

Rev. Linda Simmons
Relational Giving
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Money is never an easy topic. As soon as it is brought up, we close down. What more can I do, we ask? What more will they be asking of me? I give so much. How much more can I give? Will there ever be enough? If I don't give more, will they think less of me?

These thoughts can be daunting and not only in relation to this Meeting House. We live on an island where we are connected and connected again by so many layers of relationship, and each one wants something of us, more of our time, money, talent, commitment. It is hard to feel good enough sometimes, isn't it?

And so today, I want to talk about what has changed for me around the money conversation in my own life, how I have come to conquer the money monster, so to speak, or at least to put him in his place and feed him enough of the food he likes so he stops pulling me back when it is my time to be brave.

Because being brave is life saving. Have you found that in your life? Standing inside of life with the stance of bravery saves us. Not from cancer or others' deaths or from exhaustion or divorce or all of the myriad pains of living that we cannot control, but it rescues the part of us that we can call on, again and again, to refresh our minds, hearts and souls enough so that we can build another vision when visions get broken.

And visions create the meaning that allows life to go on, to be heroes.

Joseph Campbell writes of the hero's journey:

We have not even to risk the adventure alone
for the heroes of all time have gone before us.
The labyrinth is thoroughly known ...
we have only to follow the thread of the hero path.
And where we had thought to find an abomination
we shall find a God.

And where we had thought to slay another
we shall slay ourselves.
Where we had thought to travel outwards
we shall come to the center of our own existence.
And where we had thought to be alone
we shall be with all the world."

There is so much in those words. I think of the times I have set out on a journey to slay another, another injustice for instance or another prejudice or imbalance, and

come face to face with this injustice or prejudice or imbalance in myself and had to slay a dragon of my own making, the most difficult of all to slay.

I have slayed many a dragon in my first year of ministry and I don't need to drag you through these dragon slaying stories because you have watched me slay them, you have stood beside me and handed me the buckets of water to put out the scorching flames, you have encouraged me to call the dragon a dragon and not an overgrown scaly cat with big teeth. You have walked beside me as I have come to claim this place of ministry.

Every one of us is walking a hero's journey. There no other option really, is there?

I believe we all here walk this hero's journey because I hear these hero's questions asked all the time among us:

- Who are we now?
- What is love here, how shall we name it, who decides, what shall it look it, how will we shape it so that the world can feel our love and know that we have been moved by the suffering of those around us?
- Whose suffering will we respond to and why theirs and not another's?
- How will go on when we feel negative and like we all ask too much of each other and it doesn't really make much difference what we do any way?
- And who are we to matter? What makes us worthy of making a difference at all?

A hero's journey is not about answering questions, it's about remaining inside of the relationships that every single one of those questions puts before us: all of us here with our points of difference and sameness; those we meet outside these doors with every step we take; our relationship to money and how we spend it, when, why, how much, how little; our deepest relationship to ourselves and our personal resources of rejuvenation- that place that is sustained by bravery, by a willingness to see into the darkness that lives within each of us and sustain the light even when there seems no good enough reason.

Remaining in relationship to self and other, that is the hero's journey. Every hero must walk it, sometimes alone, but even when alone it is the dance between self and other.

I was a single mother until I met Gary when my Gina was 15 years old. Gina and I lived on welfare while I went to University for six years to get my bachelor's degree in Economics after which I promptly started working with high school drop outs and rejected the offers to work in investment firms where I could have earned over 20 times what I made doing the work I did, but it gave me time with my daughter, which I could not live without.

I went regularly to a UU Church in those years and was asked to pledge and I did. I pledged very little because no one reached out to me the way I hope you feel reached out to here, because no one nurtured me the way I hope you feel nurtured here.

I could have pledged in a way that made my pledge part of my budget. It would not have been much. My budget was small. It does not matter what your budget is. What matters is that we recognize that what we have here matters, that it touches lives, that it holds us and the people we love from birth to death, that it reaches out and offers a web that is made of gossamer thread into which we can rest when we are beautiful and broken, when we are whole and halved, when we are able and unable, when we are all that we can be and barely able to make it in the door.

This Meeting House is a relationship of which we are an integral part, a relationship that allows us our hero's journeys no matter what it is or where it is and how it is lived and which dragons populate it with which fiery breaths.

Is there another journey? Have you asked lately to live more hidden from yourself, to face fewer of your shadows so that you can live a smaller version of who you are, to be less of yourself so that others have a smaller bit of you to be in relation to? Now, I know what it is to need a break from shadows and self work and versions! I am not talking about running like a mad man or woman through the hero's journey. It is a journey of life. One must leave the past for rest and respite.

And as we walk this journey my friends, as we walk this hero's journey, we walk it hand in hand. And as we remove our masks, we remove them together, and as we forge new masks, we ask each other to pass the glue; and as we walk another path sure we'll find god, whatever or whoever or however our version of being perfectly loved is for us at this time in our lives, and find only another version of ourselves staring back at us yet again and need once more to find the bravery and polish the tarnished armor and know who we are straight up and be who we are again and again, maybe a bit more honestly, with more integrity, with more compassion, with more awareness, with more patience and even more courage than the last go round- and as we do this- we do it together my friends and we do it with some ferocity don't we and we do it giving to others too!

Just this week some of us drove 3 boxes of school supplies to Ascentria in Worcester. Ascentria's mission is to break the cycle of poverty, and build thriving communities where everyone has the chance to achieve their full potential, regardless of background or disadvantage.

Shirat Ha Yam gave us over \$100 in gift cards for Staples in these supplies as well. And Winnie Spillers, administrative assistant for the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor Program, greeted us, imperfect as we were, tired from getting up so early to catch the early boat, hungry, already having disagreed about directions and versions of

stories... but so happy too to be together and to be carrying those few boxes full of school supplies...she greeted us like we were princes.

Winne had a whole basket of cookies she baked for us and coffee and apples too. And she brought her staff and told us stories and kept stopping in the middle to say to us, "What you do for us on Nantucket means so much to us. You are so generous. You are so good. You take so much care for others." Mind you, Ascentria has volunteers who outfit these children all year round, has foster parents who take them in for years, has donors who give them thousands of dollars and we had 4 boxes of back packs and notebooks and erasers and pens and markers. And we were heroes in that moment because we noticed the people Winnie loved as worthy of receiving our care. She choked up when she spoke to us of these young people.

She choked up when she thanked us. We were humbled in her presence. Not princes but peasants who recognized that we had so little to give this giant of a woman who made our offerings into gold when she touched them.

And on the way home, Gary got a call that there was some food to pick up for Food Rescue and it was not enough food to feed the world's hungry but it feed a few families that night and in the meantime Pastor Eduardo Calles from Faro de Luz and I spoke and he agreed to join the board I sit on, Alliance for Substance Abuse Prevention, because he worries about his community's children and drug addiction and next week there's a clothing drive for the Food Pantry's clients and the week before we filled the activities room as Jews and Unitarian Universalist came to see a film about Unitarians who risked their lives during WWII to provide safe passage for Jews from Europe to America. We had a lively conversation afterwards about how Muslims now are at risk and that we have to join together to make sure we keep the world safe from repeating this history. I told them all that Dr. Qureshi who led Muslim prayer here all summer will be here on Sunday November 6th to speak to us about Islam. Many will be joining us.

And there is so much more. As we stumble forward in this life, as we seek to be loved and love and love some more along the way, looking for the hero and finding our own reflection once more, a little more tarnished than before but still here and come back together to look into each other's eyes and see ourselves reflected back again, this is who we are, this is what we have, this is our home.

I have decided to double my pledge this year because it is part of being brave for me, it is part of giving up scarcity and recognizing that this place is saving my life, that this place is giving me the bucket of water to put out the fire of dragons that would silence me and to recognize when it is time for silence too, that this place, this community, one box at a time, one meal at a time, one outfit at a time, one interfaith gathering at a time is offering sanity and hope to a world that has forgotten what sanity and hope look like. Why shouldn't that affect my budget?

Thank you for reminding me that my life is worth risking for what I love.
Thank you for being my home.

Amen.

Thomas R. Kelley, Quaker writer and educator who lived in the first half of the 20th century.

He says in *A Testament of Devotion* "Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice, to which we may continuously return. Eternity is at our hearts, pressing upon our time-torn lives, warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home unto Itself." (p. 3)