

**Thought for Contemplation:** "Happiness is like a game of pass the parcel-and your spending should be too." Quentin Fottrell

**Worship**  
**Thanksgiving Sunday**  
**November 18, 2018**

*If you wish to share a personal joy or sorrow with the congregation, please write it at the joys and sorrows table and place it in the basket there. These will be posted on the joys and sorrows bulletin board in the foyer, so that people at both services may be aware of important events in our lives. You can also privately send a joy or concern to the Pastoral Care Team by emailing [care@a2u2.org](mailto:care@a2u2.org).*

INGATHERING CHIMES  
WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS  
CHALICE LIGHTING.  
CALL TO WORSHIP

Come in,  
from wherever you have come, and know welcome.

Come in,  
with what joys and sorrows you carry and feel the comfort of community.

Come in,

To be alone with your thoughts,  
Yet together with others

Come with us,  
From isolation to connection,  
From distraction, to intention  
From fragmentation, to wholeness.

Come, let us honor what is sacred in our lives.

Anita Farber- Robertson

HYMN *Come Ye Thankful People Come* #68

CHILDREN'S TIME Bob Moseley

Introduction of Guest at Your Table program of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

**9amSong** (seated) Go Now in Peace #413

(Children are invited to go now for a brief introduction to their program.)

*Now is the time we mark what is significant in our lives. You are invited to come forward and silently light a candle. If you wish to share your personal joy or sorrow with the congregation, please write it at the joys and sorrows table and place it in the basket there. These will be posted on the joys and sorrows bulletin board in the foyer, so that people at both services may be aware of important events in our lives.*

MUSIC FOR REFLECTION

JOYS AND SORROWS

MEDITATION AND PRAYER

PRESENTATION and APPRECIATION by Jonathan Grey for FAMILY PROMISE

OFFERING

MUSICAL INTERLUDE (9am)

ANTHEM

SERMON *In Pursuit of Happiness*

### ***In Pursuit of Happiness***

The Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson

One afternoon when my girls were in elementary school they came running into the kitchen where I was preparing dinner, all excited. They were so excited they could hardly speak, and when they got it out, they were eagerly interrupting each other to tell me. They had just made a phone call and pledged to World Vision.

I was confused. World Vision is a global organization committed to lifting people out of poverty. I sort of knew that. I also sort of, “knew” that it was a Christian organization. What kind of Christian organization I was not sure. My first response besides confusion, was to want to explain to them that when we wanted to do that, we supported the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. That is what our Guest at Your Table program was all about, helping people out of poverty. But for some reason, I was wise enough to button my lip and listen.

They explained. They had been watching television. The advertisement had come on for World Vision. They had seen the pictures of the poor people and the poor children, and their hearts went out to them. They wanted to help. The television ad had included a toll-free number you could call to make a pledge. They had consulted each other, considered how much allowance they got and how much they could maybe raise, and agreed upon a pledge amount that between them, they would make. They called the toll-free number, and made their

pledge. Exhilarated and pleased they'd run into the kitchen to tell me. They were proud of what they had done. They were sure I would be too. And I wasn't going to take that away from them. I was proud of their desire to respond to the need of others, to feel compassion and to be ready to make sacrifices of their own that others might have a better chance. What else could I do? It was what I had taught them. And I was proud of them. I still am.

So, after congratulating them, and expressing my delight at their readiness to step forward and do something to improve someone's life, I asked them to sit down with me and their father to figure out how this was going to happen. They had told me how much they had pledged. It was small by World Vision standards, but huge by little girls' capacity. We explained about the commitment one makes when one pledges. That the organization was now counting on them to come through. So, we sat together, crunched the numbers and made a plan. We figured out how much money they would need to raise, to fulfill that pledge, and how they would raise it. I explained that if they thought they would not be able to see it through, we could call World Vision and cancel the pledge, or make it lower. They looked at the numbers and at what it would require of them, and were adamant. They would do it. Those girls are now 42 and 43 years old, and I will tell you that in all their years, I have never seen them happier than they were that day as they looked at one another, nodded their heads, and declared that they would do it.

So, I am not surprised when the research shows that one of the most consistent and predictable ways to experience happiness and contentment, is to do something for others. We are, after all, relational beings. My girls experienced it powerfully that day.

Our country's Declaration of Independence proclaimed that we had the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. We fought to protect those rights nearly 250 years ago. Life and liberty most of us can understand, and can rightly recognize when they are threatened. But the pursuit of happiness? No guarantee that we will find it, only that we might pursue it. And I have always thought that strange.

In my experience happiness is not something you can pursue, grab, claim, and hold on to. It doesn't work like that. In my experience, happiness was always the by-product of something else. And Quentin Fottrell has captured what that something else is, the something

from which the experience of happiness is released. It's not that hard. And surprisingly, we who ground ourselves in this, our faith and its community, are reminded regularly, just by being a part of A2U2.

Fottrell, editor and columnist for MarketWatch has identified four things that consistently bring people happiness. You can nod if any of them resonate with you.

First, he says that happiness is a warm puppy, or any pet.<sup>1</sup> The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology<sup>2</sup> published a study that showed that pet owners had greater self-esteem, get more exercise, are less likely to stay away from relationships for fear of being hurt. The support that pets provided complemented the relationships people had with other people.

Second, gratitude enhances happiness.<sup>3</sup>

A study published last week in the peer-reviewed Journal of Positive Psychology suggests that keeping a gratitude journal rather than an activity journal helps people feel more grateful for what they have.

The study involving 870 adolescents demonstrated that

“It is possible to reduce materialism in young consumers (by) fostering gratitude for the things and people in their lives.”

Gratitude here is not a nebulous concept or mere state of mind, but rather is a part of a regular practice. They suggest daily gratitude reflection around the dinner table (one suggestion: ‘keeping a gratitude jar where members of your family write down something for which they are thankful.’<sup>4</sup>

Third, Spending on others lifts your spirits<sup>5</sup>

The struggling middle class in our country is giving less to charity. While our instinct may be to save a lot of money in our savings accounts to ensure our future happiness, we are happier when we spare some to help others. Spending money on others works more magic-or ‘predicts greater happiness,’ than spending on oneself.

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<sup>1</sup> Quentin Fottrell, “5 Ways to Buy Happiness,” *Market Watch*, Nov. 11, 201

<sup>2</sup> *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2011

<sup>3</sup> Quentin Fottrell, “5 Ways to Buy Happiness,” *Market Watch*, Nov. 11, 201

<sup>4</sup> Quentin Fottrell, “5 Ways to Buy Happiness,” *Market Watch*, Nov. 11, 2018

<sup>5</sup> Op cit

In studies, participants who were randomly assigned to spend money on others experienced greater happiness than those assigned to spend money on themselves.

*"Give as if you are taking"* Hisham Matar, Pulitzer Prize-winning author said his late father advised him. *"Give as if you are taking"*- an interesting mantra, and so easy to remember. A simple doorway to happiness and contentment.

Fourth, Invest in cultural experiences.

Spending on possessions may fill your cabinets and closets, but spending on intangibles fills your soul. Many studies have shown that spending money on experiences rather than stuff can lead to more lasting happiness.<sup>6</sup>

The experiences that feed us do not need to be expensive or exotic. They merely need to be experiences that enhance our lives. Travel is an obvious choice for many, but participating in Family Promise might be what does it for you. Or volunteering to work with our children. Or coming here, to worship together.

Happiness, it turns out, is not as elusive as it might seem, if you spend your time doing things that are worthy and meaningful to you.

What ever happened to those young girls of mine? Did the lesson of their childhood days make a difference? I don't know about the specifics of the impact of their pledge to World Vision, but I do know that they grew up to be contributing members of their community. One volunteers at the local animal shelter along with her young daughter. One is a volunteer leader in her church, and one helps with fundraising for her daughter's dancing school. Somehow, they grasped that life is not a spectator sport, that what you get out is directly related to what you have put in.

And so, my friends, as we prepare for the holiday, I ask myself, and invite you to join me in asking yourselves, what is it, that we really want to be doing around the Thanksgiving table this week, if truly, "Happiness is like a game of pass the parcel..."<sup>7</sup>

Maybe we just need to take what we have, in some ways large or small, and pass it on, pass it on. Happy Thanksgiving. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN *Magic Penny* by Malvina Reynolds see insert  
BENEDICTION

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<sup>6</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

CLOSING MUSIC (please remain seated for the closing music)