

Daring to Trust

Sermon by Rev. Dr. Roger D. Jones

Sunday, May 20, 2018

Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento

Hymns:

#1000, Morning Has Come; # 1029 Love Knocks and Waits for Us to Hear; #1008, When Our Heart Is in a Holy Place.

Chalice Lighting responsive words:

We light this chalice, the symbol of our open faith.

May it renew our connections to one another and the Spirit of Life.

We celebrate this light, the signal that all are worthy of respect.

Let us honor the light that each person brings into the world.

We kindle this flame of tradition, the reminder of Love's embrace.

May it guide us on our way, and bring us home, always.

Book Cited:

Daring to Trust: Opening Ourselves to Real Love and Intimacy, by Rev. David Richo, Ph.D. Shambhala: Boston and London, 2011. All page citations refer to this edition.

Sermon

Oh! I've been betrayed, stolen from, insulted, minimized, misrepresented, manipulated, stood up, broken up with, left off the guest list, not given a *thank you* and not paid back for a loan. *How disappointing!* Or, was it I who did those things to others?

I've been misunderstood and written off by others as unreliable. Others have put me on a pedestal and knocked me off it when I didn't live up to their high expectations. *Ouch!* Or, was it I who did this to others?

Whom can we trust—or *how* can we trust? What *is* trust, anyway? It's not a guarantee, but a sense of confidence in other people, in life, and in ourselves. Trust begins *within* us. David Richo, a psychotherapist, says: Trust "is not a dependency but rather an inner assurance." Trust is not something we should grant other people for no reason. We learn to see where it belongs, we learn when we can rely on another's reliability. Likewise, trust is not something we can demand of other people. We strive to earn trust by being worthy of it.

Perhaps we might trust a person in one role but not be able to count on them in another. Every summer I go back to my Midwestern home town. I eat fresh tomatoes and sweet corn for dinner; I feel the rumble of a good thunderstorm; I swat mosquitoes. Oh, and I visit relatives. In a nursing home dining room, I have lunch with a cousin of my late mother. As we pass tables of elderly folks, she introduces me. "Roger Jones. Charles and Leah's boy." "Oh," a woman says, "Doctor Charlie? He was our family doctor. Wonderful! He delivered all of my children." My father's been gone since 1975, and ever since then I've heard stories about his good care and his wisdom. I've heard that his patients trusted him, and his colleagues and nurses trusted him. It still feels good to hear it.

Yet my older sibling and I remain puzzled that our childhood home was a not a place where trust was built or felt or learned. It wasn't horrific, thank God, compared to some stories in the news. But still there was not a good supply of what human beings need for spiritual and emotional health. In his book *Daring to Trust*, David Richo says to develop inner trust, first while we are growing up, and then in close relationships and in communities, we need the Five As. The Five As are Attention, Acceptance, Appreciation, Affection, and Allowing. *Attention.* We learn to trust others by the genuine attention we receive from them, by their presence with us.

Acceptance. We learn to trust others by seeing that they accept us as we are, with our imperfections as well as our gifts. We don't have to *earn* their love.

Appreciation. We learn to trust others when they appreciate us, when they point out and praise the little things we do as well as the big things, when they notice and say thank you.

Affection. We learn to trust others by their kindness and warmth to us. Trust grows when we receive physical or spoken affection in an atmosphere of mutual respect and identified boundaries.

Allowing. We learn to trust others when we are allowed to express who we are, to state our preferences and beliefs, to learn for ourselves and make choices that matter to us.

With the Five As, we learn to trust other people, trust ourselves, trust life, trust the Spirit of life.

The five As are important for children. It's not good when primary caregivers aren't able or willing to provide those gifts to a growing child. Yet as adults, we need to find ways to provide those gifts to ourselves and find them in sources beyond ourselves—and not a single source, Richo says. He writes that it's too much to expect any single person "to fulfill all...of our emotional needs." (62)

Saint Gregory of Nyssa was a bishop of the early church who died in the year 394. He said: "We are, in a sense, our own parents and we give birth to ourselves/ by our free choice of what is good." (40)

One way to choose what is good is to learn from those who are worthy of trust. As we grow toward independence, Richo says, "we align ourselves to those who are consistently trustworthy.... [As adults,] our trust grows ... in an atmosphere of continuity and consistency." We decide if we can *rely* on another's *reliability*, and whether we can trust in their trustworthiness.

Unfortunately, he says: "We still see that some people are not trustworthy, and we feel sad and injured. But as long as we don't follow suit [in how we act], we [can respect ourselves and we can] like ourselves more." We shouldn't stay in a harmful situation or let others take advantage of us. We can remain on our toes, noticing behaviors that indicate reasons for keeping a safe distance. And in our own actions, we can choose to be worthy of trust. By this practice, he says, "Our focus has

shifted from ourselves as victims of others' betrayals to [keeping] our own commitment to trustworthiness."

For my doctoral thesis last year, I wrote a history of this congregation in the 1970s, 80s and 90s. For many years at UUSS there was an entrenched culture of mistrust, factionalism, and fighting. Not fistfights, but words of scolding instead of allowing, demanding instead of accepting, and accusation instead of appreciation. Elected leaders were not always treated with trust or kindness. Some leaders did not appreciate or trust the congregation. A church of many good people, but a culture where trust was rare.

For a year and a half beginning in 1989, the Reverend Eileen Karpeles was our interim or transitional minister. She urged the congregation to move away from a task-orientation in church life toward a trust-orientation. It took us time, patience, and care to transform the culture.

We had the coaching of a few more interim clergy, and the courage and commitment of a number of lay leaders. They encouraged listening with respect among people of differing perspectives. They urged expressing thanks and encouragement. Rather than siding with factions, leaders took/ as their first priority/ the health of the community as a whole. The transformation has continued toward a trust orientation over the years. There's a much greater sense of mutual dependence and a common mission. There's healthy communication and healthier boundaries, and the sharing of generosity and appreciation with one another.

Richo says the process is similar in our intimate relationships. We will experience frustration; we will face challenges to our sense of comfort and trust. Yet if the parties to a relationship are willing to address the issue and not avoid it, and to engage in listening and processing the challenge and coming to a resolution, we actually can deepen our trust in the relationship. We gain trust not only in others, but we learn to trust our own courage, our own wisdom, and our own worth.

Whether making new friends, finding a community or seeking a partner, Richo advises us to look for people who make a practice of being worthy of trust in all parts of their lives. If a person seems to be generous, kind, and respectful not merely toward us right now but in how they are committed to living their life, perhaps this is evidence of who they really choose to be. This is how we learn to rely on the reliability of others. We need not take the words, “Just trust me!” at face value. We can *trust ourselves* to observe another’s behaviors. We can learn if they are *worthy* of trust. At the same time, we act and speak in ways so that others can learn to trust us as trust-worthy.

When you think about it, this congregation relies on trust. A UU congregation is nothing but the people who come together and make the decision to call themselves a congregation. That’s how this one started in Sacramento, 150 years ago. Seventeen families signed a document and created the First Unitarian Church. In so doing, they put their trust in one another and in their common mission.

Today, so many years later, we continue with trust as the energy driving us, as the glue binding us together. To be sure, we also have structures and boundaries. We have guidelines, like our constitution and bylaws. We have our statements of mission and covenant, our Sunday rituals and semi-annual meetings. All these give shape to our trust. But without an experience of trust, our structures wouldn’t matter very much.

Every year, our members elect volunteers from the congregation to positions of leadership. The nominating committee has recruited candidates who are not only willing to serve, not only varied in gifts, experience and perspective, but who have shown themselves to be open and reliable. Our Board members are even called “trustees!” We trust *them* to pay attention to the health, vitality and mission of this community. In return, those we elect show trust in the rest of the congregation—trust that *we* will pay attention to the mission, we will show up, listen, ask questions, and be reliable.

Of course, reliability doesn’t mean being rigid, only being real. Being real includes the ability to say: *I’m sorry, I made a mistake. I*

apologize. When we allow ourselves and one another to be less than perfect, we grow in trust with one another. Sometimes being real includes the humility to say, I think it’s time for somebody else to handle this role. When we appreciate one another, when we allow ourselves the grace to change, to try something new, or simply to let go, we grow in trust. In this community, we can trust in our diversity of gifts and needs. With our talents and with our imperfections, together we are enough.

Every year in March we ask one another to make financial pledges for the next budget year. The task itself is done by the Stewardship Committee. They do the asking and the reminding—and the reminding, and the reminding. They do the appreciating, too. But as a spiritual matter, it is *all of us* who put our trust in one another to make the best pledges we can. And we rely on one another to come through. The biggest source of income for our church’s budget comes from pledges and the Sunday offering—actually 4/5 of the budget. Of course, there are additional sources of income, like the auction. But just consider: fully 4/5 of our budget is based on trust!

A healthy congregation can be a place where people remember how trust works and what it is. Certainly my earliest UU congregations did that for me, and so does this one. You know, I spend about five days out of every year back in the Midwest with relatives, but most other days of the year I spend with you. You are *that* reliable.

Of course, trust is not a foolproof guarantee, it is a practice. If we are wise, we look for it in others. If we want to be healthy, we strive to be worthy of trust in the way we live our lives.

An example from David Richo: Let’s say you are going to the public swimming pool or the beach. A hundred people are there. You’d like to leave your wallet with someone, so you can go in the water. Richo says: “I can hand my wallet to only the one person I know and trust while I go for a swim. But any one of the hundred people there can trust me to hold [their] wallet.” (7)

He balances his discretion about whom to trust with his commitment to be a person who can be trusted.

How can we learn how to be worthy of trust, and be known that way? By returning to the Five As/ as our own practice.

Attention. We show ourselves as trustworthy by listening, by truly being present with another person.

Acceptance. We show ourselves as trustworthy by accepting others as they are. This doesn't mean putting up with harmful behavior, but accepting someone for who they are, with their gifts as well as their flaws.

Appreciation. We show ourselves as trustworthy by showing gratitude for others and not taking one another for granted. We notice. We say thank you.

Affection. We show ourselves as trustworthy by showing affection to others, with kind gestures and warmth. When we can express our own boundaries and respect another's personal boundaries, we give and receive affection, deepening our sense of trust.

Allowing. We show ourselves as trustworthy by granting others the respect to express who they are, to state their preferences, to wrestle with their questions and make choices that matter to them. People trust us when they see we're not trying to fix them.

Trust takes time, including time to learn to trust ourselves as well as to discern who are the people we can rely on/ to be reliable. We cannot make another person be worthy of trust, as much as we might wish to. We cannot make another person trust us.

We can only choose whether we are trustable. We can make a promise to ourselves to be worthy of trust, and we can practice it. By so doing, we bring more trust into the world. What a gift that can be. So may it be, amen.