

Homily: “Hitching Our Wagon to a Star: Stewardship Sunday”
Rev. Martha Hodges March 7, 2010

A star is a risky kind of engine to choose to pull the wagon of your life. For one thing, though it shines brightly, it is far away. Its exact nature is a mystery. And while your eyes are fastened on the beacon that draws you onward, you may trip over all kinds of ruts in the road, not to mention your own feet.

Why not employ the more prosaic and humble ox, or at least a reliable pair of horses? With those, you always know where you are going. Your pace is slow and steady. They’re easily controlled. But here’s the problem – you will only go where the roads are well-worn, and you will spend your life gazing at the back end of a horse while the heavens blaze overhead, their call ignored.

When I chose to hitch my wagon to your star, I knew there was risk. I knew that our future together was unmapped and that the road before us held many pitfalls. And yet I hesitated only briefly. I asked my mentor for advice. I had to choose between three congregations. One had a long and honorable history; but was struggling to move beyond it. Another had ample resources, but was parochial and somewhat narrow in its views. UUCC was different. Your history was brief and propelled you forward rather than holding you back. Your story was one of struggle and extraordinary dedication, a story of repeatedly rising to the challenge. Your financial resources were limited, yet you were a generous congregation, rich in hope and fellowship and open to possibilities. And when my mentor asked me, “Which one makes your heart sing?” I knew in an instant what my decision should be.

Your touched me with your spirit and you still do. Your eyes are on the star. You don’t seek easy answers. You are adventurous. You are risk-takers, and that is the source of your strength. Our challenge is to watch where we’re going, to be fiscally responsible and to take one step at a time – all while remembering to raise our eyes to the star, that mysterious power that draws us forward, lest we miss out on the beauty, the glory, of the journey.

This star – this vision of what empowers us, what calls us, what guides us – this star is many-faceted and each of us perceives it from a slightly different angle. It is Unitarian Universalism and the urgent need of the world for its message of reason and freedom from dogma, its message of compassion and mutual care, its message that all are welcome and necessary to this interdependent web of being in which we dwell. This divided and violent world where so many are relegated to the margins needs to hear this message that all are worthy, that every one of us matters.

And this star, this empowering vision, calls us to be a church that lives out this Unitarian Universalist message in our community. A church whose every action affirms that we are one, and that the goodness of life is the natural heritage of all. We demonstrate these values everyday among ourselves and that is a great strength. Now our vision, our star, calls us to widen this circle, to welcome in everyone who wants and needs to find us.

Our star calls us to make a difference in this community of South Sacramento and Elk Grove and in the wider communities of state and nation – to make a difference in the lives of people across the globe, of people we will never meet, as we are linked in care and responsibility to the earth and all its beings.

How are we to do this? As we grow in members, our ability to make a difference in people's lives grows. We must never forget that our resources – our staff, our building, our membership – are not the end but the means. The end, the star, is this power to make a difference in real lives. To nurture the spirit, to mend the broken, to serve the disempowered, to raise up a new generation that is wise and capable and caring, to tend to the earth and one another, to strengthen the web, to celebrate the mystery and to love the world.

This is the star to which we hitch our wagon. Not a mere building, or a certain membership goal, and not a budget. These are necessary, but they are not the reason for our being, these are not the star. Our star, as we affirm each week in our benediction, is the life-giving and life-saving faith in the spirit of life, hope for the community of earth, and love of the sacred in one another and in everyone, friend and stranger. Our star is bright and bold and beautiful beyond words.

What does this star look like to you? What vision draws you back here week after week? In the next ten minutes, I ask you to think about this and to talk about it with your table mates. How has being part of this congregation made a difference in your life, and what difference do you hope it will yet make in the lives of others? What are your hopes, your dreams for UUCS, the star to which you have hitched your wagon?