

**Where Your Treasure Lies, Your Heart Will Lie There, Too**

September 23, 2007

One of my all-time favorite movies is the 1971 cult classic, *Harold and Maude*, a film about a wealthy but morbidly unhappy young man, who falls in love with an eccentric much older woman. Though I can happily recall almost every scene from the movie, one that stands out for me is when Harold and Maude go to an amusement park. While Maude is flamboyantly involved with a small crowd in watching an elaborate train set in action, Harold sneaks away to a machine and stamps some words, letter by letter, onto a coin. Later, as they sit together alone on the boardwalk, with the lights of the amusement park in the background lighting the night time sky, Harold shyly but excitedly gives Maude the coin. She takes it, looks at it, reads aloud, "Harold loves Maude." "And Maude loves Harold," she responds. Then she promptly throws the coin into the ocean. Harold's eyes widen and his mouth

drops open in surprise, while Maude smiles and says, calmly and confidently, “That way I’ll always know where it is.”

Those few seconds in the film always make my heart do a little turbulent dip, as if I am watching through Harold’s eyes the arc of that coin’s journey through the night sky, into the water, where it splashes--*blurp*--with its tiny metallic weight, then sinks, unseen, to the ocean’s depths.

What is it that makes that scene so poignant? What is it about the heart and the coin and the ocean and the sage smile of Maude? While much in that scene and in the rest of the film provides clues as to why Maude herself might so counter-intuitively toss this gift from Harold into the sea, the moment alone speaks volumes to our own societal conditioning about love, money, and ownership. How do we own money? How do we own love?

Exploring that question, I’m reminded of a short story one of my brothers once told me about my dad. One day, it seems, he was walking down the street when he came upon a

man trying to break into a car, to steal whatever was inside it. My dad, not a wealthy man himself, stopped, looked at the man, and said, “If you need money, take mine.” Then he reached into his pocket, gave the man the money he had, and kept walking.

While I can question the wisdom, or the naiveté, of my father’s gesture; while I might scowl a little at the possibility that the man who received my father’s money went on to spend the money questionably, or even proceeded to break into more automobiles later on, I’ll do so at the expense of the act of faith that lives within the story. While there are certainly times for wanting detailed promise and records for how our money will be spent, there are also times when we must have faith that by letting go of our hold on our own money, we will create greater possibility for human and *humane* connection.

What greater human and humane connection were you seeking the first Sunday morning you came through these doors and into the community of Wildflower Church? What

brought you back again, and then again? I imagine there may be some immediate answers: the singing of the choir and the Peace Train Band; the children's religious education program; social justice forums; good coffee and donuts during social hour; the warm greeting in that moment of the service where we get to get up, shake hands, give hugs. But I imagine as well, that underneath all of these wonderful gifts, is a deeper, slightly less tangible gift. It is something that feels like transformation. Something that feels like belonging. The first time I stepped through the doors of a Unitarian Universalist congregation, that's what it felt like: I was transformed into belonging. And, although only about eight weeks into my ministry here at Wildflower, I can feel that feeling of belonging here, with you.

But the paradoxical twist of belonging to a church community is that that community then belongs to each of us as well. As the community—the loving, the laughter, the learning—becomes a part of our well being, we in turn become

responsible for the well being of the community.

How? How do we all go about being responsible for this community? After all, the core of this community happens on Sunday mornings, and how much work can that take? Set up some chairs, plug in the coffee machine, plunk out a few tunes, find a few folks to teach the young ones, get the minister to say a few words. Yes, it's something like that. But it's also something like the words of George Odell, which we read together earlier: "We need one another when we mourn and would be comforted....We need one another when we would accomplish some great purpose, and cannot do it alone.... All our lives we are in need, and others are in need of us."

As I sit in church committee meetings many a week night, and in particular when I sat just this Friday evening and all day Saturday with thirty-some odd Wildflower leaders at our Start Up weekend workshop, I listen to Wildflower folks speak of how we need one another, and we in those meetings

have rolled up our sleeves, striving to find where the needs of individuals and the needs of the church community as a whole might best meet. Admittedly, sometimes, trying to map out the interdependent web of our needs feels a bit like trying to walk an M.C. Escher sketch—or perhaps I mean an Etch-a-Sketch...Where do we begin? Where are we going? What's up and what's down? In other words, it's challenging work.

But it is good work. It is so good that when Southwest Conference Executive Susan Smith asked us at this weekend's Start Up workshop what touches each of us most about Wildflower Church, words like *welcome, energy, creativity, warmth, synergy, love, acceptance, tears, juiciness, promise,* and *rebirth* were used. It is so good that as long ago as 1920, Universalist minister Olympia Brown said, "There is nothing in all the world so important as to be loyal to this faith which has placed before us the loftiest ideals, which has comforted us in sorrow, strengthened us for noble duty and made the world beautiful."

To Brown, it is of *superlative* importance to stand by our faith. But remember, that standing by our Unitarian Universalist faith does not mean standing by one creed, or by any particular dogma. It means, in the words of 19<sup>th</sup> century *Unitarian* minister Theodore Parker, standing by “a religion which, like sunshine, goes everywhere; its temple all space; its shrine, the good heart; its creed, all truth; its ritual, works of love; its profession, divine living.”

Divine Living. What’s that look like? According to the Book of Luke, when a wealthy man approached Jesus and said he was following the ten commandments but still worried about receiving eternal life, Jesus said, “There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven....” Now, I’m not going to try to aim quite that high with you all this morning. In particular, I want to say to anyone who is a visitor at Wildflower Church, you are our guest this morning. Let us lavish welcome upon you. But for those who have decided this

is your spiritual—your *religious*—home, it is therefore your home to care for. You, each and all, are this community's stewards. Literally, going back to the old English, you are each a ward of this house.

And that leads us back to paradox again because, to be a ward of a house means to be a servant of it. And yet, whom are we serving? Isn't it true that we are all both servant and served?

So here is what I ask of you, as we start up our new stewardship campaign adventure. I ask you, as we do every Sunday morning during the offering, to give as generously as you are able. Don't give as generously as you think the person sitting next to you or in front of you or behind you might be able. Give as generously as *you* are able. I know that members of the Board and committee chairs have already taken tremendous leaps of faith, increasing their pledges so generously as to get our campaign off to a high voltage start.

Within that start is my pledge as well. As your minister—

pastor, preacher, teacher, court jester, and a strong believer in the religious community of Wildflower Church—I have pledged to give this year as generously as I am able. For me, for now, that means giving just under five percent of my adjusted annual income. That is as generously as I am able to give at this time. No, I'm not up to literal tithing yet, and don't know if or when I will be able to do so. But it is my religious responsibility, particularly as I ask you to do the same, to give in ample measure.

Now, perhaps some of you are thinking, but I already give to this good cause and that good cause. If you do, I thank you. I never want to discourage you from giving to other good causes. But I do want you to know that while many organizations receive money from people of all walks of life, all that Unitarian Universalist organizations have are Unitarian Universalist people. All that Wildflower Church has—all that Wildflower Church *is*—is you.

You are the ones who keep the religious education

program rich and bountiful. You are the ones who bring meals to each other, who sing together, who protest together, who transform each other into belonging. You are the ones who will some day find a new building for us to move into, and in that building there will be classrooms where the children can leave their glue- and glitter- and paint- covered art to dry all week long. There will be a youth room, at least one wall of which will be a youth-painted mural. There will be a room with a piano, where we can have not only regular choir practices, but practices for a healing choir, whose work will be to sing to the ailing among our community. In that building, there will be a sanctuary, and that sanctuary will be the sanctuary not only of Sunday morning prayer and hope and sorrow and love, but a sanctuary of justice and concerts and talent shows and weddings and memorial services, and the dedications of beautiful, beautiful babies.

Those babies will grow up to be our youth, and that youth will come back from journeys our church has sponsored

and share from the pulpit about their days spent building houses, rallying against injustice, holding spiritual pilgrimages. And you will look up at them and smile, knowing they are your children, and you will be so happy they were raised in the sanctuary of Wildflower Church. You stewards, you servants of this house, will be the ones to take us into that bright, beautiful, and just-loving future.

This past Thursday, I saw the beginnings of a bright, beautiful, and justice-loving future when I went to Jena, Louisiana, with *tens* of thousands of other people, crying out for justice, equity, and compassion. This past Friday, upon my return, I saw the beginnings of a bright, beautiful, and justice-loving future, when person after Wildflower person asked me how my trip had gone, told me they had been thinking of me the whole time, and shared how happy they were that their minister had been to Jena. This past Saturday, yesterday, I saw the beginnings of a bright, beautiful, and justice-loving future, when Wildflower's leaders said what I have said here

this morning. We have a vision. That vision is to grow, not only in numbers—not even first in numbers—but to grow in commitment, in putting our values into action, in deepening our spiritual practices, in living lives of more compassion, and more peace and even in practicing letting go.

The coin, so carefully stamped, letter by letter, with the words, “I Love Wildflower Church,” flies through the air. Your eyes widen, your mouth drops open. You hear, “And Wildflower Church loves you.” Splash. Into the waters of community it goes. Into the ocean of love and compassion, peace and justice it falls. Where your treasure lies, your heart will lie there, too.

Amen.