



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York

"The 'Without Whom' Department"

Delivered 19 May 2024

Rev. Jen Raffensperger

"Blessed are those who come to services on Sundays and who contribute to the church in a myriad of other ways, that they find fulfillment."

Our reading today, "Beatitudes for Church Leaders," comes from a Facebook post made on Monday, April 29, 2024 by the Rev. Tess Baumberger in the Facebook group "UU Ministers Worship Collaborative." Tess serves as the minister at the First Universalist Church of Essex, Massachusetts, and she was posting in order to crowd-source ideas: Did she leave anyone out of her beatitudes? Many of our colleagues commented, and eventually she finalized the text into what Molly shared with us today. (Thanks Molly!)

It is so vital for us to practice gratitude. And it's so important to try our best not to leave anyone out of such a list as we heard today. And also, we are all human, and that means we can make mistakes. The line, "Blessed are those who come to services on Sundays and who contribute to the church in a myriad of other ways, that they find fulfillment," is this blessing's way of saying "I'm sure there are others out there who contribute in ways I don't even know yet!"

And so I, too, with Tess's help this morning, am here to say: Thank you. And if I left someone out, I'm sorry. And if you help out here at UUCYork but you're not an official member of one of those many, many committees and groups that we shared...thank you. I don't want you to feel unseen or unacknowledged.

And how amazing that we can gather SO many people, so many hands working to make this community what it is, together. How amazing that there are

people supporting us without us even knowing! What a truly interdependent web, and that's just focusing this morning on our own specific faith community. Consider the larger communities in and around York, and York County, and the entire Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Consider the many, many other UU congregations, churches, fellowships, societies, and communities around the country (and the world) who are also worshipping today, who are also thanking their volunteers today, who are also holding congregational meetings today! (We sure aren't the only ones!)

When I reflect on those things I'm grateful for about this larger Unitarian Universalist community - I think about the big things, of course: the hardworking support of the staff of the Unitarian Universalist Association and of the UU Ministers Association, as well as the amazing professionals in the Association of UU Administrators, the Liberal Religious Educators Association, and the Association for Unitarian Universalist Music Ministries - these are the professional organizations that Jason, Elizabeth, and Gretchen are a part of respectively.

But I am ALSO grateful that we have things like Facebook groups where we can crowdsource blessings. People ask questions in those groups all the time: Have you ever tried this? What do you do when that happens? And they ask for help: I am giving a service on gratitude, do you have any favorite readings? I love to help when I can, especially when people are looking for poems or readings on specific subjects - I'll comb through my files looking for the perfect poem and happily share it, AND I will read through others' responses and add them to my own running (and very long) document full of poems!

Sometimes, of course, I can't help. Or I don't know the answer to the question. Or I have a question myself, something that I need help with!

Blessed are they who ask for help, and blessed are they who receive help gracefully. Blessed are they who offer help when asked, may they be helped in return, when it's their turn.

We will always need help and we will always be able to help.

I don't mean each of us all the time, to be clear! I don't always need help and I won't always be able to help. That's why we crowdsource. That's why we post, that's why we pick up the phone or send the email, that's why we show up here again and again, in person and on Zoom - in community, someone will be able to help. And someone will not be able to. The more someones, the more help gets given, and the more people also know that there are others who can help when they cannot.

That's why we do this. That's what community is for. The creation of a list of ever-unfolding gratitudes for every help, every kindness, every welcome. We are going to leave people off our gratitude lists because they are so long - and what a blessing that is. We are not always going to be able to help, we are not always going to be able to be kind, we are not always going to be able to be welcoming. This is the cycle of work in making and maintaining beloved community. Giving help whenever possible. Being kind and welcoming whenever possible. Knowing ourselves well enough to know when we are too depleted to give help or kindness or welcome, and trusting there are others who can do that better than we can in the moment. Being willing to make amends if we have been unkind or unwelcoming. Learning to ask for forgiveness, learning to ask for help, learning the amazing strength that can grow when we are willing to be vulnerable with one another.

In a spirit of community and vulnerability, I will now speak a few words of gratitude to THIS community - to you, Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York. I may never be able to explain exactly how grateful I am to you. You were willing to take a chance on a brand new minister - heck, the ink on my Master of Divinity degree was barely dry when I applied here! You were there to tell me stories, to answer my questions, to welcome me - all just as whole-heartedly and imperfectly as me. The work of making a minister is long - in fact, it's never-ending. The work of making a community is also, ideally, never-ending. I am so grateful for all the time that we have shared, all that you have taught me and trusted me with. I am so excited to see where we both go!

May we fill our hearts with gratitude and joy. May we ask for help and offer it.

May it be so.