Annual Stewardship Campaign. I believe we make the same kind of lost and found choices with our money

as we do with our time and our loyalties. I believe we can try to hold on to our money, just as tightly as the monkey in the trap does, and I believe that choice costs us something. We can't have our cake and eat it too. I'm not suggesting that I think it's necessary to give away all your money, or all of your savings and exchange them for a beggar's bowl. I don't think that 'money is the root of all evil', but I can agree with the actual passage in Timothy that says, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." Gandhi reminded us that "capital as such is not evil; it is its wrong use that is evil. Capital in some form or other will always be needed." What I'm saying is, unless we can find ways to use our money, to make it part of the generative flow of human community, unless we can find useful ways to spend and use our money, we are stuck with our hand in a coconut. We need to lose something in order to find ourselves. We may at the end of the day have less money, but will we have less of ourselves? We may at the end of the day have lost something, but have we remembered to ask what we'll have gained.

This topic of giving and of generosity and money is a touchy one in our culture. In an essay entitled, "Only Reflect: A Philanthropic Education for our Time" the authors, Elizabeth Lynn and Susan Wisely acknowledge the powerful cultural taboos that promote secrecy about money. The result, they remind, us is that we compartmentalize money, that we let the topic isolate us and that in the process money and value become unhitched. "When it comes to giving, this taboo gains new intensity, fueled by fears that others will judge us, or worse yet, try to manipulate us for their own purposes." Now I'm not saying we're going to bust the continent-wide money taboo open in one day, right here in this congregation, but am suggesting we start. I'm talking about money. I'm talking about giving some of it away. I'm talking about the need for congregations to have vital and sustaining stewardship campaigns. I'm talking about daring to have conversations about money, to bring it out of the closet, and to begin to chip away at its mystique. I'm talking about loss – but I'm also talking about gain. I'm talking about the things we find when we lose. Lost and found.

A great deal of our daily lives involves commerce. I live in a house, I pay property tax, I have furniture, I see the snowplow clear my street, I heat my home, there are bills and statements to deal with each month, and, and, and... I am an economic being. I can pretend otherwise, but I'd only be trying to kid myself and to kid you. It seems to me, that in denying the economic realities of my life I'm holding on to something – a taboo if nothing else. Acknowledging the taboo is a first step in finding our own authority when it comes to money – it means we're more able to make the money/value connection and when we do that I think we're able to understand what it means and in turn become less frightened of being judged and of being taken advantage of. We have to lose in order to find. Consider for a moment our cultural reluctance to talk about money serves? It allows us, it allows you, to foster the idea that our congregations are above money, that money isn't that important. What do you lose? You lose the ability to have open and honest conversations about the many ways you value this congregation. If congregations give in to the taboo, we lose the ability to proactively plan for the future we dream of. Unless you are willing to talk about money. unless your members are able to provide some indication of intentions in regards to their pledges – you run the risk of remaining mired in the status quo, unable to plan or project. Losing the taboo might help you find the path to the future you dream of. Lost and Found...

It takes *courage* to let things go. We *hate* the idea of losing. We *worry* about getting lost. But where would we be this morning if those early members didn't have that courage in 1845? They risked a lot to begin the work of building this Unitarian Congregation. I hope they gained something. I know I'm grateful they dared to be different. And might there be a future generation that says to ours, "Thank you"? Might they say, "Thanks for being able to lose the comfort of a warm bed on Sunday morning, for letting go of a self-identity that didn't include Unitarian Universalism, for daring to dream of a church better able to serve the needs of this community and for your willingness to open your heart and mouth and hand and engage honestly in a conversation about money? They might. And it would be good if they did, but that is not the most important reason. I'm suggesting we challenge a taboo, not to gain the

praises of the un-born, but so that you can understand who you are, what you are letting go of and the great joy of finding more of your best self. Maybe it is no less daunting today to be a member of a Unitarian congregation in this city than it was in 1845. Perhaps your neighbours are surprised for different reasons now they were then. Your choice to be part of this community still requires your commitment and your passion. They still require you to make some choices, sometimes they aren't easy ones. The things you give up now might be different than the sacrifices your founding members made. But like they did, over 177 years ago, the choices offer some paybacks. Ultimately each one of us, in our decision to be part of a congregation has gained something from it, something that keeps us involved, something that makes it worth our while. What is it that you've gained? And what is it that you are prepared to lose – so that you can, together, find your way?