

Setting A Place for Gratitude

I would like to begin this morning with a quote from a book entitled, “The Greatest Stories Never Told,” collected by the researchers of television’s history channel and I quote;

“The Mayflower was headed for Virginia when storms blew it off course. It ended up hitting the shore of Massachusetts. Rather than heading south to find a better location for their colony, the Pilgrims put ashore at Plymouth Rock.

One Pilgrim's journal explains why: "We could not take time for further search or consideration, our victuals being much spent, especially our beere. Yes, the Pilgrims made port because they ran out of beer.”

I can almost hear your response, “ You gotta be kidding, no wonder they left that out of the story! Was it ale, larger, dark or light!” I can attest to the fact that In those days, and while I was at Oxford, beer was considered an essential and healthy part of everyone's daily diet. Water, on the other hand, was usually considered suspect, because it easily became contaminated with disease. Even today if you fall into the Thames, you will need a tetanus shot!

The Mayflower had set out from England loaded with beer barrels that were now running out. Once ashore, the Pilgrims promptly erected a brew house and got to work brewing up a new batch to quench their thirst. So Plymouth, Massachusetts, became the historic home of the Pilgrims ... because they needed to make a beer run.

One of the Pilgrims who came ashore that day was a young man who was on board strictly because of the beer. John Alden was hired for the journey as a cooper, primarily to make beer barrels. British law required that "whosoever shall carry beere beyond the sea had to bring a cooper along to make replacement barrels, since barrels back in England were always in short supply. Otherwise John never would have had a chance to romance Priscilla.”

The article further reveals the actual words that Samoset spoke in March of 1621 when he astonished the pilgrims by walking into their colony and greeting them in English, which he had learned from contact with fishing vessels. "I am Samoset," is what the schoolbooks report leaving out the rest of the sentence, "Do You have any beer?"*

This is certainly an interesting and humorous twist in a story we have heard repeatedly every year at this time. But had the Mayflower been blown further off course, the Pilgrims would never have made it and would have died from thirst before they hit landfall. If that were the case, we would possibly not even be here, never mind celebrating Thanksgiving in the same way, or at all. One would never suspect that their first act of gratitude was for a place in which to brew their beer!

When we do gather each year with family and friends for the feast of Thanksgiving, we offer our gratitude for the food before us and the family and friends beside us, with which we share a meal. It is a ritual that for many that happens only once a year, yet as we count ourselves among the fortunate for that one day, it is so easy to take for granted what we do have, all year long. I am also extremely grateful to those who have put aside their own personal needs to serve others and that is the message of the Guest at your table boxes that we fill every year, to foster the extensive work of the Service Committee and their partners. Would you now unfold your box and look at the photo on cover flap.

The youth in the first photograph are proudly showing their seedlings. Their teacher in the center of the photo is Chrisantus who is the director of the Soil Farm Multi-Culture Group (SFMG), a UUSC partner in Kenya. He has helped protect water resources through Hope in Crops, a groundbreaking youth education and training program that teaches children in 30 local schools about protecting the environment, planting trees, growing crops, and raising bees. Chrisantus works to empower his local community while being mindful of their larger impact. UUSC is proud to partner with someone who upholds and respects the interdependent web of existence.

Under Advancing Civil liberties and democratic processes is a photo of Dalia who is a youth leader and human-rights activist in Egypt.

She is shattering barriers to empower a generation of Egyptians who are experiencing democracy for the first time. Inspired by Martin Luther King Jr., Dalia worked with UUSC to translate a comic book about the Montgomery bus boycott into Arabic and train youth activists in nonviolent protest. Following the 2011 nonviolent revolution, she is working to educate voters throughout Egypt, many of whom have never voted in an election, and encourage them to take part in their budding democracy. Dalia believes that everyone should have a voice and a choice in democratic society.

In the photo representing Workers' rights and a living wage, is Maria, the woman on the left who is a leader for workers' rights with the Northwest Arkansas Worker Justice Center (NWAJWC), making a difference for both undocumented and legal immigrant workers.

When she was 16, Maria moved from Mexico to California, where she helped her family by working in the lettuce and strawberry fields. Many companies were underpaying, abusing, and threatening undocumented workers. Maria saw and experienced that — and took action by starting a program to help immigrant workers. Now she works with NWAJWC, a UUSC partner, to improve conditions for low-wage workers. Maria works with women at NWAJWC as peers, in similar spirit to UUSC's eye-to-eye partnership model.

In Haiti UUSC is working with partners to protect unaccompanied children. The gentleman pictured in the next photo is Lionel, of the Oasis Institute, has helped build an innovative camp to house and protect unaccompanied children. Home to 40 girls, Camp Oasis provides more than just a roof over their heads. With a secure place to live, they are less likely to be the victim of gender-based violence, which is rampant in the camps for internally displaced earthquake survivors like Patrick, a youth who grew up in a

particularly disadvantaged neighborhood in Port-au-Prince.

Patrick found hope — and a new life — through an art workshop created by the Association for the Promotion of Integral Family Healthcare (APROSIFA), a UUSC partner. On his own from a young age, Patrick was able to reclaim his dignity through his art and return to school with money from selling his paintings. UUSC funding has not only allowed Patrick to continue pursuing his dream of being an artist, it has also contributed to his development as a leader and made it possible for him to mentor other youth. UUSC's work strengthens the cultural wealth that already exists in communities and helps young people reclaim their dignity and rights in the midst of crisis.

These are only a few of the individuals and organizations that the UUSC has assisted. What intrigues me is they support those who have experienced the depths of the issues, who live among those in need and who fully understand the traditions and customs of the culture. They are the living examples of our faith, realized, our seven UU principles in action, addressing the whole human condition, turning tragedy and deprivation into hope and renewal in the here and now.

In my early days as a student minister, I wielded a 'give me your tired your poor' mentality. Being invincible and immortal at the age of 20 and of course all knowing, I felt I could simply move into any situation and simply fix it! One day as I was researching a paper on primitive religions, I came across an old hand written account of three missionaries in the mid 1800's who traveled up the Hudson river to Ungava Bay, to bring the "good news" blessings of Christianity to the indigenous peoples of the north. Finally after weeks of paddling, and facing all the hardships of a barren and frigid climate they finally arrived at an Inuit settlement. There the missionaries plied both the adults and children with candy and sweets in exchange for memorizing bible verses. In a matter of months the natives teeth quickly began to decay and rot. As a hunting society that depended solely upon seal and whale meat and skins, for food, clothing and shelter, the Inuit had never been exposed to raw sugar before. In less than a year, the entire

tribe was decimated by starvation and the soon died out entirely.

The missionaries returned from their assignment with this report to their superiors, stating that 'it was proven to be God's will that they be eliminated as heathens.'

That story brought to light, for me, the extreme importance of understanding, fully, the true needs of any group or society before passing judgment or interfering in their way of life, in the name of "helping." It seemed to me that in this case the greatest need was for the missionaries to learn from the Inuit, not the other way around. In the same way, the story of the reason for the Pilgrims landing in Plymouth in 1620, and the circumstance around their haste, was left out of our history books. Why what would our children think if they parked their ship merely to make a few barrels of brew! The reason was far more important than the act.

I am deeply grateful to the Service Committee, because I believe in their work as they are very conscious of uniting with those who fully understand the culture and where the need lies; who are able to bring about improvements with the full cooperation of the recipients. Helping without understanding only results in hindrance and rejection rather than progress.

So as you sit down at your tables this thanksgiving. I hope you will set a place of gratitude, for family and friends and for the food before you, for those we love and those we have lost, for shelter and clothing, for clean water to drink and air to breathe, for the freedom of our faith, but also as you fill your boxes, for all of those, here and overseas, who give of themselves, in all the ways that we cannot. May you have a very Happy Thanksgiving.

So be it

Amen

