

# The Wisdom to Gather and Grow

Theodore Parker Church

March 8, 2020

## Opening Words

WE SUMMON OURSELVES

By [Gordon B McKeeman](#)

We summon ourselves from the demands and delights of the daily round:  
from the dirty dishes and unwaxed floors;  
from unmowed grass, and untrimmed bushes;  
from all incompletenesses and not-yet-startednesses;  
from the unholy and the unresolved.

We summon ourselves to attend to our vision  
of peace and justice;  
of cleanliness and health;  
of delight and devotion;  
of the lovely and the holy;  
of who we are and what we can do.

We summon the power of tradition and the exhilaration of newness, the wisdom of the ages  
and the knowing of the very young.

We summon beauty, eloquence, poetry, and music to be the bearers of our dreams.

We would open our eyes, our ears, our minds, our hearts to the amplest dimensions of life.  
We rejoice in manifold promises and possibilities.

Come, let us worship together -

## Meditation

Our time this morning is surely influenced by our ongoing concern with a virus that is dominating the news cycles. Dear and holy spirit of life – the healthy spirit that travels within, between and among us all – help us to know that in this moment, this time and space, we are well, we are whole. May that knowing give us peace, and a sense of calm even as we are aware that life feels more precarious. Help us to be voices of peace in a world that often feels far from peaceful.

The Prajnaparamita Sutra encourages us to live with skillful nonchalance and ceaseless concern. May that be our goal in these anxious times.

Let us ponder our capacities together in a time of quiet –

Reading      The Moments of My High Resolve      Howard Thurman

**Sermon**

**Gather and Grow**  
the Rev. Anne Bancroft

I want to begin today with the words of the late great Bob Marley, who said:  
*Some people are so poor. All they have is money.*

Newsflash! It's Pledge Drive Sunday! If you're new or visiting, this is the beginning of our annual stewardship campaign which typically lasts the month of March – sometimes a bit longer if people need time to figure out what they are called to give this year. I guarantee you your Stewardship Team and I hope you can make a very generous decision about that sooner than later!

Regardless, this time of year reminds us that we need to talk about money and how we make decisions about what to do with whatever amount of it we have, and whatever amount of it we have to give. There's no reason not to talk about it any time of year – which, you may remember, we have been since we just completed a very successful capital campaign – but March is when we're especially reminded of it.

So, back to Bob Marley – and ain't it the truth? Some people are so poor. All they have is money.

But when you hear that . . . inside . . . isn't there a little bit of you that might be thinking, well . . . I might like to be that kind of poor. I might like to try it anyway . . . you know, as a spiritual practice, of course!

And then we think – well, no. I don't want to JUST have money. That wouldn't be good.

No, indeed. It wouldn't, though the truth is that money does things – things we need it to do like pay the bills, put food on our tables, afford us small amounts of security – or what we imagine to be security, at any rate.

The point is, no matter where we find ourselves on the spectrum between the very, very rich and the very, very poor, our relationship with money is complicated. We know it's not the be-all-and-end-all, and yet . . . .

It's likely our financial inclinations – like so many things in our lives – were learned early on. What do you remember about your childhoods when it comes to money? What messages did you receive?

I told you a story a few months back about saving pennies from my milk money and buying a beautiful snap-on bracelet only to have it taken away since my parents told me it wasn't my

money to spend. That seemed like a pretty strict message about how we come by our funds and whose choice it is to spend them, until later in my childhood when my mother adopted the mantra that my children associate with her and reference to this day: “Charge it,” she says. “It’s free!”

What???

Did you know that American Express was the first significant credit card on the market, started in 1959? There was a Diners Card that started earlier in the 50’s but was a more closed-loop card – not nearly as expansive. Bank and non-bank credit cards really exploded in the 70’s, which is just 50 years ago.

Apparently, in another 50 years, according to [creditcard.com](https://www.creditcards.com/credit-card-news/history-of-credit-cards.php), it’s likely that some unique, 100% theft-proof physical identifier, such as the vein pattern in your hand or even your DNA, will replace the mag stripe and chip as your credit card payment verification. Another 50, we may even become our own credit card, our physical forms instantly identifiable by video recognition and artificial intelligence at shops, banks, restaurants and entertainment venues.  
(<https://www.creditcards.com/credit-card-news/history-of-credit-cards.php>)

Will there still be currency? Or is cash totally on its way out? How will we teach our children to have a relationship with something we only ever see as numbers on a page? Or a screen?

When our children were small, Dan and I decided to embark on a year of learning. We offered them each \$1 a day if they gave up TV for a year. They could watch a small amount of public television, which at the time meant basically Sesame Street or Mr. Rogers, and one family movie/week – but nothing else – anywhere. And at the end of the year, they would get \$365 if they made it the whole time. What we didn’t make exactly clear was that we planned to put \$300 of that \$365 into a savings account for each of them. They could do whatever they wanted with the \$65 dollars in cash if they made it the whole year. They were amazing. I remember going to pick up Ben at a friends’ house, and he was sitting on the stairs in their front hall waiting for me while his friend was in the living room, just across the hall, watching some dumb show. I hadn’t heard the TV on, and when I asked Ben why he was sitting by himself on the front stairs he said he couldn’t go in the living room because his friend was watching a show! Be still my heart.

What was really interesting was what they each decided to do with their funds. Our oldest spent hers on a variety of things she had wanted – in no particular hurry. Ben already knew which skateboard he wanted, and where he could buy it AND that it was more than twice what he had earned, so he asked if he could use his cash as a down payment and borrow the rest, paying it back over the year ahead. Lilly – our youngest – didn’t really have a list of things she wanted, and ultimately became the bank for the others – she always seemed to have cash available to loan out when somebody needed it – including me!

How does that happen, exactly? What combination of experience and individual inclination informs your relationship with your resources? Think about it for a minute . . . what did you learn and how?

Was money a good thing? Or an evil thing? Was it a friend, or foe? Did you learn to save it for a rainy day, or spend it as soon as it walked in the door? Did it serve only to cover the cost of living, or was it a vehicle to bring you joy?

And what about giving? What has your experience been with that?

It occurred to me recently that if we had been really good parents, we would have asked our children to decide where to give away a portion of their hard-earned \$65. I don't know why we didn't think of that at the time. On the whole, they are all three very responsible with their money, and generous, actually – in their respective ways. I know that our oldest and her husband figure out how much they have to give in any particular year and then figure out together where to give it. And, I'm always getting e-mails from our youngest about fundraisers that I could join her on, or organizations that she is thinking of supporting. Our skateboard borrower has his own way of giving – which last year meant he left five- or ten-dollar bills in odd places so that people might find them and have an unexpected delight – places like under a package of carrots at the grocery store. I'm not sure who would find that (!) but he doesn't really care. He said he does it whenever he has an extra bit of cash in his wallet.

To be honest, Dan and I do the biggest chunk of our giving right here at Theodore Parker Church. There are a number of organizations we also support in smaller ways – public radio, of course, and environmental stuff; but we hitch most of our giving to the dreams of this congregation and what it has to offer the world.

I know our operating budget is primarily about paying staff and keeping the building going, but in my mind our contribution is about supporting what faith community represents to the values we want to see abound in the world; to make sure there is a place where people gather to care for each other, of course – to sing and pray and teach and tend their spirits and manage this challenge that is life. But it's more than that. To me, our giving is aspirational. I can't imagine a world without the presence of a people that constantly push themselves by saying we – we humans – we can do better than we're doing just now, and we must. I want there to always be a place where we keep up the practice that Howard Thurman says is what church is all about – the place where we practice what it means to be human. That, I think, is the high resolve we heard about earlier. I want the full-orbed, glorious and resplendent aspirations to be right here, all the time.

Carey Neiuwhof is a former lawyer turned pastor who writes about leadership and change and personal growth in community life. He wrote a short piece about five significant attitude differences between growing and declining churches. It's interesting because he doesn't judge the impacts of the differences – he just puts them out there. For example: "growing churches believe they can. Declining churches don't. They're both right."

“Selfish people end up alone. So do selfish churches.”

And this one, my favorite: If you can't remember the last time you made a major decision that changed the course of your church, your leaders are wasting their time.

So . . . Theodore Parker – aspirational community – how are we doing? I have to tell you, I think we're doing really well. In this crazy world, where every week brings a new reality, I think we are doing a really good job keeping up, saying yes, being generous, and looking forward. I am so excited about what our new accessibility will offer not just us, but everyone around us; and what our solar panels will say about how we care about the world. You are all making this happen! You know about the Zero Waste Fair that's coming up in May, right? Electric cars in the driveway so people can check them out?

I am thrilled that our Caring Ministry Team noticed a need for quiet space and worked with the property folks to put it together. I am so excited to come to our Music on Centre concerts that are drawing more and more folks into our spaces. And, I'm proud of our efforts to move us to new racial awareness with our film series and tabling and work with the Parkway Interfaith group. I love that we are working on integrating our ages more fully – that our children are in worship, and that our adults are more present in their small group gatherings.

This is what growing church looks like: deeper, fuller, richer in all the ways that matter.

Somewhere this line popped up in my in-box: hook your giving to a purpose larger than its immediate utility. Yes! That's what it means to Gather and Grow – to know that what we are building together – what we are sustaining from the legacy we have been given – is bigger than the sum of its parts.

Oh, I hope you can be as generous as ever this year, and maybe a bit more. We have many more aspirations to follow. Let us remember the full-orbed, glorious and resplendent things that illumine our paths and support the vision of this amazing place where we continue to gather and grow.

So may it be.