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Arlington Street Church
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Buried Treasure

As the new year turned, music director Mark Buckles, our music committee, and a hearty crew of volunteers spent a Saturday in the archeological dig that was our music library. Thousands of scores of more traditional music were boxed up to donate to St. John the Evangelist on Beacon Hill. Boxes and boxes of recycling went out. It's not that there's not more to do, but the difference in the Clarke Room is amazing! And who knows what we might hear from our choir, next, on any given Sunday; there were some real beauties in the mix. I'm thinking of Leonard Cohen's *Suzanne*: "And she shows you where to look // Among the garbage and the flowers...."

Likewise, Susie Nacco and Tracey and Sandy Cruickshank-Dixon whirled through the church nursery two weeks ago. We are now greeted by a new rug, clean toys, and furniture in an open, welcoming, and spacious rearrangement. It's beautiful.

On all of our behalf, I want to thank the merry music band, and the terrific toddler moms: *Thank you!* And I also want to say that I was lifted up by their projects. There's something really glorious about uncovering buried treasure and choosing to let it shine. That two-step movement - the decluttering that reveals the gems, and the choice to let them shine - is inspiring.

I was just talking to my young friend, Adam Gerhardstein, from the Unitarian Universalist Association's Advocacy and Witness Program. His New Year's resolution, he told me, is to get off all the e-lists to which he had subscribed; to empty his inbox, and start over. Adam gave me permission to tell this story....

In the midst of his e-purge, his mother sent a message to the entire family which Adam described as "whacky." He was the first to respond,

saying, essentially, “Mom, this is whacky.” And then there were cyber responses from near and far - no one bothering to pick up the phone, or, g*d forbid, to make a house call - and the morass just got deeper and stickier. Finally, Adam’s brother put an end to the whole thread ... with a single word. He wrote, “Unsubscribe.”

So maybe we can translate this into our own lives, some of us quite literally, and give some thought to just what is cluttering our lives, and how we might “unsubscribe.” What small or grand gesture might we make to reveal what is essential, what is precious: the buried treasure.

Worship Committee chair Ginny Merritt first directed me to FLY Lady, the queen of decluttering. “FLY” stands for “finally loving yourself;” you can find the queen of clean at flylady.net.

Two of my favorite FLY Lady terms are *hotspot* and *27-Fling Boogie*. A *hotspot* is (quote) “any area that, when clean, if you lay one piece of paper on it, the paper will begin to multiply and, before you know it, the surface will be covered.” The *27-Fling Boogie* is the remedy: It is to be done as fast as possible. “Take a garbage bag and walk through your home,” writes FLY Lady, “and throw away 27 items. Do not stop until you have collected all 27 items. Then close the garbage bag and pitch it. Do not look [into the bag]! Just do it.

“Next, take an empty box and go through your home collecting 27 items to give away.... This will change the energy in your home and bring about good feelings... As soon as you finish filling the box, take it [out, so you’ll be] less tempted to rescue the items.”

Here are the opening lines of FLY Lady’s homepage:

Taking 15 minutes each day to declutter an area, [clearing your hotspots - think fire drill - and] using the 27-Fling Boogie, are among] ... the most powerful tools you can use to create a more peaceful home. Remember: *You cannot organize clutter; you can only organize the things you love!*¹

I commend you to her; she wants to help us make space in our lives for peace, the greatest treasure of all, and to unbury the things we love. Who

¹ *italics mine*

knows what might be surfaced in the morass? *For what are we making room in our lives?* The treasure. O, the treasure!

Here is Thomas John Carlisle's poem, *Our Jeopardy*.

It is good to use treasured dishes,
 the most genuine goblets, or the oldest lace tablecloth.
 There is a risk, of course, every time we use anything
 or anyone shares an inmost mood or moment
 or a fragile cup of revelation.
 But not to touch, not to handle,
 not to employ the available artifacts
 of being a human being -
 that is the quiet crash, the deadly catastrophe,
 where nothing is enjoyed or broken
 or spoken or spilled or stained or mended,
 where nothing is ever lived, loved,
 pored over, laughed over, wept over, lost or found.

My colleague and friend in Brooklyn, Patrick O'Neill, preached this poem recently, and I remembered how much I love the line, "There is a risk, of course, every time we use anything." I suspect that's the point: surrounding ourselves with *stuff* keeps us from feeling too much; there just isn't room left to feel.

Yes, the using of treasured things means that something might get "spilled or stained;" if nothing is enjoyed, Carlisle says, nothing is broken, meaning nothing is "lived, loved, ... laughed over, wept over, lost, or found." There is no hint of "once I get everything straight, then I'll be perfect." It's really quite the opposite; once we open up the space in our lives to be fully human, there will be catastrophe, as always, but there will also be cause for celebration. So let's think together about what it might mean to declutter our lives to the point that the treasure is revealed, and how it might look to bring forth the best of ourselves and let it shine.

I've shared this with you before; it is one of my all-time favorite stories of lost and found, of cluttered and freed. I don't know the speaker, but we know her heart. Here she is:

“I was a housewife and a mother, and when the kids got bigger, I was looking for something else to do. I wanted to give. But I had a good deal of self-doubt, not knowing really what I could do for anyone else, unsure of who I was....

“But I was willing to try, and I see now that this was enough. Very often something just comes right in front of you. Like for me, it was an ad in the newspaper: ‘If you love animals, come volunteer at the zoo.’ And ... I went, and I became a guide there.

“We started an outreach program, to bring animals to people who could never come to us. We’d bring them in twos – two birds, two mammals, two reptiles. The snake we’d show next to last. We’d end with a dove.

“We’d take them to nursing homes, hospitals for incurable diseases, children’s wards, burn units, [psychiatric] hospitals. Places where people are very sick, or lost, or dying. They’ll never go anyplace else again. They’ve lost interest, [maybe] given up on life itself.... It hurt me.

“But I witnessed things I’d never dreamed of when I answered that ad.

“In one [psyche] hospital, we went to a group known as ‘the boys.’ ‘The boys’ can be aged eighteen to forty-eight, but with a mental [capacity] from infant to two or three years....

“I had a ferret. One boy came running, yelling ‘Touch! Touch! Touch!’

“I said, ‘You can touch him later.’

“But when we got around to it, the feeling had left him. I just wanted to die. Tears streamed down my face. I’d missed it. Oh, did I miss it! But I’ve never missed it again.

“In a cancer ward, a man refused to come out of his room. He was bitter and angry.... [but] he heard there were animals, so he was just a little curious.... This time, right away, I said, ‘Would you like to touch?’ ‘Oh, sure, sure,’ he said sarcastically. ‘With these hands?’ He thrust them in my face; there were no fingers left. Then he just looked down at the floor. I felt terrible, but I said, ‘Here, then – with your palms.’ And he began to let us help. With each animal he became softer. For once, there was something

beside his illness. He began to cry. ‘This is so beautiful,’ he said. ‘I will never forget this.’”²

My spiritual companions, let us look among the garbage and the flowers, compost the garbage, and make our gardens grow. Beneath all our clutter, may we seek, and find, the treasure we were meant to surface and dust off and clean up and polish, the treasure of our brightest selves, the treasure that is the very life we were meant to live, meant to give. May we make space in our lives for peace and the treasure of what we love.

You know the chorus:

Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

² Ram Dass and Paul Gorman, *How Can I Help?*, pp. 238-239