

## **To Dream – To Labor**

- a sermon reflection composed and presented by Dawn Daniels, UUFCM Minister

Sunday, September 2, 2018

### ***Opening Words***

We come bound by the threads of a dream  
Of all walking together side by side,  
none of us above or below  
Less or more or forgotten.  
A dream that more is possible  
even more than we have yet imagined.  
A dream of kindness and connection  
that softens and turns us toward each other with tenderness.  
A dream of courage and commitment  
that will enable us to stay the course  
and admit where we have gone astray.  
May this vision comfort and challenge.  
May it weave us together and never let us go  
until the dream is made real.

~ *Soul Matters Team*

### ***Meditation Reading***

“Let Us Make This Earth a Heaven”

- by Tess Baumberger

Let us make this earth a heaven, right here, right now.  
Who knows what existences death will bring?  
Let us create a heaven here on earth  
where love and truth and justice reign.

Let us welcome all at our Pearly Gates, our Freedom Table,  
amid singing and great rejoicing,  
black, white, yellow, red, and all our lovely colors,  
straight, gay, transgendered, bisexual, and all the ways  
of loving each other's bodies.  
Blind, deaf, mute, healthy, sick, variously-abled,  
Young, old, fat, thin, gentle, cranky, joyous, sorrowing.

Let no one feel excluded, let no one feel alone.  
May the rich let loose their wealth to rain upon the poor.  
May the poor share their riches with those too used to money.  
May we come to venerate the Earth, our mother,  
and tend her with wisdom and compassion.  
May we make our earth an Eden, a paradise.

May no one wish to leave her.

May hate and warfare cease to clash in causes  
too old and tired to name; religion, nationalism,  
the false, false god of gold, deep-rooted ethnic hatreds.  
May these all disperse and wane, may we see each other's true selves.  
May we all dwell together in peace and joy and understanding.  
Let us make a heaven here on earth, before it is too late.  
Let us make this earth a heaven, for each other's sake.

### **Sermon Reflection**

Our worship theme for the month of September is a dance of sorts with the question "What does it mean to be a people of *vision*?" Now some of us, maybe a good many of us, will have found the spoken meditation I just shared to be an example of a lovely but far too distant and perhaps unobtainable dream; an example of vision devoid of reality. Perhaps. But the key phrase repeated several times were the words "let us make." "Let us make." Those words call our attention to what Buddhist monk and teacher *Bhikkhu Bodhi* (bee-COO bah-dee) wrote of in a pragmatic online blog piece titled "Balancing Vision and Routine":

All human activity can be viewed as an interplay between two contrary but equally essential factors - vision and repetitive routine... When one factor prevails at the expense of the other, the consequences are often undesirable. If we are bound to a repetitive cycle of work that deprives us of our freedom to inquire and understand things for ourselves, we soon stagnate, crippled by the chains of routine. If we are spurred to action by elevating ideals but lack the discipline to implement them, we may eventually find ourselves wallowing in idle dreams or exhausting our energies on frivolous pursuits. It is only when accustomed routines are infused by vision that they become springboards to discovery rather than deadening ruts. And it is only when **inspired vision gives birth to a course of repeatable actions** that we can bring our ideals down from the ethereal sphere of imagination to the somber realm of fact... It took a flash of genius for Michelangelo to behold the figure of David invisible in a shapeless block of stone; but it required years of prior training, and **countless blows with hammer and chisel**, to work the miracle that would leave us a masterpiece of art. [...]

~ Bhikkhu Bodhi (*bee-COO bah-dee*)

<http://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=723>

This past week we were reminded via the coverage of the memorials for Aretha Franklin and John McCain of the **competing visions** that currently exist for this nation we inhabit and call home. While I differed wildly at times with the opinions of John McCain, I admired the courage of his convictions and his dedication to the work required in the realization of his vision for this country...a vision largely built on universal, inclusive ideals. I wept often and more copiously than I would have ever imagined...

During the process of all this, I was reminded of a profound prayer I heard on New Year's Eve 2016 that Victoria Safford also used in a sermon from last Spring titled "Powerless and Powerful" in which she spoke of the necessity of the revisioning and reframing of the context in which we live, and of the labor required in the process. This is a portion of what she wrote:

On the day following the 2016 presidential election, a young mother wrote a prayer that remains useful and instructive and healing even on day 590:

In our tears and agony, we hold our children close and confront the truth: The future is dark.

But my faith dares me to ask:

**What if this darkness is not the darkness of the tomb, but the darkness of the womb?**

What if our America is not dead but a country still waiting to be born? What if the story of America is one long labor?

What if all the mothers who came before us, who survived genocide and occupation, slavery and Jim Crow, racism and xenophobia and Islamophobia, political oppression and sexual assault, are standing behind us now, whispering in our ear: You are brave? What if this is our Great Contraction before we birth a new future?

**Remember the wisdom of the midwife:** "Breathe," she says. Then: "Push."

Now it is time to breathe. But soon it will be time to push; soon it will be time to fight for those we love: Muslim father, Sikh son, trans daughter, indigenous brother, immigrant sister, white worker, the poor and forgotten, and all the ones who cast their vote out of resentment and fear.

**Let us make an oath to fight for the soul of America with Revolutionary Love.**

We must fight and live and love with revolutionary love.

(“A Sikh Prayer for America on November 9, 2016” - by Valerie Kuar)

This question about birthing comes from Valerie Kuar, a young filmmaker and writer who holds degrees in theology and law, and who became a mother recently and became an activist 17 years ago when her uncle was murdered, the first American person killed in a hate crime after 9-11. You may remember: he was a Sikh, whose turban was a symbol of his faith, his devotion to a religion of nonviolence and peace, but which confused his killer into believing he was Muslim, as if that would make killing a person okay. Valerie Kuar became an activist for love as a college student. Among her radical activities has been work within her own family, finding a way after more than a decade to bring her cousins face-to-face with their father's murderer in prison, to hear him tell his own tragic story, and to offer him forgiveness. In these times, there are many ways to be a warrior for love.

Valerie's question in November 2016 came out of that same non-violent, visionary faith: **What if this is a moment that beckons us not toward despair but toward an unprecedented conjuring of resilient imagination and radiant clarity?** What if this is a moment now, in our country and our lives, not for resignation and regression, but for rebooting, recalculating our own capacity, as a people, for courage, commitment, collaboration? That isn't really a political question, though of course it plays out in political ways. **It's a religious question**, a moral question, a prophetic question, asked in the way that prophets of old would come into a town bifocally, saying, "Yes, I see the conditions here, and at the same time I see something else. I see the circumstances under which you live, the poverty, the resources spilled for war, the refugees, the racism, the hateful walls you build. (*This is how the prophets spoke.*) I see your apparent and appalling disinterest in affordable healthcare, affordable housing, affordable education, your strange systems of taxation which belie a preferential option for the rich. I see the despoiling of your water and your land." The prophet would come to town and say, "Oh, I see the world as it is, **but I also see the world as it could be**, the world as it should be, as it will be, **if you will only desire it and commit to it**, if you will only submit to your own spoken desire for justice, freedom, equity, compassion."

This question about our present darkness and whether we are in a dying time or birthing time, is a prophetic question. <https://whitebearunitarian.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/05-07-17-sermon.pdf>

While I lack a sufficient answer to this prophetic question – as I often do, finding myself instead with a growing collection of better and better questions (which is not at all a bad thing from a spiritual perspective) – the reframing possibility of the question itself gives me hope. So in lieu of adequate answers, I can at least leave you with a good story...

Thomas Friedman, in his book *Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist's Guide to Thriving in an Age of Accelerations*, retold this ancient Hebrew tale:

A rabbi once asked his students: "How do we know when the night has ended and the day has begun?" The students thought they grasped the importance of this question. There are, after all, prayers and rites and rituals that can only be done at nighttime. And there are prayers and rites and rituals that belong only to the day. So, it is important to know how we can tell when night has ended and day has begun.

So the first and brightest of the students offered an answer: "Rabbi, when I look out at the fields and I can distinguish between my field and the field of my neighbor, that's when the night has ended and the day has begun." A second student offered his answer: "Rabbi, when I look from the fields and I see a house, and I can tell that it's my house and not the house of my neighbor, that's when the night has ended and the day has begun." A third student offered another answer: "Rabbi, when I see an animal in

the distance, and I can tell what kind of animal it is, whether a cow or a horse or a sheep, that's when the night has ended and the day has begun." Then a fourth student offered yet another answer: "Rabbi, when I see a flower and I can make out the colors of the flower, whether they are red or yellow or blue, that's when night has ended and day has begun.

Each answer brought a sadder, more severe frown to the rabbi's face. Until finally he shouted, "No! None of you understands! You only divide! You divide your house from the house of your neighbor, your field from your neighbor's field, you distinguish one kind of animal from another, you separate one color from all the others. Is that all we can do - dividing, separating, splitting the world into pieces? Isn't the world broken enough? Isn't the world split into enough fragments? Is that what Torah is for? No, my dear students, it's not that way, not that way at all."

The shocked students looked into the sad face of their rabbi. "Then, Rabbi, tell us: How do we know that night has ended and day has begun?"

The rabbi stared back into the faces of his students, and with a voice suddenly gentle and imploring, he responded: "When you look into the face of the person who is beside you, and you can see that person is your brother or your sister, then finally the night has ended and the day has begun."

Hastening that heavenly day is the moral work of our generation.

Shalom and Salaam. Blessed Be and Amen.

### ***Closing Words***

We don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory.

*~ Howard Zinn*