

WANT WHAT YOU HAVE

Jim Glassford

Adult Religious Education Co-ordinator

My talk today is the first of three sessions based on the mantra of the Reverend Forrest Church. Those of you who have participated in any of my sessions of Unitarian Universalist Theology will know of Forrest Church as one of my favourite spiritual writers and thinkers. He had a mantra which was usually said in his Church.

His Mantra was:

Want What You Have

Be Who You Are

Do What You Can.

I will be looking at each of these in my talks this year and we will be discussing “Want What You Have” today.

First of all I want to give you a little background on Forrest Church. He was the senior minister to the liberal and affluent New York’s All Souls congregation since 1978 up to his death from cancer in 2009. He preached a message of love, compassion and social service in stirring fashion, inviting his listeners on a shared quest. He use to say “I am involved in a search and all of my conclusions are tentative.” Doesn’t that sound like a UU but actually Forrest Church was more of an Universalist. That quote reminds me of a cartoon that I saw once. It was about a seeker of the great truths of the world and who had climbed this mountain to see a famous guru. The seeker had just been given a paper with all the great truths written on it. The seeker asks the guru, “If these are the great truths, why are they written in pencil?”

When Forrest Church began preaching in 1978, the attendance at the Church was around 100. At the time of his death, the attendance was usu-

ally over a thousand. Doesn't that say a lot about the man and his message.

He wrote nearly two dozen books many of which applied his theology to everyday life. He was much more than a parish minister, he was a writer, thinker and public intellectual of consequence. He was an eloquent public speaker and commentator on radio and television.

His final two books were written in the last three years of his life. He had been diagnosed with a terminal cancer and was told he only had a few months to live. He wrote in 2006 "Love and Death: My Journey Through the Valley of the Shadow". It turned out that the prognosis was incorrect and he underwent what appeared to be a successful operation. In 2008 his doctors discovered that his cancer had returned and had spread to his lungs and liver. He then wrote his final book summing up his religious philosophy, "The Cathedral of the World: A Universalist Theology". These two books should be in our Library as I purchased them for this congregation.

"Want What You Have". This stirred me into thinking and reflecting on our present lives and back to the time I was growing up in St. Catharines. Yes, I was raised a city kid. I lived one block from the Garden City Arena. My significant memories of my childhood are from the end of the Second World War to 1950. There was a lot of children around and all of my friends were from hard working families. I had two batches of friends. One group were my cowboys and pirate group. The other group was composed of my sports buddies. We played in the field where the downtown Firehall is now located; and in Riordan Park where the Rex Stimers arena and parking lot is located. The park had a baseball diamond and every night in the summer I use to watch the industrial Men and Women's ball games. In those days the Toronto Maple Leafs had their Fall training camp in our arena. Often some of the Leafs would come out and play softball with us. We got to know Bill Ezynicki, Turk Broda, Howie Meeker, Syl Apps to mention a few I

can remember. Great Guys. Imagine an era where children could wander and play in the streets and parks without fear of being molested.

We earned extra money by collecting pop bottles or old newspapers and taking them to the junk yard on Geneva Street. Every Saturday it was the double feature movies at the two theatres on James Street. Why am I mentioning all this? We enjoyed life with what we had. None of the families I knew had much money. So, my buddies and I made things. The branches from the Tree of Heaven made great swords. Boards used in shipping were available in the alley back of St. Paul street as well as great large boxes. They were used in our construction projects (tree forts etc.) We didn't have fancy hockey nets; two rocks were our goal posts and yes, we did use the road for our rink (Remember; 'Car Coming!). Our dads made us outdoor rinks! That is where I learned to skate. What did we have? Friends! Imagination! Supportive loving parents! Safe places to play. Wanting what we have.

Now contrast that to today. Adults and children are bombarded by advertising to buy more and more. You can't be happy unless you have this and this and this. For adults, you don't need money, just finance it. Use your credit card and if you can't pay it right now we'll only charge you 29% interest. I thought Usury was illegal!

Oh my gosh you can't wear that dress now or that suit. The colours are passe or the collars are too narrow this year for you to be one of the beautiful people. Do you remember appliances coloured Harvest Gold, Avocado Green, poppy red. Where are they now? Oh, Jim your kitchen is so 1960's! Remodel. It only cost \$35000.00

The constant advertising of TV can drive one crazy. My phone rings several times every day. Someone is always trying to sell me something. (aha, I am outsmarting them-I have call display. Just don't answer the phone. They hardly ever leave a message).

What effect is all this having on us? Well, this feeling of not having enough, not enough money, having to keep up with the Jones (How come the Jones always seems to have more? Where the heck do they get all their money), not being satisfied, always looking at the future and ignoring the precious present. Our modern life is playing havoc on us.

Divorce has hit 50% (a little statistic to the side - Statistics Canada states that the longer a couple lives together, the higher the chances for divorce).

I didn't know that. I always felt that money or the lack of was one of the main reasons for divorce. Consider these reasons couples divorce:

- . Infidelity (25%) Want what you have
- . Unreasonable behaviour (17%) Would you act this way if you wanted what you have? .
- . Mid life crisis (10%) ditto
- . Money (5%) I thought it would be higher but then again people often aren't completely honest when telling causes
- . Growing Apart (27%) Tops the chart! We are living longer than generations before us. Could it be the longer we live together the higher the chances of two people growing apart, or could it be the greater we take one another for granted and fail to keep on nurturing our love? Want what you have!

I have been doing a lot of spiritual reading lately. My latest book was "The Untethered Soul" written by M.A. Singer and recommended by Tom Harpur and Bob Ripley . I highly recommend it. Eckhart Tolle and Wayne Dyer are other writers that are all saying the same thing. There is a power within us that we need to access and that will help us control our EGO. Oh, yes!! The Ego. You know the part; the voice inside of you that never stops talking, showing us videos in our mind; that always has the answers to protect itself. Example: "Are you going to let him/her get away with that? Who do they think they are acting that way ? Don't they know who I am? Wait a

minute, buddy!! Who do you think you are cutting me off. Give him the horn! Give him the finger!

We can control the Ego through meditating every day. Whether it be by just relaxing and listening to our breath come in and out and letting go of any thoughts that come into our mind or by saying a mantra or by any other method that allows us to go to our loving and peaceful centre. Controlling our Ego allows us "To Want What We Have" and to live in the present.

Think about this simple concept and the wisdom in it and think about it in your own life. Do you put more attention and energy than you would like to admit on either wanting things you don't yet have or wishing things were different, or that you had a little more of this and a little less of that?

Most of us, even those of us who know better, spend and waste a lot of time thinking that things will be better when.....we lose weight, get promoted, move into a nicer place, make more money, get married, get a divorce, have children, get rid of our children, get out of debt, have more free time, start our own business, retire, recover from a specific injury, illness or setback, or whatever else it is we think needs to change in order for us to be happy and fulfilled.

While the circumstances of our lives- both positive and negative - do have an impact on us, the truth is that we always have a choice about how we relate to our circumstances and to ourselves in the process. A great job, big house, large amount of money, fit body, incredible relationship, or anything else we say we want, can't and won't make us happy if we don't choose to be.

Wanting what we have in our lives doesn't mean everything is "perfect" in our lives, which is almost never the case, or that we can't desire for things to change or evolve in a way we deem positive. It simply means we choose to accept what we have in our life, right now, with a sense of gratitude and surrender.

Surrendering is not about complacency, weakness or giving up...it's about learning to make peace with life as it is. It's important for us to remember

that the passion, joy and fulfillment we experience doesn't come from life itself, it comes from us and our ability to accept, appreciate and celebrate what we have in our lives.

To want what we have is to engage in a deep spiritual practice of appreciation. We've all heard the lines from the Joni Mitchell's song, "You don't know what you've got until it's gone." Wanting what we have calls us to constantly keep in our awareness the things that we would miss, the things that we would long for terribly were they to be taken from us. When we want what we have, we don't take things for granted. To use Forrest's language, we see all the panes of the window the bright clear ones and the cloudy ones alike, and are grateful for the light that shines through them all. Wanting what we have helps us to know and to love what we have before it's gone. "The light of the morning sun rising each day, the light of a child's smile, the light of a friend's constant companionship, the light of **LIFE** which is our single, greatest gift. These are the things we have, and that we can hold onto. And if we do, we will never go wanting.

I am ending this session with a quote from A.A. Milne's book "Winnie the Pooh", "How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard."

I want you to take a moment right now to think about those things in your life that you would miss so much if they were suddenly taken away from you and what are you doing about it. When we finish, I will ask for any comments.

Amen and Blessed Be