

Time Surplus...?

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

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8-Minute Connector © 2023 Rod E.S.Q.

A month ago, I spoke about my sense of pride in... showing off an empty bottle of olive oil. More specifically, it was a special Mediterranean olive oil, brought directly from far away as a gift from a friend who'd been travelling.

In cases like these, it's my instinct to "save" these special things for "later" – for some imagined special occasion that would warrant their use.

Inevitably, that special occasion either doesn't happen, or it gets put off as life happens, or when it *does* happen... I've forgotten about that special thing that I was saving, which then ends up languishing until it is no longer fit for use. So, I was particularly pleased with my empty bottle of fancy olive oil, that I gladly used up while celebrating *ordinary time*, recognizing that every moment we live can be special... if we allow it to be.

I also mentioned an 8-minute phone call technique that is proposed by columnist Jancee Dunn in a New York Times article, wherein she schedules a deliberately-short check-in with friends, ends it promptly, and schedules another one before signing off. Her rationale is that proposing a digestible chunk of time makes it easier for her, and her potential contacts, to ensure they wedge in the moment of connection into their busy schedules.

The 8-minute number is perhaps arbitrary. I don't usually follow it myself, and I don't know what number would work best for you, or your connections. But it's the *mindset* behind the technique that I find most useful – the practice of making an important task easier and more accessible, so that we *actually* do it when it matters most: now.

It also illustrates that important things don't have to be daunting or onerous for them to matter – it's *getting* to do them that matters. If time feels scarce, then adapting to a manageable timeframe helps with that hurdle. If we fear that one task will go beyond what we're ready to commit to, then setting reasonable boundaries to our commitment allows us to offer whatever we are able to, without overextending ourselves. In taking that extra step to recognize our limitations, we may yet be able to do what we set our hearts to, without hitting the wall of expecting an ideal time when we'll be able to do *all the things*.

The same columnist, Jancee Dunn, happens to quote professor of psychiatry Dr. Bob Waldinger, who said that: “*most busy people ‘tend to think that in some unspecified future, we’ll have a “time surplus,” where we’ll be able to connect with old friends.’ That may never materialize, he said, so pick up the phone and invest the time right now.*” [*The New York Times*, “Day 2: The Secret Power of the 8-Minute Phone Call” by Jancee Dunn. Jan. 2, 2023]

Of course, that does not mean that it is not also worth thinking in the longer term. Some investments take time to pay off. Planning with vision for future goals can offer guidance and motivation for responsible choices, even when they might imply some sacrifice in the present. Some goals may not be achieved in the short term or even in our lifetime. Being mindful of the generations after us is a way to become worthy ancestors.

But relying exclusively on what we imagine might be the “right” conditions, for action to make the present worthwhile, can also rob us of the ability to take advantage of the present moment, for doing what we can, with what we have, and for making and maintaining connections that sustain us within our limitations. And these are investments of their own.

At our church, we have now reinitiated some hospitality offerings. It's a somewhat scaled-back version of a practice we'd had for several years, before the pandemic made sharing food and drink much riskier.

Now that the risk feels more manageable, we have walked some steps toward resurrecting that practice. The offerings may be more modest, usually some hot tea, rather than tea *and* coffee. Some of you might remember quite substantial spreads on Sunday. These days, we've begun to enjoy occasional nibbles, to go along with our hot drink. This is what our volunteers, and the resources of time, space, work, and money that come along with them, are prepared to offer at this time. It is manageable, and it is present. And for these we are grateful.

There *may* be a future when our after-service gatherings look more like what we might imagine as a golden age, but rather than expect such future when an imagined surplus might or might not materialize, we make *these* Sunday afternoons a golden time. We enjoy them because we can have them *now*, with the people who are *here*, and because they are gifted with *love*. Love for our community, and love for fellowship that receives these gifts, these times, and this company with grace and gratitude.

In April, we'll have another opportunity to resurrect a cherished practice of a larger-scale community meal within our walls – a chili lunch. It's a BYOB event... Bring Your Own Bowl. The volunteer team has invited this initiative after recognizing the current limitations of our space for handling large volumes of dishes. Clean-up can be quite a demanding task, especially as our kitchen does not currently have an industrial-grade dishwasher and sanitizing machine. So we are asking for your assistance in bringing one dish for your chili, which you can look after at home.

Of course, our Property Team is looking into getting the hardware that would make these events easier with our inhouse serving ware. But rather than wait for the ideal time when we *might* have a surplus of

resources, we are making the time for warm fellowship and food *now* – this is the time we have.

So, my friends, we don't know when we might have a time surplus, or a resource surplus, in an imagined future, which is why it pays off to invest in the present with the resources we have now, even when they might feel limited – they may well be more than we realize.

My friends, depending on what traditions are familiar to you, this coming Wednesday represents the beginning of the Lent season. Some of you might know it as Ash Wednesday. And the Lenten season can offer us an opportunity to reflect on some practices that we may *already* seek to uphold during “ordinary time”... but which may yet have fallen by the wayside, so the calendar offers us an additional excuse – an invitation – to pay extra attention to them.

Sometimes, the Lenten practice is framed as a fast, and in a narrow definition of fasting, it may mean reduced food intake, or giving up certain foods (or other things that we might put into our bodies). But we can also look at a broader understanding of fasting as reducing those things that take more time and space in our lives than we'd like. To turn them down a notch. Paradoxically, these self-imposed limitations can open up room for *more* of those other things that we recognize as important in our lives... things that we wish we could turn up to 11, if *only* we had time and space for them – which we just might have... if we mindfully make it so.

My friends, our limitations (personal and collective) might be constraining and restrictive. They are also invitations to take action and connect – however we may be able. Scarcity can represent real hardship, and it may also be a guide in searching for the wealth that is available to us.

My friends, our community represents rich resources of time, space, warmth, and love. A wealthy surplus of these may abound in the times and spaces where we are now.

May we search for that surplus together.

So may it be,
In the spirit of hidden wealth, in all its dimensions,
Amen

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Suggested Hymns:

Opening Hymn #19 The Sun That Shines

Words: Attrib. to Dimitri S. Bortniansky, 1751-1825, v. 1

~)-| John Andrew Storey, 1935-1997

~)-| Music: David Dawson, 1939-

BARNFIELD

Hymn #86 Blessed Spirit of My Life

Words & music: Shelley Jackson Denham, 1950- ,

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PRAYER

Closing #288 All Are Architects

~)-| Words: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1807-1882

~)-| Music: Thomas Benjamin, 1940- , © 1992 Unitarian Universalist Association

WOODLAND