

The Rocks in the Jar
Sunday, June 2, 2024
Tri-County Unitarian Universalists
Summerfield, FL
Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Lake County
Eustis, FL
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Reading: A philosophy professor stood before his class and had some items in front of him. When class began, wordlessly he picked up a large empty mayonnaise jar and proceeded to fill it to the top with rocks, right to the top, rocks about 2” in diameter. He then asked the students if the jar was full. They agree it was.

The professor then picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly. The pebbles, of course, rolled into the open areas between the rocks. The students laughed. He asked the students again if the jar was full. They agreed that yes, it was.

The professor then picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up all the still empty spaces. So, the rocks are your family, your partner, your health, your children - anything that is so important to you that if it were lost, you would be nearly destroyed. The pebbles are the other things in life that matter, but on a smaller scale. The pebbles represent things like your job, your house, your car. The sand is everything else, the small stuff.”

“If you put the sand or the pebbles in first there is no room for the rocks. The same is true for your life. If you spend all your time on the small stuff, material things, you will never have room for the things that are truly most important.”

Sermon: I am a planner. I sit down on Sunday afternoon or Monday morning and write out my schedule for the week. There is a TriUU outing on Tuesday morning and a TriUU potluck Friday night. There are UUCLC meetings Wednesday afternoon and Friday morning. I agreed to meet with someone Thursday afternoon. I signed up for a UU denominational meeting Tuesday night. There is a school event for one of my grandchildren on Saturday. I have an appointment for an oil change on Wednesday morning. I know that somewhere in the week I need to write and practice a sermon, buy groceries, eat, shower, sleep, etc. Usually, it all gets done. But what if I need to prioritize?

Way back when I was taught a planning grid. I expect many of you were too. There are four squares. Is it urgent and important? Is it urgent but not important? Is it important but not urgent? Is it not urgent and not important?

I may be cleaning the bathroom. I expect many of you will agree that a clean bathroom is important. But then I happen to glance out a bathroom window and see the neighbors’ children up on their roof all decked out in superhero capes. I am not going to keep cleaning the bathroom. I am going to go outside and get those children safely off the roof before they jump. A clean bathroom may be important but keeping the children safe is both important and urgent.

My boss wants the monthly report by 5 tonight. I may doubt that the boss ever actually reads my report, so maybe I class that as urgent but not important. I plan to get it done and in on time because this is my boss who wants this. But, if my spouse calls today and says they think their having a heart attack, my boss is not getting my monthly report today. Something both urgent and important has taken precedence.

One has to be careful with this grid though. It can be tempting to put things you do for yourself in the not urgent and not important box. Watching reruns of Doc Marten while eating popcorn on your sofa may be in your not urgent and not important box but if you really need a rest break maybe you need to move it into a more urgent or more important position.

The urgent important grid can be used for planning your own to do list, but it can also be used by organizations. During a pandemic it may be both urgent and important to get the congregation up and running for online worship and meetings. A congregation may decide that it would like to buy more hymnals but that it is not urgent and that it is not high in importance since the words are up on the screen on Sunday mornings.

One of the elements of highest importance in any congregation is the volunteers, you. We tell you at least once a year at pledge time and likely more often that we need your time, your talent and your treasure. Hopefully, we will say thank you more than once a year.

Congregations also realize that not every member and friend of the congregation has time, talent and treasure in equal measure.

If you are working full time and are a caregiver for a family member you likely don't have a whole lot of time to give. Maybe you do things that you can do in one small block of time. You serve as an usher. You volunteer one Sunday in the kitchen. If you have the time though, your congregation has plenty of need for you. All volunteers who have any time at all that you give are needed. Thank you.

Talents vary. If you have a bad back, you likely aren't going to volunteer to work in the garden or set up tables. If you have some memory issues, you likely aren't going to volunteer to chair a committee. If you don't have a computer, you likely aren't going to volunteer to be the notetaker for a committee. People give in their areas of ability and expertise. Maybe you take wonderful notes or are tech savvy or are a natural born leader. All talents are appreciated. And so are the contributions of those not sure you have the talent but are willing to see if you can develop it. Thank you.

Treasure varies too. Members are asked to make an annual contribution of record, but there is no minimum. If you are worried about whether your money is going to last till the end of the month or that you will have enough to cover your rent or mortgage you are not likely to commit large amounts of money to the congregation. If, however, you feel like you have comfortably covered your needs and have money to spare, the congregation would be glad of your contributions. From \$5 to thousands of dollars your financial contributions are appreciated. Thank you.

In the Christian tradition only one disciple was named as a rock, Simon then called Rock-Peter, on whom the Christian church was to be built. In our Unitarian Universalist tradition every

person is a rock. It is you, the people, that are most important. If a congregation forgets that and starts concentrating on the pebbles and sand the congregation will not last long.

And please don't start comparing yourselves to one another. He's a diamond. I'm quartz. She's gold. I'm pyrite. I'm the emerald among the stones. We want to say thank you to everyone for everything.

At our annual denominational meeting General Assembly when it is in person you will see people with multiple ribbons flowing from their nametags. One may mean that they are serving as a delegate from their congregation. Another may mean that their congregation has given their fair share amount to the denomination. Another that their congregation is a Welcoming Congregation. Another that the congregation has Green Sanctuary status. Another that the congregation has a campus ministry. Another that the congregation has accepted the 8th Principle. The ribbons are a sign of honor, yes, but the bigger point of the ribbons is to have other people ask about them. What is that one for? Oh, that sounds interesting. I wonder if my congregation would be interested in that. I know I am.

Some congregations do the same with ribbons. Ushers have a ribbon to designate that they are the people who can direct newcomers. Membership or at UUCLC now Congregational Support have ribbons so that newcomers know who to ask about the congregation.

Other groups such as Social Action, Welcoming Congregation, Legacy Fund members may also have ribbons. The point, as at General Assembly, is for people to ask what's that for? Maybe some who ask will also be interested in the project.

Not everyone in a congregation is going to join the Social Action Committee. Not everyone is going to be interested or have the ability to serve on the Tech Team. Not everyone has the money to help with a mortgage or give to a Legacy Fund. That does not mean that all who do should not be recognized and thanked.

Growing up my mother, my grandfather, my grandmother and an uncle all taught religious education classes. My father would never have been able to do that. But if anything broke at the church - wiring, plumbing, furniture- my dad was the person to call to fix it. One was not more important than the other. Everyone is important.

The people are the rocks in the jar of a congregation. A building, the music, the potlucks, the worship services, the social gatherings. They are only there for and because of the people.

In my childhood there was a Sunday School song I learned, one verse of which was,

“The church is not a building;
the church is not a steeple;
the church is not a resting place;
the church is a people.”

Neither Tri-County Unitarian Universalists nor the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Lake County names itself church but the point is the same. The people are the rocks- the most important things in the jar.

UU minister Rev. Diana Davies tells this story.

The Spider and the Very Important Person

“I’d like to share a story with you today – a story about a simple little spider who did an amazing thing. You’ll find versions of this story in Christian, Jewish and Muslim traditions, and in ancient Japanese folktales, as well. In the Christian version, the baby Jesus, Mary, and Joseph are hiding from king Herod; in the Jewish version, a young David is hiding from King Saul; in the Muslim version, the prophet Muhammad and his friend Abu Bakr are hiding from a crowd of people who want to harm them, outside the city of Mecca; and in the Japanese version, the great Shogun warrior Yoritomo is hiding from *his* enemies. In all these stories, though, the spider is – just a spider.

“Once upon a time, a Very Important Person was watching a spider weaving her web, and the very important person thought to herself: ‘Why in the world did God make spiders? What good are they? They aren’t beautiful or cute. They can’t do tricks. They don’t guard the house or make anything we humans can eat or wear. They don’t sing or make interesting sounds. And those webs they’re always building are just a nuisance!’”

“And the little spider overheard her, but she didn’t care. She just kept working on her web.

“Soon, though, the Very Important Person was in trouble. Her enemies were out to get her! She had to run and hide! She hid in the deepest, darkest cave she could find, but still she was worried that her enemies would find her.

“Just then, she noticed that the little spider had started building a new web at the entrance to the cave. She was afraid to shoo her away, for fear that her enemies might hear, so she just stayed very quiet and watched the spider work. In no time, the cave entrance was completely covered by the web. And it was just in time, because right then, the Very Important Person’s enemies came running up to the cave, but they didn’t go in.

‘Ick!’ (they said), ‘No need to go into that cave. Look at that big spider web. It’s clear no one has been in there in a loooong time.’

“And the Very Important Person realized something very important that day: ‘Wow – Spiders are the best!! So what if they’re not beautiful or cute, and can’t do tricks or sing, and can’t guard the house or make things that humans can eat or wear... the spider deserves our kindness and respect, just like all animals!

“And the spider just shrugged her many little shoulders and said...’Eh! Just doing what spiders do... but thanks for noticing.’

“Have you ever looked closely at a spider’s web? Each individual thread is so thin and delicate you can barely see it *but* the web itself is incredibly strong. And this great, strong web is made by just one, little spider, just doing what spiders do best. What the Very Important Person in our story came to understand is that *every* being is worthy of respect and kindness. Every being has a

precious life to live. Even the littlest spider can save the life of a Very Important Person. Even the littlest spider is Very Important, too.”

Choose people first. They are the rocks in our jar. All the rest is the pebbles and the sand.

Let us give thanks for the gift of each other. By other hands and other hearts, we are blessed. May we bless others in turn. Amen.