



March 2017 Monthly Theme

# SIMPLICITY

*the practice of living by heart*

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*The intention of the themed year is to help Unitarian Universalists build a robust spiritual and ethical vocabulary. The themes are points of departure for religious liberals seeking to think, speak and act theologically, prophetically and prayerfully. The themes reclaim religious language, casting old terms in a new key to deepen spiritual grounding and sharpen moral reasoning. More at: [wbuuc.org/themes](http://wbuuc.org/themes) or sign up for a circle at [wbuuc.org/classes](http://wbuuc.org/classes).*

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## QUESTIONS

How have you, or could you, de-clutter or simplify areas of your life?  
What practices or experiences help you listen more closely to your heart?  
What parts of your life (interests, passion, skills, etc.) feel core to your identity?

## QUOTATIONS

Our life is frittered away by detail... simplify, simplify.  
- Henry David Thoreau

A high school student wrote to ask, 'What was the greatest event in American history?' I can't say. However, I suspect that like so many 'great' events, it was something very simple and very quiet with little or no fanfare (such as someone forgiving someone else for a deep hurt that eventually changed the course of history). The really important 'great' things are never center stage of life's dramas; they're always 'in the wings.' That's why it's so essential for us to be mindful of the humble and the deep rather than the flashy and the superficial."  
- Fred Rogers From *The World According to Mister Rogers*

There is a perverse form of contemporary violence ( and that is ) activism and over work...The rush and pressure of modern life are a form of violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to violence. The frenzy of our activism neutralizes our work for peace. It destroys our inner capacity for peace.  
- Thomas Merton

Simplicity is not so much about what we own, but about what owns us. If we need lots of possessions to maintain our self-esteem and create our self-image and to look good to our neighbors, then we have forgotten or neglected that which is real and inward. If our time, money, and energy are consumed in selecting, acquiring, maintaining, cleaning, moving, improving, replacing, dusting, storing, using, showing off, and talking about our possessions, then there is little time, money, and energy left for our other pursuits such as the work we do to further the Community of God.

- Christin Snyder

## POETRY

Sit and be still  
until in the time  
of no rain you hear  
beneath the dry wind's  
commotion in the trees  
the sound of flowing  
water among the rocks,  
a stream unheard before,  
and you are where  
breathing is prayer

- Wendell Berry

### *Any Morning*

Just lying on the couch and being happy.  
Only humming a little, the quiet sound in the head.  
Trouble is busy elsewhere at the moment, it has  
so much to do in the world.

People who might judge are mostly asleep; they can't  
monitor you all the time, and sometimes they forget.  
When dawn flows over the hedge you can  
get up and act busy.

Little corners like this, pieces of Heaven  
left lying around, can be picked up and saved.  
People won't even see that you have them,  
they are so light and easy to hide.

Later in the day you can act like the others.  
You can shake your head. You can frown.

- William Stafford

*When I Am Among the Trees*

When I am among the trees,  
especially the willows and the honey locust,  
equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,  
they give off such hints of gladness.  
I would almost say that they save me, and daily.  
I am so distant from the hope of myself,  
in which I have goodness, and discernment,  
and never hurry through the world  
but walk slowly, and bow often.  
Around me the trees stir in their leaves  
and call out, "Stay awhile."  
The light flows from their branches.  
And they call again, "It's simple," they say,  
"and you too have come  
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled  
with light, and to shine.

- Mary Oliver

The perfectly tuned notes of a piano,  
Become a symphony.  
The first raindrop to fall from swollen clouds,  
Becomes a thunderstorm.  
26 letters printed in fresh black ink,  
Become a novel.  
The first sunbeam to pierce through the window,  
Becomes a sunrise.

The sound of a crackling fireplace,  
Or a cat softly purring on your lap  
The feeling of a warm summer breeze ruffling your hair  
or the crisp winter air biting your cheeks  
The sweet taste of a first kiss  
Or the salty smell of the sea

The thumping of your heart  
Beating out the words  
This is where I belong  
This is home

- Simple Joys by Loden Croll, WBUUC youth

## READINGS & EXCERPTS

Voluntary simplicity involves both inner and outer condition. It means singleness of purpose, sincerity and honesty within, as well as avoidance of exterior clutter, of many possessions irrelevant to the chief purpose of life. It means an ordering and guiding of our energy and our desires, a partial restraint in some directions in order to secure greater abundance of life in other directions. It involves a deliberate organization of life for a purpose. Of course, as different people have different purposes in life, what is relevant to the purpose of one person might not be relevant to the purpose of another.

- Richard Gregg

Our life is frittered away by detail. Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumbnail. Simplify, simplify. Instead of three meals a day, if it be necessary eat but one; instead of a hundred dishes, five; and reduce other things in proportion. . . . The nation itself, with all its so-called internal improvements, which, by the way, are all external and superficial, is just such an unwieldy and overgrown establishment, cluttered with furniture and tripped up by its own traps, ruined by luxury and heedless expense, by want of calculation and a worthy aim, as the million households in the land; and the only cure for it, as for them, is in a rigid economy, a stern and more than Spartan simplicity of life and elevation of purpose. It lives too fast.

- Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

In the long run the industrial economy will undermine our ability to feed and clothe and shelter ourselves, but in the short run we are likely to find it easier and more convenient to buy groceries at the supermarket than to raise them in the backyard . . . to hop in a car and drive to work than to bicycle there or ride the bus . . . to turn up the thermostat than to feed a woodstove or put on an extra layer of clothes . . . to buy a new gadget or garment than to mend the old one . . . to sink into the couch and watch a music video than to learn to play the fiddle and gather neighbors for a dance. The practice of simplicity is more strenuous than the pursuit of luxury; it demands more of our attention, intelligence, perseverance, labor, and skill. The reward for this effort is a more gathered and meaningful and joyful life. In a letter written the year after publication of *Walden*, Thoreau asked: "To what end do I lead a simple life at all, pray? That I may teach others to simplify their lives?—and so all our lives be simplified merely, like an algebraic formula? Or not, rather, that I may make use of the ground I have cleared, to live more worthily and profitably?" He sought to live in a materially simple way so as to create the conditions for spiritual and intellectual richness. The root of the word simplicity means all of a piece, single, whole; thus it is closely aligned with sanity, whose root means health or soundness. What generations of readers have found in Thoreau is a robust sanity, a harmony of action and values, an antidote to scatter, clutter, distraction, delusion, and sham: To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust. It is to solve some of the problems of life, not only theoretically, but practically...No life is perfect, but every life can become nobler, finer, saner. Just because we can't live without doing harm doesn't mean we can't do less harm. The world's crisis is an opportunity—to reorient our lives away from material consumption and toward inner richness, to heal ourselves as well as the planet.

- Scott Russell Sanders, *Simplicity and Sanity*