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Our token payment for our faith: performing miracles.

And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

³⁵ For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.

³⁶ For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

³⁷ Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

Mark, 8; 34-37

My Dear Brethren,

When we feel that something unavoidable is about to happen, we say "something is in the air". This winter the smell of a strong wintery weather, the swirling snow clouds, and the heavy snows were in the air. 25 years ago the necessity of political and societal changes were in the air, and this overwhelmed the stench of the dying tyranny and gunsmoke. Our ancestors were even better sensitized to detect the signals up in the air; perhaps, because their lives were closer to Mother Nature, or perhaps because they were more attuned to spiritual signs. I recall from my theology classes that during the 16th century Europe what was in the air was the passion about changing religious doctrine, and in Transylvania the curiosity and willingness to carry out those changes. In Transylvania it was also in the air that those changes are to be carried out with patience, and without the use of force. For us, Unitarians, all those transformational ideas in the air became a miraculous reality when at Torda in 1568 January 13 the Diet of Transylvania declared the freedom of religious belief and religious conscience. That miracle made possible the formation of our Church. During the past 447 years that initial miracle opened the way for our Church to live happy times as well as times of tribulations. While today I give thanks to God for His guidance, and I acknowledge the

marvelous achievements of our ancestors, I can't help, but feel that there is something in the air for us in the form of tasks yet to be accomplished, and possibilities yet to be explored. I'm seeing the hints of better chances for us Unitarians to serve better, to live our biblical faith, to live out our calling, because of the reality of the newly unified Hungarian Unitarian Church, because of the brighter alignment of the national and international stars, because of the new leadership, and because of the many new sowers of God's fields. Today I want to transform the energy from the light and warmth of the heritage of 1568 to illuminate our path of tasks and opportunities. The teachings we hear today from our Gospels and from Jesus are the same teachings that has showed us the way, that maintained us, that blessed us: that we remain faithful to our Unitarian beliefs, that we hold on to our uniqueness, that we hold on to our values, and that we open our ranks to the many who may need us, and seek us. It is my contention that had we not lived as Unitarians, had we not remained faithful to our beliefs, had we not held on to our values, had we not defended and not demanded the acceptance of our ideals despite being different, then we would have long been erased from the landscape of the European religious scene.

I do believe that Jesus is calling our multitudes today just like in the past: "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself", let him deny his weak, fallible, cowardly, ignorant, dull and dreary himself, and take on the charismatic, unique, heavy, but wondrous cross, and then "follow me", everybody according to their set of beliefs, Unitarians with unitarian beliefs, and other according to their beliefs. For, those who want to give up on the charismatic and unique way of their life will lose that life. They will remain fallible, cowardly, ignorant, dull and dreary. And those who aren't afraid to give up such life, and recognize the importance of more meaning, of more value, of the deeds and the teachings of Jesus and the Gospels; those whose faith includes the daily, practical, industrious protection and acting out of the unique values and characteristics, they will save their lives. "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul". That loss is losing faith, not living out one's promise, not expressing one's own persona, when the words, the heart, the deeds are not in sync.

The individual, and the Church, can not give anything material in exchange for one's soul. "Gnothi Seauthon", Know Thyself! This call appears first in Plato's Kharmidesz, as the representation of gaining or losing one's destiny depending on understanding one's own. According to Apollon, the human destiny is a mystery, but it can be deciphered through self-examination and understanding. "Learn your own true destiny" says Herakleitos; according to him this destiny is our soul, our spirit. So, we can say that the "Know Thyself" call is the calling to search, to accept the existence of, and to discover, to explore the deep inner spirit with its inherent virtues, despite the weak

dreary, fallible outside appearance, and then restore the guidance of one's life around those deep inherent virtues.

My Dear Brethren: This morning on the Main Square Catholic Church I saw a sign that has a message for Unitarians as well: "Estini Seauthon", Embrace Who You Are. Without such embrace and without the will to live out one's own uniqueness knowing ourselves isn't worth much. The yearly pilgrimage to Deva and Torda, the enthusiastic sermons and celebrations, and even an entire year's worth of work for the church makes sense only if it comes from the embraced self: our spirit comes to life through our thoughts, words, and deeds. We can honor the Diet of Torda, honor the writings and martyrdom of Ferenc David, respect the self-sacrificing efforts of our ancestors best if we continue to represent the values they held high. We acknowledge those individual and community values such as personal freedom, freedom of thought, the openness, the patience, the tolerance, and the diversity. Are we committed to embrace and to defend those values? Are we dedicated to live out and renew those values? Are we committed to base our thoughts and deeds on those values? Are we dedicated to maintain those values as the wellspring of our personal and institutional religious and moral actions?

My Dear Brethren. What's in the air in Kolozsvár and in Transylvania is that we have arrived to the point where we can resurrect our Unitarian morals. Those morals shape our character that will lead us to a well-meaning life, and a well-intentioned service. In our times when the individual is placed in the epicenter of popular culture, the emphasis on morals of a virtuous life, and on a religion that powers self-realization are good opportunities. We perform good service when we assist with, and defend the expression of the personal uniqueness, when we help disseminate the ideals of personal freedom of conscience and freedom of religious belief. Such a service is useful, because in our world there are large groups of people searching for a community that fits their expectations; there are many people who are marginalized for their expressions of their uniqueness, and there are people who are denied off hand of their right of free speech and expression of their uniqueness. The repression in our world doesn't manifest only through violence, like we see in Paris, in Ukraine and in Nigeria. There are more hidden, sneaky forms of repression such as the public shaming, religious beliefs forced by authorities, and the suppression of free expression of dissent. The expression of the demand for self-determination may be assisted by the basic ideals of our religion, such as the acceptance of differences, and being guided by love.

Our Unitarian faith has always been described as salvation through character, and not through religious belief, or through divine mercy. We must continue to have faith in the power of the character and morality, and that our values will continue to serve us well. Our Unitarian ideal is to follow the teachings and example of Jesus: the denial of the timid self, the courageous carrying of the cross of uniqueness, and the act of remaining

accountable only to our own conscience. By following that path we may not win over the entire world, but we do gain the grace of the one who called us to serve: our God.

While we may not be able to give anything material in exchange of our souls, we can offer a token payment for our life in the form of faithful service. The poet Nagy Laszlo in his poem "Sermon on the Mount" describes this better than I could do myself:

Don't just explain the miracles, but perform them

Our paths meander to nowhere

We know the future more than the past

Let's choose the presence of the lightning

Otherwise the louse of terror will run up to our brains

Like we are chained to a chicken coop

While we are sitting on a mount of basalt

Do not be concerned of your fate, I'm not concerned either

Our wells run deep, and even the lightning can't dry them up

As they are filled by a multitude of creeks, we'll suffer no drought

We are living this miracle as the blades of grass form windows around us

Do not be concerned of your fate, do not be concerned of the rags

Our clothing will be light, our gift is the cleverness of the poor

So, our babies will get their winter boots

Don't just explain the miracles, but perform them.

Dear Brethren! The Unitarian miracle is the embrace and the defense of the freedom of religious thought, and freedom of conscience. On the day of the announcement of that miracle, on this 13th day of January, our best action is to encourage the furthering of the miracle of that Edict, not just explain it. And on those countless days after the celebration our best action is to embrace it in our lives, to show how much we identify with that miracle. We can expand on this miracle further when we declare and defend such freedoms; when we declare and defend the human right of people to live their lives according to their conscience, including their religious choices. When we declare and

defend the freedom to choose one's religion, and assert that restricting such freedom is unacceptable whether it is done by using force or violence, or the excuse of family traditions, or the opinions of church leaders. We can keep alive the heritage of January 13, and the entire year of 1568 if we demonstrate every day that we live up to that heritage. It's only through such demonstration that "we will know the future more than the past", because we shape the future, not only praise it. Such demonstration affords us to choose the presence of the lightning, because we can shine that powerful light onto the benevolent, moral, and loving nature of our religion.

My Dear Miracle Performing Brethren. "Do not be concerned of your fate, I'm not concerned either", as the strength of Providence is with us. Our conscience is fortified by our calling from God that invites us, Hungarian Unitarians, to act out our faith, and to improve individuals and communities, and to perform miracles. "Our paths meander to nowhere", because we don't have to go down every single path, only our own path. We seek out, and walk down on the path where we can move in freedom, with dignity, and with love. Let us not compete on this path with anybody; let us work for the goal of progress and moving forward, and that is only possible when we find our true selves. Let us "not chain ourselves cowardly to the chicken coop in fear", as we are sitting on this basalt mount, and we do have the reserves, the resources, the motivation to keep acting out our faith. "Our wells run deep, as they are filled by a multitude of creeks", we put in so much energy, enthusiasm, sacrifice into our service. We will suffer no drought if we make good use of our resources, and if we use the cleverness of the poor. As long as we employ the blessings of the Providence we shall see a bountiful harvest. "Do not be concerned of your fate, do not be concerned of the rags; our clothing will be light; our babies will get their winter boots". Let us not just explain the miracles, but perform them.

Amen