

**Thomas Jefferson Memorial Church – Unitarian Universalist**  
**“From Generation to Generation”**  
**The Rev. Dr. Morris W. Hudgins**  
**June 13, 2010**

**Introduction**

The readings we have chosen for this service are some of my favorites in the Hymnal. Antoine De St-Exupery reminds us how important it is that we pass on our heritage to our children, “the heritage of mind and heart, laughter and tears, musings and deeds.” Yes, we need to impart our knowledge and ideals to our children. Yes, we are to build memories, allow treasures, transmit the passwords from generation to generation.

As a church we are also a family and we are to celebrate the ceremonies of passage. We did it last week with the Challenge Service, recognizing and celebrating their Coming of Age, appreciating their talents, and hearing what they believe. As primitive societies have rituals when children become adults, as Jewish communities have their bar and bas mitzvahs, we have our Challenge or Coming of Age Program in UU churches. These are important events in the lives of young people.

Today we have recognized another Rite of Passage, when our graduates become Young Adults. This is a ceremony that has only lately come on the UU scene, but it has become an important tradition. The graduates are walking into the next phase of their lives, going to college, or the work place.

I am reminded that in some cultures these teenagers would be marrying and having children at this age. My own mother had four children by the time she was 21. She had become an adult with adult responsibilities before she was out of Jr. High School. She never completed 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

We can be glad today that our young people have time before these things happen in their lives. They can enjoy their college years, have a chance to travel, see the world, build friendships, and develop their skills, before going to work, marrying and raising a family. At least, this is what we hope.

The other reading that we have chosen for this service is from Kahlil Gibran. It is titled, “Your Children” and it reminds us that our children need to separate themselves from their parents, “they come through us but are not from us, they are with us yet they belong not to us.” “We house their bodies, we care for them, we teach them, but they have their own thoughts, they are different from us.

I remember asking my son when he was young, what he was going to do when he grows up. He said, “I am not going to be a minister, Dad. You don’t make enough money.” He followed more in his step-father’s path and studied engineering, and yes made more money out of college than I did after 30 years of ministry. My son is smart. He went into software development and has become very successful. My daughter runs an architectural firm in North Carolina. I am proud of them both.

I had to be reminded periodically that my son and daughter were going to be different from me. My past is not necessarily their future. When I was growing up I used to love baseball. I wanted to become a professional baseball player. I would take a bus down to see the St. Louis Cardinals play. Stan Musial, a hall of famer, was my hero. He threw me a baseball in the stands one time and I treasured that gift. I wanted to pass it on to my son. I gave it to him and told him about Stan Musial. He took the ball outside and quickly lost it. I knew then that my treasures are not necessarily his.

Yes, we are like bows, and our children are like arrows and we send them forth. But as Gibran writes, there is something larger than ourselves, Archer with a capital A. Our children are “sons and daughters of life’s longing for itself.”

We can give our children our love but not our thoughts. At the same time, I hope they have some of our values. They should not be like us, but they can live the good life that we envision for all children. We can communicate to our children that they are part of something larger than all of us, the Great Spirit as the American Indians called it, the Oversoul, or Nature as Ralph Waldo Emerson called it, or for some it is God. As Unitarian Universalists I hope we can be a part of this larger view. As we learned from our Challenge Class last week we can have many different views, some wanting to question, some angry, others wanting us to be happy, all getting along. We are indeed wide in our perspectives and desires.

I also hope we as a liberal religious movement do the best we can to teach our young people about responsibility and love. We need to teach them about their family heritage, and their religious heritage. As every family should have some pride in their roots, so do we.

Most important of all, we never give up on our children, no matter how far they may move from us, or what decisions they make. We must keep the hope they will some day return to our side.

I close this homily with a poem by the musician and songwriter, John McCutcheon. It is on his album, "Sermon on the Mound," an album with all baseball songs. Those of you who grew up playing baseball, and teaching your sons and daughters to play, will surely understand this poem. I hope others will as well. At is titled, "Catch":

### CATCH

John McCutcheon

I stand in the cool loneliness of a November afternoon  
my face awash with the labor, sweater long abandoned,  
a warm clutter on the porch, my sleeves curled high, gathering again the fallen tears of the once fire  
maple.

I claw on the ground with a great wing of fingers coaxing  
these stubborn feathers into their pyre.

When at the very edge of the yard at the foot of the hackberry  
some small surprise rolls from the roots—a ball.

Lost long ago sought and surrendered, an impossible find,  
a small treasure filled with remembrance

And I recall that long ago search  
how it grew evermore anxious  
until finally another ball is remembered in the house  
and this one was given up for dead, forever.

And the game went on in that great ball-field that we find  
wherever need calls,

All the space required to heave this small stone  
from one sure hand to another, the simplest,  
the purest of games.

And before all this we played with cotton-swabbed rocks  
with wadded up plastic bags with bits of wood,  
worried round and smooth with allowance money,  
turned into a true baseball no less miraculous than Canaan,

With lost refugees from old games unearthed just as today,  
and with a joy I cannot explain,  
I met my son here in this place,  
and took my own heart swaddled in horsehide  
and stitched up tight  
and sent it to him,  
a gentle, soulful ark through the air of home

And little by little he became less afraid,  
he anticipated its path,  
and he captured it from the sky,

And little by little he grew comfortable, confident, transcendent  
until it became breath,  
in and out, back and forth,  
the hypnotic flight from father to son,  
from son to father  
breeding language, questions, information,  
until the son's own ark or the smell of supper  
or the call of a childhood wild,  
or an errant throw, broke the spell  
and life again donned less beauteous skin and he was gone.

I sit here today holding again this dirt-smeared jewel,  
this relic from the scattered families mind of memories  
and play a small catch with my self,  
left to right, right to left  
with this small resuscitated heart,  
the size of my son's own, so long ago,  
and I am redeemed.

I take the ball and put it into my pocket,  
feeling my son on my hip all afternoon,  
and slip it into my closet  
for the next time that he comes home.