



UNIVERSALIST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF HAVERHILL

“Call and Response,”
a homily given by the Rev. Frank Clarkson
on September 13, 2015

I’ve been struck lately by all the pictures I’ve seen of children going off to school, starting a new year, and young people going off to college. We just saw a few of those pictures in our slide show of some of the faces and events of our congregation. September feels like such a poignant time doesn’t it, with all these new beginnings and endings?

I have a question for you young people, and you can answer out loud if you want, but you don’t have to. How is it, going off on that first day of school? When I was your age, doing new things made me kind of nervous. Would I like it? Would I make friends? Especially when I was going to a new school, or somewhere I had never been. This isn’t just for young people though. Today is kind of like a first day of school for Nate, our new music director, isn’t it?

And your parents may not tell you this, but your new beginnings are a big deal for them too. Do you know that? My son just moved out to the West coast to start his first job, and that was a big deal for his mom and me. I still remember his first day of kindergarten, and how it felt to see him going out into the world without me. It’s a big deal, these times of change, of starting new things, and we need to be kind to one another, don’t we?

So whether you are young or old or in between, I hope you know there are people who love you and care for you, that you can come to when you need help or someone to lean on. That’s one reason why we’re together here, why we have church—to help each other get through life as best we can, to be here for each other, here when someone needs us.

Our worship theme for September is “Vocation and Calling.” It’s about living the life that is your own. If you’re six years old, one of your callings is to go off to school, so you can learn to read and write and think, so you can start learning how to go out into the world. If you’re a parent, you have this complicated calling of nurturing your children and, at the same time, letting them go. Holding on, and letting go—it’s something we get asked to do over and over again.

When you’re young, it seems that you respond to your callings without thinking very much about it. You just do it! Some of you are called to play soccer, others of you to sing or act in plays or to write stories. You are each called to grow into that beautiful person that is you, to be yourself as fully as you can, because there is no one else in the world just like you.

But as we get older some of us lost track of this. We get other voices in our heads, and we lose track of our callings. Sometimes we lose our way and we need help and companions to guide us back, to help us hear the calling that is our own. So we're going to be thinking about this and talking about this, and I hope praying and meditating on this, asking, "What is my calling? Who am I called to be and what am I called to do? And what about us as a community—who are we called to be and what are we called to do in this place and this time?"

There's a kind of singing called "call and response." One person sings something and you respond back. Here's a blessing I like—will you sing this back to me?

O we give thanks
for this precious day
for those gathered here
and those far away
for this time we share
with love and care
O we give thanks
for this precious day.¹

There can be call and response at a protest or rally, or at a sporting event. "Let's go Red Sox..." There can be call and response in worship, when the preacher says, "Are you with me," and the people respond, "Amen!"

We each receive callings in life. And we always have a choice, in how we are going to respond, and if we are going to respond. In my experience, if you ignore your call, it will come back again. It's not a one-shot deal

It's good to make the time and the effort to listen for your calling. But once you hear it, you still have a choice—how are you going to respond? You may be nervous about going off to school that first day, but what do you do? You go. Life calls us on. That's why we're here. To seek and hear our callings, and then, to do something with them. To say yes to life.

Amen.

¹ "We Give Thanks," by Wendy Luella Perkins, #1010 in *Singing the Journey*.