**“We Gather Together: Thanksgiving”**

**The Unitarian Church of Lincoln**

**November 22, 2015**

[Gratitude can transform common days into thanksgivings, turn routine jobs into joy, and change ordinary opportunities into blessings.](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/w/williamart676240.html?src=t_thanksgiving)

[William Arthur Ward](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/w/william_arthur_ward.html)

***Gathering of the Community***

**Ringing of Bell**

**Welcome and Announcements: Board Host**

**Prelude:**

***Stating Intent***

**Chalice Lighting:** from Robert Schaibly

**Opening words:** #512 “We Give Thanks”

A shared litany

**Hymn:** #349 “We Gather Together

***Time for all ages***

**Story:** "Grandpa Alan's Marvelous Loaves"

by Beryl Aschenberg

**Children’s Song:** #402 “From You, I Receive”

***Deepening***

**Reading:** from Kenneth L. Patton

Adapted by Kathryn Warrior

**Musical Interlude:**

**Sermon:** “We Gather Together”

**Offering and Offertory:**

***Returning to Community: the work of the people***

**Sharing of Joys and Sorrows**

**Meditation**

***Integration and Release***

**Closing Hymn:** #67 “We Sing Now Together”

(verses 1 & 4)

**Postlude:**

**Closing Words:** by Barbara J. Pescan

**Worship Associate:** LauraLee Woodruff

***Stating Intent***

**Chalice Lighting:** from Robert Schaibly

*We drink from wells we did not dig.*

*We have been warmed by fires we did not build.*

*We light this chalice in thanksgiving*

*for those who passed their light to us.*

*Robert Schaibly*

**Opening words:** #512 “We Give Thanks”

A shared litany

**Hymn:** #349 “We Gather Together

***Time for all ages***

**Story:** "Grandpa Alan's Marvelous Loaves"

by Beryl Aschenberg

**Children’s Song:** #404 “From You I Receive”

***Deepening***

**Reading:** from Kenneth L. Patton

Adapted by Kathryn Warrior

Who can make an accounting of gratitude?

For the universe we give thanks, an expanse of life to stretch us with wonder...

For the earth we give thanks, fragment of the stars that is our home...

For life we give thanks, the burning of stars ordered and tempered here allowing us life and breath...

For growth we give thanks, for the heritage of the spirit, for all the forces past our knowing, power past our control...

For the ages which follow us, for the eternity of days, in which life is ever renewed and fulfilled, we give thanks.

**Musical Interlude:**

**Sermon:** “We Gather Together”

On the morning of Tuesday, November 19, 2013, I learned, via my cousin Annemarie’s FaceBook page, that her father, who was also my mother’s brother and my God father, Josef Gilbert Parker, died, not two months after his second leg was amputated for diabetes-related complications.

Joe was 85 years old and lived those years fully. He was truly a character of broad appetites and strong opinions. He was a husband to two women (both named Mary Louise) sequentially, a father of three children by one of those women and two by the second, an English teacher, a high school basketball and baseball coach, and an irascible raconteur of very bad jokes. My next brother unfortunately inherited this last quality. Joe will be missed but not forgotten.

But here’s the thing: The community celebration of his life took place in a park in Dunedin, Florida, followed by a wake in a local bar. While his Barbershop buddies provided music, there was no spiritual community to provide a place to celebrate his life and support his family. Since his second wife was also failing, the family chose to wait until his second wife dies to hold a memorial service – who knows where or when? Maybe practical, but somehow sad for me.

I am not telling this story to engender sympathy for me – or his family; I tell it because I know, no matter whether I am, still serving a church or not, I am attached to a spiritual movement that will provide a place to celebrate my life. I know Judy will have the support and care of a UU congregation, and my children will have a place with shared values and concern to gather together for their closure. I am content and grateful.

Yes, we “gather together” for many reasons, not the least of these being celebration of the lives we have loved and lost and whom we grieve after their departure. As the Rev. Dr. Forrest Church pointed out, “Religion is the human response to knowing that we are alive, and that we will die.” We gather together to acknowledge both those realities.

But that is certainly not the only reason we gather together. There is deeper meaning to our gathering than simply addressing death, powerful as that reason is.

In the 2013 winter *UU World*, my colleague Tom Schade asserted that there are deeper reasons for gathering together in spiritual community. He writes, “. . . our purpose is to develop people who would care about an issue and feel the strength to act.” (*UU World,* winter 2013, p. 32.)

Even that is not enough though, He writes, “We must build our religious communities not as refuges, but to humanize our culture and transform the world.” (Ibid. p. 33.) The he gets quite specific:

Transforming our culture will include many of the activities that are already a part of our UU lives: inviting people to join our congregations; volunteering for charity; campaigning for justice. But our larger cause is to build a culture of liberality, by encouraging individuals to live by the liberal virtues, such as openness and solidarity, respect for the truth, humility, reverence and awe, gratitude and generosity, and self-awareness and self-possession. . .

We have to turn ourselves inside out to turn the world upside down. (Ibid.)

Tom is not presenting us with comfortable “cheap grace.” He is offering the inspiration of action as well as good feelings, of thinking not only of our selves, but the world in which we live - with a lot of people who may make us uncomfortable. He is asserting that we need to gather together in deeper and more life-changing ways.

What are the outcomes of this sort of gathering? Tom has quite a list: openness, solidarity, humility, reverence and awe, gratitude and generosity, self-awareness and self-possession, and respect for truth. That’s a tall order – and it inspires me to feel like life is more worth living with those results. Gratitude, giving thanks, is a natural outcome of living in spiritual community with these values.

I would add another reason for spiritual communities that reach beyond themselves into our world, and that is our very human need to have a place to accept and magnify our individual and collective upwellings of creativity, celebration, and love. We need places to show what we can do and to risk something new. And we need people to cheer us on and offer constructive advice as we do these things.

We need to gather together to support one another as we take risks. We need to stand behind those who are reminding us all that “Black Lives Matter.” We need to support those who are opposing the terrible terrorist actions in Nigeria that have taken so many lives this week. We need to remind those around us oblivious to the realities of our world that this October was the hottest October in the world since records have been kept. Global Climate Change is not in the future. That future is now and beyond repute.

Life clearly is not all bad, nor all good; not all sorrow, nor all celebration. As my good friend Barbara Woolf once noted with great insight and balance, “We all need a place to say ‘Oh, Shit’ and ‘Yahoo!’ That is a good reason to gather together.

Finally, Tom Schade invites us to share a message of encouragement and good will as we gather together during this season of thanksgiving:

You matter. You are a child of God and you have a right to be here, to be yourself, to think for yourself. Listen for the truth, and speak it, too. Respect yourself and treat others with the same respect. Open your self to the new and the unknown. Love your neighbor as your self. Be thankful for all you have received and share it joyfully. Sing. Be the change you wish to see in the world.

May we help one another do this with respect, responsibility, and relish for the process. So be it! Blessed Be!

**Offering and Offertory:**

***Returning to Community: the work of the people***

**Sharing of Joys and Sorrows**

**Meditation**

***Integration and Release***

**Closing Hymn:**

**Postlude:**

**Closing Words:** Barbara J. Pescan

May the glory of the passing away of autumn

lie about us

fresh gold

for a time.

And when the dark comes, and the cold

May we remember how today we stand in glory,

how we walk in bounty

heaped upon the earth’s dark carpet,

how we move knee deep in abundance

flung against night’s winter curtain.

We are thankful for its coming

and for its passing.

Let it be.

So Be It! Blessed Be!