

Vision: Look Inside, and Awaken – The Rev. Suzelle Lynch -- 09-07-08 –
Unitarian Universalist Church West.

CALL TO WORSHIP (Lynch copyright 2008)

We gather in community
seeking life's deeper meanings
seeking the joy of one another's presence
seeking the larger hope we always find in being here together.

We kindle the flame of our faith,
and it leaps to life in the chalice.
The chalice: a vessel, a bowl,
a cup filled with our common hopes,
our shared dreams,
our mutual commitment
To a world made whole.

With the kindling of this flame,
we enter this sacred time and place.

FIRST READING

Some Wise Words on Vision

Hellen Keller once wrote: "The most pathetic person in the world is someone who has sight, but has no vision."

"Vision," according to English writer Jonathan Swift, "is the art of seeing things invisible."

George Bernard Shaw proclaims: You see things; and you say, "Why?" But I dream things that never were; and I say, "Why not?"

Rabbi Stephen Wise explains, "Vision looks inward and becomes duty. Vision looks outward and becomes aspiration. Vision looks upward and becomes faith." . . .

American poet and activist Audre Lorde says: "When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid."

According to meditation teacher Jon Kabat-Zinn: "Our vision has to do with our values, and with our personal blueprint for what is most important in life."

And finally, Carl Jung wrote: “Your vision will become clear only when you look into your heart. Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens.”

SECOND READING

Song of the Builders by Mary Oliver

On a summer morning
I sat down
on a hillside
to think about God -

a worthy pastime.
Near me, I saw
a single cricket;
it was moving the grains of the hillside

this way and that way.
How great was its energy,
how humble its effort.
Let us hope

it will always be like this,
each of us going on
in our inexplicable ways
building the universe.

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Do you have a vision for your life? Do you have a strong sense of why you are here on this earth – what you are here to be or to do?

I didn't think I did.

Not really, at least. To tell you the truth, I hadn't thought about my personal vision much until recently, when a friend sent me an article on work-life balance that claimed that knowing one's own vision was key to achieving a balanced life. And I was intrigued, for as you know, I am all about balance (or rather, about being out of balance!).

So I went looking for information about having a vision, and came across all kinds of articles on the internet. All kinds of instructions for developing a personal vision – everything from quick and snappy newsletters written by personal coaches to lure people into engaging their services, to quotes from

Steven Covey's book "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People." Some of the approaches to developing a personal vision that I found were pretty comprehensive, and I am sure they're wonderful for getting us to pay attention to what's important in our personal, professional and family lives. Indeed, some of the material looked like it would make a great Adult Enrichment class for Unitarian Universalists!

But the words I found that spoke to me most deeply came from Carl Jung, who said, "Your vision will become clear only when you look into your heart. Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens."

His words touched me because so much of what I saw in the literature on developing a personal vision really had more to do with looking outside than with looking into our hearts. It was all about developing a plan for success in the world of the marketplace. How to be a more effective worker or manager, how to put in long hours and still make sure you have time to get to your children's athletic events or dance recitals, how to build a retirement nest egg, how to be a better spouse or partner, how to ensure that you get enough rest and renewal in your life (while still working overtime and going to all the kids' events...).

That's all good stuff, but it didn't feel like vision to me. Vision is like passion, it surges up from our roots, from the core of our being. Vision is a force within us based in the principles by which we know we must guide our lives. Our vision rises up from the values we hold dear – it's the calling which we cannot ignore, it is the most powerful motivating moral force within us. Looking outside, we cannot help but be driven by the values of the marketplace, by what our culture tells us will make us successful. But when we look inside, into our hearts, that's where our vision is, waiting to awaken us.

The idea of vision always makes me remember the story of the stonemasons. [Now, this may not be a factual account, but nonetheless, it is a true story....] It seems that back in the Middle Ages, a traveler visited a city where there were a great many stonemasons at work. Curious as to what was going on, he approached a group of the workers and asked what they were doing.

The first stonemason replied, "I'm cutting stone. It's backbreaking work, but with the money I make, my family can eat."

The second stonemason the traveler approached responded, "Just look at the smoothness of this stone, how perfect the edges are and you will know what I am doing. I'm becoming the best stonemason in all the land."

The third stonemason, when asked what he was doing, looked up from his work and said, "I am building a cathedral for the greater glory of God."

That's vision. It is a center from which we can act, a larger purpose by which we guide our lives. Vision is more than a list of aspirations and goals – which is not

to say that goals aren't important in life, because they are. The stonemason who wanted to feed his family had an important goal, as did the one who wanted to become the best in the land. Goals are the actions we take, the concrete steps we pursue as we pursue our vision. They are an expression of it. The difference is that while we can accomplish our goals, our vision is rarely something that we finish. It remains at our core, shaping how we carry out our lives, motivating us and fueling our efforts even if our goals shift with changes in our life circumstances.

President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was a man of vision. Elected in 1961, at the height of the Cold War and the accompanying Space Race between the United States and the Soviet Union, Kennedy immediately laid out a vision of having a man walk on the moon. This vision galvanized an army of government scientists and innovators in private industry who set to work creating new technology for everything needed to realize it – everything from jet fuel to foodstuffs. Space age technology pushed into fields from astrophysics to forestry. Freeze-dried and “ready-to-eat” foods, food sterilization and packaging techniques, fog-free ski goggles and breathable, water-repellent fabrics -- all of these have their roots in space science. If you have a GPS in your car, you're using technology that owes its origins to Kennedy's vision.

Kennedy's assassination in 1963 meant that he did not live to witness the first steps on the moon taken by Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin six years later, but his vision was never really about achieving that particular goal anyway. What drove him was a passion for pushing out the frontiers of what we believed was humanly possible – a vision of humankind expanding far beyond where we'd ever dreamed we could go.

And that vision, as well as fueling science and industry, pushed an even larger shift in human consciousness. After orbiting the earth in space, Soviet Cosmonaut Aleksandr Aleksandrov put it this way. He said, “We were flying over America and suddenly I saw snow, the first snow we ever saw from orbit. I have never visited America, but I imagined that the arrival of autumn and winter [and the process of getting ready for them] is the same there as in other places.... And then it struck me that we are all children of our Earth.” Seeing the earth from space brought a new vision of our common humanity into greater consciousness.

Another vision was born during this time as well, spoken by US astronaut James Irwin, “As we got further and further away, [from the Earth],” he said, “[it] diminished in size. Finally it shrank to the size of a marble, the most beautiful [marble] you can imagine. That beautiful, warm, living object looked so fragile, so delicate, that if you touched it with a finger it would crumble and fall apart. Seeing this has to change a man.” It's no coincidence that the first Earth Day took place not long after we began to see the earth – full and round and beautiful and fragile – from space.

Do you know what your vision is? I cannot be sure, but deep in my heart of hearts, I believe that your personal vision has something to do with why you are here in this church.

For Unitarian Universalism is a visionary faith. Listen to the words of our congregation's mission statement:

Unitarian Universalist Church West is a congregation of adults, youth, and children diverse in identity and beliefs. We strive for honest, caring relationships that inspire and enable spiritual and ethical growth. We promote religious freedom and engage in a shared search for personal and collective meaning. We serve our larger community and wider world by practicing compassion and working for justice.

A diverse congregation of people in honest and caring relationship with one another. People growing spiritually and ethically. A congregation that stands up for religious freedom, and is engaged in the search for meaning. A congregation that serves the world beyond its walls by working for justice – working with compassion and devotion.

What our mission says is that as a congregation we are striving to live out the Unitarian Universalist vision of transforming the world.

How do we do this? How does a congregation go about transforming the world?

First of all, we do it through a radical hospitality. We open our doors in enthusiastic welcome to people who are searching for meaning or spirituality. To people who may feel exiled from the faith in which they grew up because they could not find food for mind and soul there. And we do our best to make sure that people can find a place here to explore their spirituality fully without feeling dishonest. To find here a place to learn, to journey, to quest for what both their intellect and intuition tell them is true and right. We live here by the principle that each person can and must engage in a free and responsible search for truth and meaning – and this is life-changing.

What else do we do? We educate the children in this church – yours and mine and everyone's – so that they are equipped to respect and honor the fact that there are many ways to be religious or spiritual in the world. We help them understand that there are many cultures and ideas to learn from, and we encourage their curiosity and wonder. Unitarian Universalist children also grow up grounded in principles of compassion and understanding which helps them make moral decisions and take ethical action as they go through life. This kind of religious education changes our children, and they change our world.

In our church, we also live by the principle of accepting people where they are. We stand with and care for those who are young, who are old, who are in the middle, who are searching, who are in crisis. People whose joys overflow,

people who have cause to mourn. People who experience oppression. People who are in the midst of life transition, or are navigating times of confusion. Our commitment is to respect the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and our ministry to and with one another and our work beyond these walls that is based on this respect, is life-changing.

And the truth is that when our lives change, our families change. Our friendships change. Our work relationships change. And these changes transform the wider community of which we are a part. And a transformed community helps transform the world. The vision of Unitarian Universalism is a vision of a world more peaceful, free and just, a world more compassionate and conscious, a world in which we honor and respect all persons, and live gently on our beautiful planet, understanding that we do not own it, but that we are, instead a part of its living system. Each time we engage with our church, we are taking a step toward that transformed world.

That vision is the passion I chose to give my life to when I joined a Unitarian Universalist congregation as an adult. And whether or not you believe it about yourself, I think that vision is why you are here as well.

Now, I know that if I asked you the question about why you're here in this church, the vision of a world transformed wouldn't necessarily be the first answer you'd give. You might say you're here because you love the people here, and have deep friendships. Or you might say it's because you wanted a good and broad-minded religious education for your child, or because the prospect of a religion that frees you to shape your own meaning sounded good to you. But what I want you to see is that underneath those very good, very sound reasons for being here lies the UU vision, for after all, you could make good friendships by being part of a book group or a rec department soccer league, couldn't you? And the Sunday Schools of many liberal Christian faiths are quite broad-minded these days about world religions, and much more open and accepting of the diverse beliefs of their adult members as well.

I believe that you are here because somewhere, somehow a fire was kindled in your belly like the flame in this chalice, a passion for a world more peaceful, free and just, a world more compassionate and conscious, a world in which we honor and respect all persons, and live gently on our beautiful planet. And you know you can live out that vision more fully in community with others.

Most of us do not have the opportunity to be visionary in the grand way of John F. Kennedy – we're not likely to become President of the United States, and be able to direct billions of dollars in resources based on our vision. But by being in this church, you do have access to a larger circle of caring, committed people who share your values and can help you act on your vision.

For example, I think of Jim Gerber and Ann Heidkamp, who hold a vision of peace, and who live out their passionate commitment to helping bring peace to

our planet. Jim and Ann lead the peace focus group of our Social Action committee, and they consistently and constantly invite us all to be part of the things they are doing in the service of this vision of peace.

I think of our Director of Religious Education, Maria O'Connor. Maria might not use quite these words, but I know she has a vision that children can transform our world -- children who are religiously literate, respectful of themselves and others, children who are invested in the common good and committed to making a difference. So she works here, and encourages us all to get involved in this good work for our children.

I think of Rob Zimmerman, who speaks often of his conviction that our faith has something vitally important to offer our wider community and our world, and so he's giving generously of his time and leadership as president of our congregation as a way to act on his vision.

I think of Karen Engelking, who serves our Worship Ministry Team with energy and passion because she has a vision that what we do in worship here must be so beautiful and meaningful and inclusive that it plants seeds of grace in each and every soul in the room – and she gives generously of her time on the team to inspire all of us with the fire of this vision.

I think of Julie Mayhew, whose social work background and experience serving people in need in our wider world has lent her a vision that caring and support transform lives, and she finds a way to live out that vision here in our church by heading up our CommUUnity Connections Team.

I think of Dennis Briley, Amy Taivalkoski, Calvin Gander, Melanie Weston, John Bahr and other members of our Earth Ministry team who share a vision of slowing down the rate of climate change, to help preserve the earth for generations to come. They have harnessed the energy and commitment of our congregation in the service of their vision by helping us take earth-saving actions like the solar electric generating panels installed just months ago on our church roof.

I think of Pat Kashmerick, who through her work coordinating community outreach for a local hospital – sees first hand the impact on real people of the deplorable state of our nation's health care systems. Pat has a vision of a nation that takes better care of all its citizens – and she is living out that vision with other members here like Becky Steffes and John Meurer by offering healthcare forums so that we all might learn more and get involved in changing the system for the greater good of all...

I think of all these good people, and so many more – and I ask you – when you look into your own heart, what do you see? What vision is there, waiting to awaken you into action? What vision is there, ready to move you into community with others here so that it might be lived out in the world?

Here at church, we are entering the first full year of our long range plan, and I want you to know that there is room for your vision here. Chances are good that there are others here who share your vision. And indeed, this church needs your vision, your passion, your heart to live ever more fully the larger Unitarian Universalist vision of a world transformed.

For it takes each one of us -- like the cricket in Mary Oliver's poem -- it takes each of us and all of us -- with our often humble efforts, and our own inexplicable ways -- it takes each of us to keep building the cathedral of our Unitarian Universalist faith; to keep going on, building the Universe.

Amen.