



***We Are the Ones***  
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From Matthew chapter 25, verses 14-30. And Jesus said unto them: You know, the Kingdom of God is like a man going on a trip who called his servants and turned his valuables over to them. To the first he gave five talents, to the second two, and to the third he gave one, to each in relation to his ability, and he left.

Immediately the one who had received six talents went out and put the money to work; he doubled his investment. The second also doubled his money. But the third, who had received the smallest amount, went, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master's money. After a long absence, the servants' master returned to settle accounts with them. The first, who had received five talents, came and produced an additional five, with this report: "Master, you handed me five talents, as you can see, I have made you another five."

His master commended him: "Well done, you competent reliable servant! You have been trustworthy in small amounts; I'll put you in charge of large amounts. Come celebrate with your master!"

The one with two talents also came and reported: "Master, you handed me two talents; as you can see, I have made you another two."

His master commended him: "Well done, you competent and reliable servant! You have been trustworthy in small amounts; I'll put you in charge of large amounts. Come celebrate with your master!"

The one who had received one talent also came and reported: "Master, I know that you drive a hard bargain, reaping where you didn't sow and gathering where you didn't scatter. Since I was afraid, I went out and buried your money in the ground. Look, here it is!"

But his master replied to him, "*You incompetent and timid servant!* So you knew that I reap where I didn't sow and gather where I didn't scatter, did you? Then you should have taken

my money to the bankers. Then when I returned I would have received my capital with interest. So take the money away from this fellow and give it to the one who has the greatest sum. In fact, to everyone who has, more will be given and they will have an abundance; and from those who don't have, even what they do have will be taken away. And throw this worthless servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Yikes! And, as the kid asked the minister, “what if you don’t have teeth?” The minister’s grim reply, “*teeth will be provided!*”

But what’s up with Jesus? This is not the way we usually think of him, all sweetness and light. This is not the popular domesticated Jesus, but a strange and challenging one. As I have said before about Jesus, he wasn’t *nice*. And we don’t understand him.

A talent, a unit of weight in the Middle East, was equal to six thousand drachmas — a 4.3 oz. silver coin. It was a lot of money. A talent was the equivalent of twenty years’ wages for a common laborer. You can understand why the third servant was worried about losing it. But his caution is not rewarded.

Through a felicitous pun, talent also refers to inner qualities, which we are given in different measure.

Which we either invest  
in the world  
or we bury within us.

What are we doing here? We don’t come to church to develop our caution. We don’t come to be encouraged to play it safe. We come to learn to uncover our precious talents and invest them in a world that needs what only we can give. Even this life itself, this sacred and holy existence we enjoy — it is sometimes called a gift, but it is not given to us, but merely loaned. We are given this life to use and enjoy for a little while, and then we have to give it back. Jesus tells us to take that loan and risk it, assuring us that “*For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance . . .*”

While we are blessed with many opportunities to share our talents in this religious community, the annual giving campaign is specifically about sharing our material resources. It is about supporting the budget—about funding the work of the congregation. Especially now, as you’re beginning the search for a new minister, it is a time for not for *caution*, but for *boldness*.

We are being asked to make this congregation a financial priority in our lives.

We are being asked to give serious consideration to the question of what a personally meaningful financial contribution means to each one of us.

And to answer that question, we have to ask ourselves, what are we *doing* here?

In Unitarian Universalism, we say that we are bound together, not by a creed, but by a covenant. By what we are willing to promise one another. At Starr King seminary, there used

to be a sign above the kitchen sink that said, “You are responsible for your own theology *and* for your own dishes.”

Our theology, our sense of what we are doing here, does not arise only in solitude, but in spirited conversation and in committed action with others.

What are we doing here? We are here to make channels for the streams of love. Without love, life is not worth living. Yet we know that love is more than a feeling, love is an active verb. There is a great love in us, and we are here to give it voice.

This is a place for love made manifest. We are here for friendship. For the eyes that light up when they see us, for the arms that open to receive us. For those we love, and those we are learning to love.

We are here for spiritual freedom. Because here we are not told what to believe, but rather are bound to find meaning in our own experience, and in the ongoing conversation, of words and of deeds, which creates this community.

Freedom, friendship, action. It was expressed simply in the words attributed to the 16th century Transylvanian minister Francis David, when he said, “We need not think alike to love alike.”

We are here for worship, when we come together to rededicate ourselves to our highest and best sense of ourselves, our broadest and most inclusive sense of what we and the world can be.

We worship in silence and in song, in prayer and in speech, affirming the love that unites us far more deeply than any differences can divide us. We move together in the rhythms of worship, breathing together, harmonizing ourselves in common purpose.

We are here because in the year of 1830, five years after the establishment of the American Unitarian Association Boston, a small group in Cincinnati was brave enough and far-sighted enough to establish a church. Their ambitious goal, in the words of their first minister, Edward Hall, *was “to give the character of Unitarianism in the whole wide and growing West!”*

This was an evangelical goal—and one I believe we still share. Therefore I remind you to participate in one of the “What Do You Say” workshops, so you too can share the glad good news of Unitarianism!

It is a place that we are tending, as it tends us. Look around at its soaring space; at its broad embrace. Think of the music that has expanded to fill this room. The tears and laughter that have been shared here. This is a place which houses our longing, that inspires us in our worship and in our work.

We are here to care for our children. Our children who look to us to show them courage and generosity; to teach them a faith that will strengthen and sustain them in their lives.

We are here to care for one another, informally, friend-to-friend, and institutionally, through your extended ministry program. We support one another by our presence, by our hospitality. You know that every once in a while someone will come, chin dragging on the ground, and will somehow find here the strength to carry on.

We reach beyond these walls, providing care for others, supporting neighbors in need, with contributions and direct action. We ever seek new ways to be of service.

We do it. The work of the church is the work we do together — here in this building and in our work in the larger community. All of us do the work of this congregation. All of us minister to the world by living out our values. We carry it on — the dreams and affirmations of this group, now gathered, and we stand in a lineage — we carry on the dreams of those who came before.

And we must not forget those who paid a heavy price. We must honor the sacrifice, the suffering — through persecution, exile, martyrdom — the tremendous cost paid by others to secure the practice of our free faith.

These include our forbear Arius in the fourth century, who, after the Council of Nicea, [in the year 325!] was persecuted and exiled for preaching the heresy that Jesus was not God.

Michael Servetus in the sixteenth century, burned at the stake by John Calvin for maintaining that God is one and not three.

The disestablishment of religion, the separation of church and state in the United States Constitution, the guarantee of religious freedom that we enjoy in 21<sup>st</sup> century North America is a fragile and relatively recent phenomenon. Our forebears helped to establish this cherished freedom that is ever at risk.

As we know well, religious bigotry and persecution did not end with the triumph of the Enlightenment, with modernity. During the Second World War it was the Czech Unitarian minister Norbert Capek, whose message of freedom and reason infuriated the Nazis who arrested and then killed him in concentration camp Dachau.

In 1955, Unitarian minister James Reeb and Unitarian lay-person Viola Liuzzo were murdered in Selma, Alabama during demonstrations for the civil rights of African Americans. In 1994 two Unitarian Universalists were violently attacked while assisting women in exercising their right to the safe and legal medical procedure of abortion. One of them, James Barrett in Pensacola, gave his life in service of his religious convictions.

I invoke the martyrs of our faith because when we ask what we are doing here, it is important to remember the price others have paid in the service of our free faith.

Lucky for most of us, we will not be called to pay so great a price. It is only rarely that individuals are called to die for their faith. Most of us are called to do something far more difficult: to *live* for our faith. And to remember that one part of living our faith is that as a religious community we stand with our Muslim brothers and sisters currently threatened by our new president.

Salvation, in our tradition, is achieved through deeds, not creeds; we are saved by living lives of integrity and compassion, by treating others with respect and kindness. And, of course, by building, maintaining, and deepening a religious community that is a force for love and justice, for hope and healing.

This day is a grand and daunting one. Various streams of love flow among us. Some of the folks who have been laboring here for years are tired. Others, fresh in searching, seek to make a place here. You are ready to lend a hand.

Great dreams simmer here,  
 amidst the tired and satisfied,  
 amongst the energized  
 and the exploring.  
 Great dreams coax us  
 and call to us from the past,  
 from the heritage we share.  
 Great dreams inspire us,  
 arising from our communion with one another.  
 Great dreams beckon to us,  
 speaking in a language  
 not yet imagined by us here.

We are called, all of us, to the difficult task of living and supporting our faith.

We are not called to jeopardize our livelihoods, to leave our homes, to give our lives. We are called only to give our fair share, to give as we are able to support the ongoing work of this congregation. For, as the canvass theme reminds us, *we* are the ones we've been waiting for!

To all of you who are new to our movement, to Unitarian Universalism, to the First Unitarian Church of Cincinnati, I invite you to take — take of the great riches our free religion has to offer. Taste and savor. Explore and test. Question and come, again and again, to your own conclusions. Find where love calls you to serve.

To all of you who are committed members and friends I invite you to *give* — give generously to support the ongoing work of this congregation. *Your* work. The work you do together.

We're not saying that those who bury their money in a hole or use it for other purposes will be cast in the outer darkness. There is no weeping or gnashing of teeth in Unitarian Universalism. . . So of course there's no need for *teeth to be provided*.

But we do say that to those who give, more will be given – and they will have an abundance. For by being generous with our talents, we keep faith with those who have gone before and with our companions on the path. By keeping our religious communities strong and thriving we ensure that our values will outlive us and serve future generations.

May it be so, and may we give generously and receive gratefully. And now Ray and/or Lisa will tell you how. AMEN