



# Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens

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## “Giving Thanks, Sharing Blessings”

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A brief homily delivered on November 22, 2015

At the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens, GA

### Centering Thoughts

*Oh, the Lord is good to me and so I thank the Lord for giving me the things I need—the sun, the rain, and the apple seed. Oh, the Lord is good to me.* Traditional sung prayer

*You are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to no one.* Jean Jacques Rousseau

*Blessing is the lifeblood throbbing through the universe.* David Steindl-Rast

*When we bless others, we offer them refuge from an indifferent world.* Rachel Naomi Remen

### Thanksgiving Homily (this followed a skit about Johnny Appleseed)

Johnny Appleseed, or John Chapman, was a real person. Reports seem to agree that his clothes were ragged and he often went barefoot. Wearing a pot on his head may be the stuff of legend, however. He wandered the mid-west seeking only a meal and an occasional roof over his head in return for apple seeds and seedlings. Most times he slept beneath the stars.

A wanderer with little else to his name, Chapman likely told stories about his travels to those who offered him a meal or other kindness. True stories of his travels may have given rise to many tall tales. One reports that his bare feet were so tough and trail-worn that when a rattlesnake tried to bite his foot, it couldn't get through Chapman's thick skin.

Born in 1775, Chapman lived during a time when forging a life in the American wilderness was difficult for new immigrants and settlers. Chapman's love of apples came from his grandfather who taught him about their growth and care. But rather than set up shop and sell the fruits of his labors, Chapman gave away apple seeds and seedlings across America because he wanted people to have enough to eat. For forty years Chapman traveled the mid-west sharing his seeds and planting seedlings. He believed apples were a blessing all could enjoy and would help people survive harsh frontier life.

But apples weren't the only blessing. Chapman himself was a blessing by carrying these precious seeds into the wilderness. Just as much as Wampanoag Indians helped the New England Pilgrims survive, Johnny Appleseed helped the rugged people struggling on the frontier to survive. And he too became friends with many Native Americans he met during his travels.

Chapman's generosity not only spread apples across the country, but he created a legacy for we who follow him. By planting apple trees he might never see mature, he blessed future generations. And by living simply with the kindness of strangers, Chapman showed us that we too can be kind to strangers and generous with our gifts.

This season of thanksgiving, I encourage you to recognize the blessings in your lives, whether it's something small like sharing an apple, or something great like listening to a friend with a story to tell. And be mindful, so that as you become aware of your blessings, you may offer a simple, "Thank you." And know that you can share what you have with those who have even less. We really don't need as much as we think we do. And you never know what good might sprout from your acts of kindness and generosity.

Happy Thanksgiving!

### **Questions for Reflection & Discussion**

1. Name a recent blessing you have received or given. How might you increase your awareness of the blessings you receive and give?
2. How might the act of sharing apple slices, a symbol of blessings, foster community for you?
3. What metaphorical seeds have you planted that might be enjoyed by future generations?