



The Unitarian Church in Westport

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT:

More Than Enough

By Rev. Dr. John Morehouse

Sunday, September 15, 2019

A story:

Long, long ago, the Queen of an ancient land was old and dying. She loved children but had none of her own. So the Queen decided to choose one of the children of the land to be the next ruler. The Queen also loved plants, and of these, she had many. So nobody was surprised by the test she offered the children of the land. The Queen called all the children to the palace. She said, "I will give one seed to each of you. Come back in one year. When I see what you have grown from your seeds, I will choose the next ruler."

The children ran from the palace smiling. All they had to do was grow a seed and they would be ruler. But a year is a long time. Most of the children decided to wait a while to do their planting, and as the year went by, many children forgot their seeds.

But one child, a boy named Chen, took care of his seed right away. Just like the Queen herself, Chen loved plants. Chen carefully carried the Queen's seed home, sealing it securely in his hands so it wouldn't fall, but not so tightly that it might crush.

As soon as he got home, Chen found a clay pot made by his Grandfather. He thought that pot would be just right to grow his seed. He washed the pot and dried it carefully. Next Chen found rich, black soil that had many worms in it to make it nourishing. Chen filled the pot with the soil. Then he planted his seed, carefully covering it with the soil.

Chen set the pot in the sun. Each day, he lightly sprinkled water on the seed. But nothing grew from the seed. Nothing at all.

Some weeks went by. The other children boasted to each other of the wonderful large plants they had grown, but Chen's seed did not grow. He tried moving the pot to another window. He tried watering his plant more, and even singing to his plant. But no matter

what Chen did, his seed did not grow. Then, a year had passed. It was time to return to the Queen. Chen was ashamed that his seed had not grown.

His wise Grandfather said, "You did your best, Chen. You were caring and patient. Be honest with the Emperor and explain that you did your best. It will be enough."

So Chen returned to the palace with his empty pot held carefully in his arms. The children lined up to present their plants. The first child had a large plant with thick leaves, a ginseng plant that could be used to make paper and medicine. The next child had a eucalyptus plant, a healthy, strong plant that soon would become a tree big enough to produce food for many animals. By the time Chen's turn came, he was so sad about his empty pot.

Feeling very embarrassed, Chen held his empty pot up for the Queen to see. Chen explained how he had lovingly cared for his seed. Chen talked about his love for his Grandfather who had made the pot. He told the Queen everything he had done to care for the seed, and how sad he felt that the seed would not grow.

The Queen smiled and spoke. "There is only one among you who is honest enough to be the ruler," he said. "The seeds that I gave you had been boiled so they would never grow. These wonderful plants some children have shown me did not come from the seeds I gave them."

Now some of the other children looked ashamed, because they had not been honest. And the Queen knew it. "Only one child cared for the seed even when it did not grow," the Queen said. "Only Chen gave the seed all it needed and asked for nothing. Only Chen was honest enough to show me an empty pot. Chen will be the new ruler."

Chen moved to the palace with his Grandfather. The Queen taught him many things, about gardening and much more. And when the Queen died, she was smiling, because she knew

that Chen would care for the land with love and honesty. Chen would care for the hungry and the homeless who come with empty pots. (UUA.Org)

I worry a lot when I see people who have so little such as the homeless on the street. How many of you worry about others who seem to be suffering? How many of you feel a little guilty if you don't give someone homeless some money? It's ok to feel a little guilty; after all we should feel that way. I try to give homeless people a little something but it's hard sometimes. When I was in Chicago, I would carry a lot of one dollar bills and go down the street between where I was living and working and hand them out. I try to always look into the eyes of those people who are asking for money. I try to say "I see you" and to say "I see me in you" because we are very lucky most of us to not be living on the street.

I told the story about the empty pot for two reasons:

1. The first is that we can't hope to make our world a better place if we are not honest about who we are and what we want to give. Chen did all he could to make that plant grow, but it wouldn't. But instead of putting a different plant in the pot and pretending he had made it grow, he brought the Queen the empty plot and admitted that he failed. Now, I am not so sure I like the Queen for tricking the kids, but I do think this story teaches us an important lesson about giving and expecting. When we are honest about what we have, and give what we are able, our heart is in the right place. Some people just can't give that much money because they don't have it. No shame in that. (Although it is a well-known fact that poor people give vastly more money to help other people than rich people do. Maybe that why the rich are rich.) But if we are honest about what we can give to help others or to help rebuild our church for instance, than our little pot is not really empty, it's full of honesty and generosity.

2. The second reason I picked up on this story of the empty pot is that regardless of whether Chen was able to make his plant grow, there will be others who can make plants grow. How many of you watched any of the Star Wars movies? Well, in one of them ObeWanKonobe and a younger Vadar are trapped on a planet, and Vadar is really worried about how they will get off the planet. Obe says “a solution will present itself”. I believe this is true. If our eyes are open we will see that a solution will present itself. If our pot is empty, there will be someone else whose pot is full and will share it with us. This is our faith in our congregation. That is why we need to give to the best of our ability to our Capital Campaign. If we give as much as we can, others will as well and there will be more than enough. Generosity of spirit reflects in generous giving.

Honesty and generosity go hand in hand. And when we give as much as we can, we can expect others to do the same. At least that is how it works in our church. How often are we given the opportunity to act towards the benefit others? Well for starters we need to give until it feels right. The Buddhist asks for a vegan burger and says “Make me one with everything” and hands the vendor a \$20 bill. Waiting for her change she asks the vendor, “where is my change?” And the vendor relies “Change comes from within”. True enough.

Here is what I know: There is more than enough wealth to feed the hungry, cloth the naked, house the homeless, and heal the sick. The money that the top 1% of the wealthiest Americans sit on, is enough to solve most of our most intractable problems. It’s a matter of expectations. If we can see there is more than enough there will be.

Last Sunday we heard from our beloved Minister Emeritus Frank Hall. Frank and I have learned a lot from each other, coming as we do with our own empty pots. Frank has taught me to love poetry. Now I probably should have told the search committee this four years ago, but until I got here I really didn’t like poetry, well, I didn’t get poetry. I like stories more. But here is the thing that Frank taught me. Poems unlock our inner best

selves in mysterious ways. Like prayers do. It doesn't matter if you don't pray or understand the poem, the words open you up to the more that is in you. Can I get an amen here?

So beloveds, young and not so young, I am falling in love with poetry. I am falling in love with all of you, empty, cracked and pots to flowing over. So let me close with this poem that speaks about there being more than enough and what we can expect from love even in this broken world.

This poem is from one of my favorite poets Naomi Shihab Nye in her collection "The Red Suitcase"

You can't order a poem like you order a taco.
Walk up to the counter, say, "I'll take two"
and expect it to be handed back to you
on a shiny plate.
Still, I like your spirit.

Anyone who says, "Here's my address,
write me a poem," deserves something in reply.

So I'll tell a secret instead:
poems hide. In the bottoms of our shoes,
they are sleeping. They are the shadows
drifting across our ceilings the moment
before we wake up. What we have to do
is live in a way that lets us find them.
There are more than enough.

Once I knew a man who gave his wife
two skunks for a valentine.
He couldn't understand why she was crying.
"I thought they had such beautiful eyes."
And he was serious. He was a serious man
who lived in a serious way. Nothing was ugly
just because the world said so. He really
liked those skunks. So, he re-invented them
as valentines and they became beautiful.
At least, to him. And the poems that had been hiding
in the eyes of skunks for centuries
crawled out and curled up at his feet.
Maybe if we re-invent whatever our lives give us
we find poems. Check your garage, the off sock
in your drawer, the person you almost like, but not quite.
And let me know.

Let our poem together begin.