

We're All in This Together  
Sunday, January 22, 2023  
Tri-County Unitarian Universalists  
Summerfield, FL  
Rev. Cynthia A. Snavelly

Time for All Ages: [Give Yourself \(a story about Ralph Waldo Emerson\) | WorshipWeb | UUA.org](#)

A couple months ago I went to one of the Beacon Salon Speakers events at Beacon College in Leesburg. The speaker told a story about a blind jazz musician whose name I have now forgotten. On a city street corner, the musician was approached by a stranger who said they were blind and would the musician please help them to cross the street. Now, of course, the first thought that crossed the musician's mind was that he was the last person this person should have asked, the blind leading the blind and all that. But... but the musician knew how to cross this street. He helped the stranger across, and all was well.

I was reminded of that story on this Sunday when we begin our annual pledge season when we ask you to consider the gifts of your time, talent, and treasure that you will commit to this congregation over the next year. Maybe this year someone will ask you to consider taking on a task or a commitment and your first thought will be, "I'm the last person you should have asked." But... but think a moment. Is it really something you actually can do? Then consider doing it.

I took my oldest grandson for a job interview at a fast-food place this week. They told him that if he took the job, he would spend one month in training working each position in the store for one week so that he would know how to do everything. It reminded me of the words I will use for the benediction today. The nineteenth century Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen said, "A community is like a ship; everyone ought to be prepared to take the helm." I am telling you these words early on in the sermon and I will repeat them as my last words today. "A community is like a ship; everyone ought to be prepared to take the helm." We're all in this together.

Now, Tri-County Unitarian Universalists is a little different than a ship. Most ships aren't going to keep you on the crew if you can no longer see, walk, hear, remember. But if you have trouble hearing or seeing or walking or remembering TriUU still wants you to be part of this team. Maybe you really can't be board president if you are struggling with your memory. Maybe you truly can't get up on a ladder and clean the garden trellis if you are no longer steady in your walking. There are other things you can still do. Each person is needed on the ship of this Unitarian Universalist congregation.

So often during pledge season we think mostly of the commitment of our money, our treasure, but your time and talent are just as important. As Emerson's daughter taught him, the gift that only we can give is the gift of ourselves.

Still, we need your money too. My pledge will be lower this year than last. I am going to be working for two congregations so my pledge will be split between two congregations. For various reasons, others among us may also need to lower our pledges. That does not mean that we are any less a part of the crew. But it also means that TriUU needs those of you who can and will increase your pledges.

The money, the treasure, like the time and the talent is needed to make this ship sail. We need the person who knows how to raise and lower the sails, we need the navigator, we need the cook, but we

also need to buy the material for the sails, the compass, and the food, which reminds me of a story from our Universalist history.

Do you know the story of the eighteenth-century Universalist preacher John Murray? His only son died. His wife died. He ended up in debtor's prison over their doctor's bills. His brother-in-law got him out of prison, but Murray was depressed and decided to sail for America and lose himself in the wilderness. He sailed for New York, which even in the 1700s was not the wilderness. But Murray's ship became grounded on a sandbar and becalmed off the coast of New Jersey, which might have been a bit closer to wilderness.

The ship's captain asked Murray to go ashore and see if he could find more provisions for the ship, which was why I was reminded of this story. It was in that task that Murray met the farmer, Thomas Potter, who had built a chapel on his land for use by itinerant preachers. Finding out that Murray had been a preacher Potter asked him to preach at the chapel, but his preaching was one of things Murray was leaving behind. How can a person who had lost so much and was so depressed preach God's love? But Potter pressed Murray until finally he agreed that if the ship was still becalmed on Sunday he would preach. Of course, Murray expected that by Sunday he would be back on the ocean on his way to New York. But Sunday came and the ship was still on the Jersey shore. As Peter Hughes puts it in his biography of John Murray on the Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biographies website, "The winds did not change, and Murray preached. Potter was greatly impressed and invited Murray to stay. Murray traveled with the ship to New York, but he soon returned to New Jersey and began a popular evangelical career," [John Murray \(uudb.org\)](http://uudb.org).

Asking Murray to preach at that point in his life might have been like asking a blind man to lead one across the street, but Murray did it and it turned out that it helped him as much as those who gathered to hear him. It marked the beginning of his new life in America not as a lost soul in the wilderness but as someone today honored as one of the founding leaders of our faith.

We're all in this together. Sometimes we can get bogged down in the various tasks and needs. We need enough money to hire a minister and a music director. We need a treasurer. We need a board president. We need a Worship Team chairperson. But, the twentieth century French writer and aviator Antoine de Saint-Exupery said, "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea." What do you long for in a congregation? The point of having a Unitarian Universalist congregation is not simply to have a congregation. It is to create a community, a community that will aid our and others' spiritual growth, will help us to live our lives with integrity, and will help us to serve each other and the wider world with compassion. If that is the kind of community you long for, then put your hands and hearts to the task of continually creating and maintaining it. It is your time, talent, and treasure along with your neighbors' that will make that community real for yourself and for others.

The ship of TriUU has been through some stormy seas. Three years of a worldwide pandemic has done in many congregations. You aren't where you were three years ago, but you aren't done in either. We are back in the building. We have a new skill. We know how to Zoom. There aren't as many of you as there were, but new people with new ideas and new skills are coming in the doors. The Indian Catholic bishop Father Alfred D'Souza said, "For a long time it had seemed to me that life was about to begin—real life. But there was always some obstacle in the way, something to be got through first, some unfinished business, time still to be served, a debt to be paid. Then life would begin. At last, it dawned

on me that these obstacles were my life.” We may think that figuring out how to come out of a three-year pandemic is just an obstacle to get through but how you navigate this obstacle may make as much difference to the life of TriUU as being becalmed off the coast of New Jersey made to the life of John Murray.

A last quote, from American actress Gina Rodriguez, star of “Jane the Virgin.” She said, “I try to keep in mind that it's a long journey. It's not a race. It's about staying focused, continuing to do good work, make my family and community proud; that's all I really want to do... and pay my bills.”

Your pledge cards came in this past week's mail, please consider your commitment, fill them out and get them back to us. We're all in this together.