

On the Threshold of a Dream

A sermon offered by Rev. Kathleen C. Rolenz

Sunday, May 17, 2020

For the Unitarian Universalist Church of Annapolis, MD

There are many things which make us unique as individuals, but there are some things which all human beings do. We take them for granted of course, until we can't do them anymore. We all have to breathe to survive. We all have to eat to stay strong. We all have to rest and sleep to rejuvenate ourselves. And whether we like it or not, we all dream. Many of us don't remember our dreams, but there is that moment before we wake up – what I'm calling the threshold of a dream – when we are still lingering in Dreamland – coming slowly to consciousness but not yet fully awake. I don't know about your experiences, but I suspect they are similar to mine. That threshold time is when I seem to have the most vivid dreams. Whatever I'm doing in the dream is so real that at times when I wake up I am not sure if I'm still dreaming or if I'm awake – of if it really happened or was just all in my mind. We talk about liminal space – the space between things – and dreams are such a space as this – it's a place of both being in our bodies and in our minds and in some other realm altogether.

In the 1980's and beyond my husband and many others who lived in the San Francisco Bay area were influenced by Unitarian Universalist Jeremey Taylor. In his little book "Basic Hints for Dream Work," Taylor writes: "Dreaming is a universal human phenomenon which unites us all...everyone dreams in the same basic way, and when we examine dreams with an eye to structure and meaning, we discover that dreams speak a universal language of metaphor and symbol...the dream does not mask or hide, but does its best to reveal – why then are most dreams are so opaque? It is because every dream has multiple meanings and multiple layers of meaning, joined into a single narrative or dream experience. ...When we make the effort to understand, our dreams reveal startling insights, creative ideas and conscious understanding of confusing emotions."

So grasping that threshold and trying to understand what it means is actually a good metaphor for what I've been doing for the last 2 ½

years as your interim minister. I've been listening to your dreams. One of Taylor's insights that I've both struggled with and accepted is that everything in the dream is about you. There is no other. Everything that you dream...the place, the action, the people are all representations of you – the dreamer. In addition to that insight, Taylor suggests that every dream has an element of constructive self-criticism and every dream has an element of creative inspiration or problem solving.

So what have been your dreams, Unitarian Universalist Church of Annapolis? As I've said in previous sermons and articles, I came to you with five tasks that all interim ministers are supposed to do. They are (slide) Coming to terms with history (2) Discovering a New Identity; (3) allowing Needed Leadership Change (4) Strengthening Denominational Ties and (5) Committing to New Directions in Ministry. In addition to these five tasks, as a member of the Executive Team, I had shared responsibility with reporting about your ENDS statements. Now some of you may not really know what those are – but they are the guiding stars of your governance system; they are the values statements which guide the Board's policies, decisions, and our work as your minister. Your first statement –called your Global Ends statement is this: : ***The Unitarian Universalist Church of Annapolis exists to create the beloved community by inspiring and empowering all souls to live bold and compassionate lives.***

This values statement frames our perception of who we are, and what we are called to do and to be in our own personal lives and in the world. So on this morning before the annual congregational meeting, I want to look at three questions:

1. How have you exemplified living a Bold and Compassionate life?
2. How have you built Beloved Community in 2019 – 2020?
3. How to move from the dream to reality?

Bold & compassionate life.

How are you personally living both a bold and compassionate life? Being bold doesn't necessarily mean grabbing the microphone and leading a march. It can mean speaking up for our values – your values – when it would be easier to remain silent. It means writing letters to people asking them to be sure to register to vote. It can mean volunteering in our Faith Formation department not because you have children in the program – but because you don't. You know that every moment you spend with another's child is a gift to their parent or guardian. It can mean giving a ride to a neighbor, sewing a mask, bringing flowers that you arranged yourself, singing in the choir. These are acts of boldness too – when you take on a new skill; when you challenge yourself for the sake of another – when you extend yourself out of your comfort zone.

For those of you who may be visiting UUCA for the first time this morning, you need to know that this is a congregation of bold dreams. Ten years ago, they had a vision of putting their aspirations of becoming an anti-racist, anti-oppressive and multicultural congregation into practice by calling the first African American minister to your ministry. Under the leadership of Rev. Fred Muir, Rev. John Crestwell and Rev. Christina Leone Tracy you, as a congregation had many good years of a team of putting those bold dreams into action.

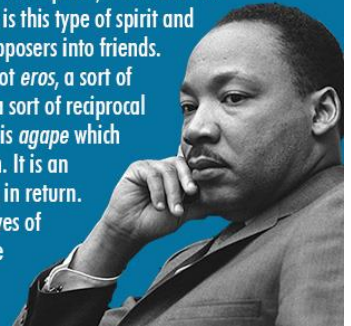
And then, life happened. Rev. Fred retired. Rev. Christina accepted a call to another congregation. Rev. John wanted to stay - but didn't want the church to essentially be the same with new people. Rev. John began to dream too – to dream of a more collaborative ministry, building on the strengths of two rather than a solo, Senior position as you have known. And so, in an unusual, but bold move, you called the Rev. Anastassia Zinke to serve as a colleague of equal standing with Rev. Crestwell. Once again, UUCA is in the forefront of leadership in our Association. As I interview with churches our size and larger, they are watching what happens here in Annapolis as a possible model for the future as the distinctions of Senior and Associate minister become less important.

I don't know about your dreams, but I can do things in my dreams that I can't do in real life. I can fly. I can be invisible. I can fix the planet. One of your dreams is to Build Beloved Community right here, right now. So I want to talk about how UUCA builds beloved community, but I'm also hoping that this will apply to your own life and your spheres of influence outside of this church.

You dream the beloved community. How have you built beloved community?

"The end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the beloved community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opposers into friends. The type of love that I stress here is not *eros*, a sort of esthetic or romantic love; not *philia*, a sort of reciprocal love between personal friends; but it is *agape* which is understanding goodwill for all men. It is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. It is the love of God working in the lives of men. This is the love that may well be the salvation of our civilization."

—MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.



What did Dr. King mean by that? He speaks not of romantic love, or friendship love, but agape, a sense that love extends beyond the boundaries of our own personal relationship and yes, even the walls of the church. Building beloved community means wearing a face mask – not for oneself, but for one's fellow human beings. It means practicing social distancing. Beloved community is no less than the salvation of our civilization. Building beloved community also means holding ourselves accountable.

How have I seen that in action at UUCA? A lot of people have pushed back on UUCA's 8th Principle; because of being hurt or called out or feeling that there is a strident tone or a gotcha feeling about not espousing the latest anti-racist orthodoxy. I understand those feelings; I've had them myself. But, I was thinking about this while walking the other day – a mother and father pushing a baby carriage and a toddler walking alongside them. Mom and dad's attention focused on the baby, watched the toddler start to toddle out towards the street, unaware of the car that was speeding down the road. The mom screamed out "Abigail – STOP!" in the loudest, most disturbing voice. Abigail, hearing her voice, plopped down on the ground and started to cry. Dad held the carriage, mom went over to Abigail and picked her up. I heard the mother say "It's because I love you

that I yelled at you. “ Didn’t stop Abigail from crying, but I thought – to interrupt the isms in our lives; racism, ageism, ableism, sexism, heterosexism, we sometimes have to yell “Stop.” Our feelings may get hurt. But the mother’s intervention was not to shame that child; it was to interrupt what was happening in the moment in the strongest way possible. This is what I believe it means to live a bold and compassionate life. That’s part of why the church continues to engage in the 8th Principle work of dismantling racism and other oppressions.

How do you create Beloved Community in your own life? It’s our hope – mine, Rev. John’s, Leika’s, Josh and Julie that what you learn here in church you can practice at home and teach your children. There’s no disconnect between the lofty ideals you hear on Sunday morning and how you behave on Monday night. The principles of worth and dignity of every person; justice, equity and compassion in human relations, acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth – these are made real not just by what we say we think – or how we feel – but the ways we make them real – right now- every day.

On the Threshold of a Dream

I was pretty pleased with the title for this morning’s sermon “On the Threshold of a Dream.” And then I realized that was actually the title of an album by the 1970’s group “The Moody Blues.” I loved the album as a young adult because I was fascinated by that idea of that threshold space between dreaming and waking up. It’s a place where the dreams are the most vivid and it’s also the place where dreams fade the fastest. Dreams fascinate us because they tell us something about ourselves in story, metaphor, fantasy and always contain elements of truth.

UUCA feels to me like it’s on the threshold of a dream that is quickly becoming reality. After this Sunday service, the congregation will reflect and ultimately vote on other dreams that have been in the works for now over 2 ½ years. When I arrived at UUCA, you had, as my grandmother say, “good bones,” but your outer appearance did not reflect your inner vitality.

The carpets were stained, your curtains were threadbare, the corners had gotten cluttered. Over

these past 2 ½ years as your interim, we have made great progress in having a building and a ministry that reflects not who you were, but you are now – and who and what you are becoming.

I started this ministry by asking you: Where did you come from, what are you and where are you going? In my last two sermons with you, I’ll continue to reflect on those three questions as my time with you draws to a close. You know now more fully where you’ve come from; you have consistently identified who and what you are as a congregation – and now the exciting threshold task of moving into making the dream of building Beloved Community – real.

Where are we going? Well, like the songs says Woyaya, which is a Ghanaian word which means “we keep going.” It’s like the song says: “We are going, heaven knows where we are going, but we know within, and we’ll get there, heaven knows how we will get there, but we know we will. It will be hard we know and the road will be muddy and rough but we’ll get there, heaven knows how we will get there, but we know we will. Woyaya. Woyaya. Woyaya!

Blessed Be, Ashes and Amen!