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Sharing your goodness makes a difference.

Companioned

“Don’t ask *me*,” said Moses to God, “ask my brother!” God had asked Moses for help. The Israelites needed a leader to bring them out of Egypt. Moses didn’t feel anything like a leader—he may have thought himself ineloquent or perhaps he had a stutter, because he said: “Please, I have never been a man of words....I am slow of speech and slow of tongue....Please, Lord, make someone else your agent.” (Exodus 4:13) And yet, we know the story of Moses becoming a great leader.

The Hebrew Bible tells of other reluctant prophets who protested when God asked for their help: Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jonas, Jeremiah. Everyone had an excuse: “Who am I that I should go?” “What do I have to say?” “What if they don’t listen to me?” “Send someone else.” “I’m not good enough.” “I’m too young and inexperienced.”

To each of them God gave this assurance: “I will be with you.”

When asked to give of our time, it’s easy for us to say no, too. We have all the reasons in the world: We don’t have the time. We’re not so comfortable with kids. What if they don’t listen to us? We’re too old. We’re too young. We don’t really have anything to offer. We’re not good enough. Send someone else.

On some level, we may be afraid to say yes. What if we fail? Sometimes we see our inadequacies more readily than our goodness....

But hold on. We may well feel uncomfortable, even shy, about connecting with a child or a teen. We might not know where to start. But we’re not being asked to do something extraordinary. Rather, we’re simply asked to offer a bit of *goodness*. Goodness is not about what you know, it’s part of you. Offering goodness just means showing up and being someone who can be counted on. Once you are present, with a little luck and curiosity, it’s about seeing in that someone what they haven’t yet discovered about themselves—a gift more valuable than any learned skill.

I visited my childhood neighbor, Mrs. Wright, a couple of weeks ago. Ninety-seven, she still lives in the same house, though my favorite room—the old-fashioned bathroom she’d once turned into a terrarium—has been repurposed. Way back when, heat lamps and pools of water steamed up the windows. Happy plants crept up the walls, and salamanders, turtles and frogs from a local swamp roamed free. It felt like a tropical jungle, the air warm, wet and earthy.

I liked the life of that place and the quiet, too. It felt good, a refuge of sorts from my family’s busy, activity-driven home. I realize today that Mrs. Wright’s quiet, steady presence was part of that feeling. Fifty years later, when I was in seminary, the UU church in Lexington invited me now and then to lead worship. She would always come. We hugged goodbye one time, and she looked up at me, her beautiful blue-green eyes no longer seeing. What she said surprised me.

“I’ve loved you,” she said, “for a long, long time.” A moment to treasure. I’d not thought of her as a mentor, but of course she was one, inextricably connected to those peaceful childhood afternoons. In her quiet way, she was with me all along, her presence calming and grounding.

Our presence is what we offer the world. It’s what we offer our beloveds, our companions in faith, the child who needs a friend. Our presence is a simple gift and meaningful. Think of people who have made a difference to you over the years—those who noticed you, who listened to what you had to say, who liked you just for being you. Whose kindness, whose strong shoulder, could you count on? Who has shared with you their simple goodness?

Claes reminds us that there is a whole lot of good in this world, so let us share it. Find the courage to offer your presence. Trust that you can help someone discover what they may have not yet seen in themselves...and believe with all your heart that your very presence is a gift to the world.

So may it be.