

Love to Serve

You will notice from the order of service that the title of my sermon today is “Love to Serve”

Love is a tough word to define but I think it was best expressed by great philosopher Paul Hamilton Williams when he wrote

Love, exciting and new
Come Aboard. We're expecting you.
Love, life's sweetest reward.
Let it flow, it floats back to you.

The Love Boat soon will be making another run
The Love Boat promises something for everyone.

Service on the other hand is defined by the ethic of reciprocity;

The golden rule has its roots in a wide range of world cultures, and is a standard which different cultures use to resolve conflicts; it was present in the philosophies of ancient Judaism, India, Greece, and China. Principal philosophers and religious figures have stated it in different ways, but its most common English phrasing is attributed to Jesus of Nazareth in the Biblical book of Luke: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Before launching into a vigorous course of action I think we need to answer a few questions that you may have about when and how to help others.

Why should I take time out of their life to help others?

According to the Random Acts of Kindness Foundation

Numerous scientific studies show that acts of kindness result in significant health benefits, both physical and mental. Here are some key points:

- Helping contributes to the maintenance of good health, and it can diminish the effect of diseases and disorders serious and minor, psychological and physical.

- A rush of euphoria, followed by a longer period of calm, after performing a kind act is often referred to as a "helper's high," involving physical sensations and the release of the body's natural painkillers, the endorphins. This initial rush is then followed by a longer-lasting period of improved emotional well-being.
- Stress-related health problems improve after performing kind acts. Helping reverses feelings of depression, supplies social contact, and decreases feelings of hostility and isolation that can cause stress, overeating, ulcers, etc. A drop in stress may, for some people, decrease the constriction within the lungs that leads to asthma attacks.
- Helping can enhance our feelings of joyfulness, emotional resilience, and vigor, and can reduce the unhealthy sense of isolation.
- A decrease in both the intensity and the awareness of physical pain can occur.
- The incidence of attitudes, such as chronic hostility, that negatively arouse and damage the body is reduced.
- The health benefits and sense of well-being return for hours or even days whenever the helping act is remembered.
- An increased sense of self-worth, greater happiness, and optimism, as well as a decrease in feelings of helplessness and depression, is achieved.
- Once we establish an "affiliative connection" with someone - a relationship of friendship, love, or some sort of positive bonding - we feel emotions that can strengthen the immune system.
- Adopting an altruistic lifestyle is a critical component of mental health.
- The practice of caring for strangers translates to immense immune and healing benefits.
- Regular club attendance, volunteering, entertaining, or faith group attendance is the happiness equivalent of getting a college degree or more than doubling your income.

- A recent report links helping others to health and longevity. It does pay to be a good neighbor and actively participate in community projects. Better functioning ability, increased longevity, less risk of heart disease and decreased levels of depression were among the benefits of helping others.

Can't I over-help people?

While it is true that some people will take advantage of others kindness and take all they can. For me it is worth the risk. I try not to judge the intentions of others and just stick to the fact that I am doing the best I can to be helpful. I don't think it is helpful for example to enable a homeless person by giving them money that might not be spent on the stated purpose. All though I have to hand it to the guy who held up the sign that said "Why Lie I Need a Beer." I have take people who ask me for money that say they are hungry to McDonald's for a sandwich. I am just one person with limited finances. But I can do what I can do.

Shouldn't people help themselves?

This is often expressed in "God helps those who help themselves."

This is a very good question. I have been very fortunate in life. I have been blessed with a good family and abilities that enable me to live a comfortable life. Michelle and I are not living hand to mouth wondering where the next meal is coming from. I have been working since I was 14 and a strong work ethic was modeled by my family my whole life. It is easy to say to heck with the people who don't know the way let them find their own way.

A friend of mine expressed the reason that she helps people is empathy. Most people who truly need help are too proud to ask for it. They may have alcoholism or other issues that are very tough to recover from on their own. They may have other issues or having a tough time in this economy. There is a lot of poverty out there and people that can not afford the basic necessities that we all enjoy. That brings me to the next question that springs to mind.

I don't have anything how can I help people?

Helping others to me is not about money or things. It is about reaching out to someone who may not have a lot of friends. Some people may be new to a

gathering I can always reach out and try to make them feel welcome. A car in the garage and money in the bank never made anyone help anyone. Just making yourself available to others can be a very big help.

I will never forget the people that have reached out to me and made me feel welcome. I know the fastest way to make friends is to be friendly. I can't always change the world but like children's story said I can do my part.

How do you feel after you help people?

I know from personal experience when I give of myself to help others it makes me feel better. I can remember walking out of a volunteer opportunity feeling like I was walking on air. I truly believe that it is in making the effort not the success of our efforts.

According to David Harnden-Warwick, "human evolution strongly selected for reciprocity. Individuals who didn't help others tended to lose access to protection, resources, and mating opportunities, not to mention securing poor reputational standing in the group. Over hundreds of thousands of years, those with a selfish disposition produced fewer offspring than cooperators and helpers. Simple math wedded to the complexity of group living in the face of ongoing environmental and social upheavals. It's the same reason women feel affection for their children; the ones who didn't tended to lose more children and produced fewer offspring with bad mother genes. Over time, as with reciprocity and feeling good when helping others, love for one's offspring became predominant in the species."

So does that mean that like eating, helping others is pleasurable because it benefits me. I do find myself attracted to people who help others. But Aren't our heroes people who dedicate their lives to helping others. Don't we always say he would give you the shirt off his back as a compliment.

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead with no clothes. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, and he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, he too passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own

donkey, took him to an inn and looked after him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

When I help others I build the fellowship I crave.

Helping others is the original social networking. Way before facebook and twitter, computers, telephones, radios, TV and just about any other form of entertainment. People banded together for mutual aid. It just makes sense. Where are you going to meet friends? Among the people you help.

Can I be unselfish and lonely at the same time?

For me it is mutually exclusive. I call it my anti-depressant. It is way cheaper than drugs and better for you too. And according to the study I cited above it is true for most of us.

Don't make me break out my Barbara Streisand, "People who need people are the luckiest people in the world."

Are we not all from the same family?

According to current research and theory, all human races and humans today descend from a group of Africans who lived about 50-60,000 years ago. This group of people was completely modern both in their body and mind. They spoke a language, practiced a religion, and had a level of intelligence that was on par with modern humans.

If we are all related this gives me another powerful reason to help others.

Shouldn't people be helping me?

Waiting on the sidelines of life and feeling sorry for myself is not a beneficial place for me. Besides there really is no sidelines in life. There is only playing field. Not risking and waiting for other people to make the first move is not beneficial to me.

Me personally I am the wall-flower type, shy and reserved. (Wait for it) Now come on you know me. I really have a hard time making conversation. Really I call my self a natural born BS artist. But even if you have a hard time talking to others there are many volunteer opportunities waiting for you too.

Should I help others anonymously or should I tell everyone?

The Lone Ranger always skated out just before the big thanks. For younger people think of Batman who always disappeared right before Chief Gordon told him Thanks for saving Gotham once again. Many people don't want credit for their good deeds. Many others want the building named after them when they cut the big check.

I can see both sides of this argument. Anonymity has a great spiritual benefit to the giver. Making it a public contribution models for the community that they can do it too and may incent others to do the same.

We do it both ways here at First Unitarian. We put up plaques and bricks in the garden. But most people donate and volunteer anonymously.

Fish learn water last.

In this church When you are surrounded by it, it is all you know and easy to take for granted. You see so many people volunteering and helping others that I forget that almost everything you see is a donation or provided by a volunteer.

I had the thought that maybe I shouldn't even be up here talking about this. That someone probably thinks I am doing this to portray myself as a saint or someone who spends all his time volunteering.

However the benefit of this is maybe someone will change their mind about the topic and decide to reach out in a new way so I decided it was worth the risk of appearing self aggrandizing. You probably already thought that anyways so I am not really breaking new grounds.

Do you believe in Karma?

According to that all knowing source Wikipedia;

- First, karma really is happening—it is not merely an illusion.
- Second, you really are responsible for your actions. There is no outside force, like the stars or some good or evil being, acting through you. When you are conscious, you are the one who decides what happens.
- Third, your actions have results—you are not just writing on the water—and those results can be good or bad depending on the quality of the intention behind the act.

Hmmm intentions behind my acts. So if I do help someone my motives should be pure, not selfish. That which goes around comes around. Perhaps it is as simple as a self fulfilling prophecy. When I help others I consider myself a worthwhile person. Sounds like an anti-depressant to me.

There was a guy and he was in prison and members of the community used to come in to the prison and put on programs for him to help him to change his life. He could not understand why people would spend their own money and time to talk to a bunch of people who did not want to hear what they had to say. So one day he got mad enough to ask them, “Why do you do this? What do you get out of this? Do you just like to see the animals in their cages? Why do you keep coming into this prison?” The response he got was cryptic, “When you can answer that question you won’t have to ask it?” But the real answer he realized was they were givers and he was a taker. He said that he had been a taker his whole life and takers don’t know anything about givers. He said they were giving just for the fun of it with no expectation of anything in return not even thanks in return.

There was a kid and he was walking down the beach and it was littered with starfish he was picking them up one by one and throwing them back into the sea to keep them from dying. There were thousands and thousands of them everywhere. A man came up to him and said you will never get them all back into the sea. The kid picked up another starfish and through it back in and said “I made a difference to that one.”

Mark Stringer says “In a bruised and battered world” it is easy to give up and think my part can’t be that big of a deal. What if everyone said that? We are social animals and not meant to live alone. Helping others by definition is a social and spiritual act. I think we all need a higher purpose. I am sure God wants us to be happy, joyous, free and to help others. I know because I feel the best I can when I do.