

# *Thanksgiving Service*

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**[The Unitarian Church in Summit NJ USA](#)**

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Two weeks ago, in the Church School Worship Service, we asked our children to pause for a moment, to think about the world around them, to think about their lives in that world, and then to tell us what things they were grateful, what things filled them with thanksgiving. And they gave us a long list, as one child's gratitude triggered another child's enthusiasm. This morning, as part of our service of Thanksgiving, I would like to share with you the things for which our children are grateful.

"What makes you thankful?" we asked.

Like most of us, our children thought about things.

They talked about toys,  
the entertainments which enrich their lives.

"We are grateful," they said,

for toys,

for Nintendo

and Super Nintendo,

for Ninja Turtles

for Segga

for Nickelodian

and for Television Sets

and for VCRs,

for all the exciting and challenging ways

children fill the leisure hours.

I thought about my own childhood,

back in the distant days

when there were no television sets,

there were no electronic games,

and wondered how I would have answered the question.

I, too, would have been grateful

for toys:

for marbles, and building blocks and erector sets

for electric trains and toy trucks and model airplanes

and a dozen ways I filled the hours

and my lips formed a silent prayer of thank-you

for the golden hours of childhood

and the chance to play our way

into the adult world.

Looking at our children,  
I suddenly am reminded  
that there are children who do not play,  
who are old before their time,  
for whom life is struggle and pain  
and childhood, which should be a dream-time  
is a nightmare,  
and in my thanksgiving  
I weep.

"What makes you thankful," we asked  
And our children thought of the food which sustains life.  
" We are thankful for food," they said,  
"for Turkey at Thanksgiving,  
and for fruit and bread,  
and for candy  
and sweets."

I read the list,  
and a thousand memories flooded my mind,  
I was a little boy again,  
trying to stay out of the way  
while the Thanksgiving dinner was being prepared.  
The smell of roasting turkey  
and home-made bread  
and pumpkin pies came back to me,  
And I, too, was thankful for food  
and for the people whose labor brings it to me  
and for all that dies so that we can live.

And suddenly I saw a face,  
the face of a tiny child,  
too weak from hunger to cry,  
too weak from hunger to brush away the flies  
swarming around his face,  
one of thousands of children  
for whom a morsel of food  
is the difference between life and death.  
and in my thanksgiving,  
I weep.

"What makes you thankful," we asked the children.  
"For our homes," they said,  
for warm houses  
and bunk beds,

and comfortable, pretty clothing,  
for electricity to drive away the shadows,  
and those special times  
when I get my breakfast in bed.  
And for pets,  
for cats  
and dogs,  
and a special dog named Emma.

I remember a bunk bed,  
and the sound of the radiator  
singing under the window as it warmed the room,  
and a special dog who learned to climb the ladder to the top bunk  
so he could sleep with me at night.

And I thought of the thousands of children in this land  
who have no homes,  
no special place that is theirs,  
to sleep wherever worried parents can find shelter,  
who cannot know the special love of a pet,  
and in the midst of my thanksgiving,  
I weep

"We are thankful for our parents," said the children,  
"and for our brothers  
and our sisters  
and for the entire family.  
Sometimes we're angry with them  
and wonder why they do the things they do,  
and why they leave us sometimes,  
but they are our family,  
and we love them,  
and we are thankful for them."

And we are thankful for friends,  
boys and girls who are not family,  
but whom we can count on  
and tell secrets to  
and share dreams with.  
And someone said, "I am thankful that I am me,  
one special, unique person in all the world--  
no one ever like me before,  
no one ever like me again.  
Just me."

We are thankful for special places we share with family and friends  
for aquariums

and parks  
and zoos,  
for Sea World and Disney Land  
and the airplanes  
and automobiles that take us there.

In the days before Disney Land  
and Sea world,  
there were parks  
and sea shores  
and county fairs  
and carnivals  
and I remember a little boy  
standing by the shore of a lake  
watching graceful swans swim across the glassy water,  
throwing bread crumbs,  
watching the birds gracefully dip their beaks to scoop up the food  
and then toss their heads so the crumbs could slide down long necks,  
and I, too was thankful for special places  
shared with family and friends,  
and for the gift of being me.

"We are thankful for this world," said the children,  
"and for all the living things that share this world with us,  
for insects, and lady bugs,  
for mice and frogs and grass turtles,  
for shrimp and squid and fish  
for the flowers and the solid earth  
and even for the muck and slime  
in which life is hidden and growing.  
and for our brains, the minds which help us see  
and understand  
and feel gratitude."

And I remembered a little boy,  
hunkered down on a hot sidewalk,  
watching an ant struggling with a leaf  
many times its size,  
and wondering how such miracles  
came to be, and whether the ant  
knew he was being watched,  
and whether somewhere  
something was watching me  
watching the ant.

"And we are thankful," said our children,

"for special times, for holidays  
like Thanksgiving  
and Christmas  
and Hallowe'en.  
We are thankful for special places,  
like this church  
and for the church services  
when children are welcomed.

And I remembered sitting in church  
with family and friends  
at special times of the year  
and singing together  
and speaking together,  
and swinging my legs  
as I sat on chairs too big for me,  
and the gentle touch of a hand  
when I squirmed too much,  
and I was grateful, too, for special times and places  
where children are welcomed.

And then said one of the children,  
"I am grateful for UNICEF,  
for the little orange boxes  
and the chance to collect some money  
to send to the children around the world  
who have so little and need so much."

My eyes filled with tears  
and I remembered the children,  
all the children.

## FLY AWAY HOME

### A PRAYER FOR RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHILDREN

We pray for children  
who put chocolate fingers everywhere,  
who like to be tickled  
who stomp in puddles and ruin their new pants,  
who sneak Popsicles before supper  
who erase holes in math workbooks,  
who can never find their shoes.

And we pray for those

who stare at photographers from behind barbed wire,  
who can't bound down the street in a new pair of sneakers,  
who never "counted potatoes",  
who are born in places we wouldn't be caught dead,  
who never go to the circus,  
who live in an x-rated world.

We pray for children  
who bring us sticky kisses and fists full of dandelions,  
who sleep with the dog and bury the goldfish  
who hug us in a hurry and forget their lunch money,  
who cover themselves with band-aids and sing off key,  
who squeeze toothpaste all over the sink,  
who slurp their soup.

And we pray for those  
who never get dessert,  
who have no safe blanket to drag behind them,  
who watch their parents watch them die,  
who can't find any bread to steal,  
who don't have any rooms to clean up  
whose pictures aren't on anybody's dresser  
whose monsters are real.

We pray for children  
who spend all their allowance before Tuesday,  
who throw tantrums in the grocery store and pick at their food,  
who like ghost stories,  
who shove dirty clothes under the bed, and never rinse out the tub,  
who get visits from the tooth fairy,  
who don't like to be kissed in front of the car-pool,  
who squirm in church or temple and scream in the phone,  
whose tears we sometimes laugh at, whose smiles can make us cry.

And we pray for those whose nightmares come in the daytime,  
who will eat anything,  
who have never seen a dentist,  
who aren't spoiled by anyone,  
who go to bed hungry and cry themselves to sleep,  
who live and move but have no being.

We pray for children who want to be carried and  
for those who must,  
for those we never give up on and for those

who don't get a second chance.

For those we smother...and those who will grab the hand  
of anyone kind  
enough to offer it  
we pray.  
Amen.  
--Ina J. Hughs