

**To Be A People of Imagination
Unitarian Universalist Church of Yakima
Sunday, January 10, 2021**

Description for Newsletter and Update:

People of IMAGINATION

Our search for a better world begins by imagining the world we want with more justice, more peace, more love. What we imagine moves us forward and makes us better. In our personal lives, imagination can connect us to the sacred by helping us see and understand and know more than what is simply in front of us. Through the lens of imagination, we perceive the common as precious, even miraculous, and our “everyday” lives can be understood as amazing adventures.

Susan Kaphammer shares this message drawn from resources from the Soul Matters Series.

Spiritual Snack: from *In the soft light of this flame* by Rev. Scott Tayler

May the turning of year give birth to a dream.
May the emerging light pull a new story into view.
May what is, give way to what might be.
May we believe again in the world we imagine.

Zoom Service

Tech Host: Bill Jacobs

Celebrant and Message: Susan Kaphammer

Tech Intro and Reminders - Bill

Watch and allow entry to zoom session. Introduce self.

Please remember that although we are each in our own homes, this is a Sunday service. If you need to move around, you can turn off your video to avoid distracting others. You will need to unmute yourself if you wish to speak during joys and concerns or during discussion. At all other times, check that you are muted.

Call to Worship: - Susan

Good Morning. I am Susan Kaphammer, your celebrant and speaker. Our theme today is “Imagination.” May this sacred time together prompt us and prepare us to understand and meet the challenges of “A People of Imagination.” In the words of Gretchen Haley:

Cast your vision here
in the middle of the hardest moment
the turning of the new year –
this life with so much worth
saving, this fragile faith –
... the world as it is
with the threat of war and whole
continents burning
still, ...into this day,
offer the vision you’ve
tried to talk yourself down from,
your wildest dream,
your audacious aims,
the beauty that whispers to you
to follow, and build, and become.
For this world coming undone
by distraction, and greed
and fear – this world

divided by made-up borders
fake fights
and all that needs forgiveness –
Here, stir up your steadfast hope
your resolute clarity of what remains
possible – be generous
with your dreaming
and brave –
All paths to the future
are born in this courage
of imagination – this willingness
to shed, to salvage, to
start again
to be this blessing
for each other
to be this blessed.
Come, let us worship, together.

Welcome: - Susan

Welcome to our Zoom experience of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Yakima. Whether you come with a heavy heart or a joy-filled spirit today, we are glad you are here. We set aside our time together by joining Unitarian Universalists around the world in the ritual of lighting our chalice with our familiar words:

Chalice Lighting - Susan speaks; Bill shares screen for words.

We light this chalice in deep respect
for the mystery and holiness of life;
with honor and gratitude for all who have gone before,
with love and compassion for all who dwell among us,
and with hope and faith for the generations to come.

Our opening song is also familiar for many of us: *There Is More Love Somewhere* offered in a recording by the Foothills Unitarian Church. A traditional African American hymn, the words remind us that no matter how bleak our lives, a better world may be possible.

Check that you are muted, then feel free to hum or sing along, allowing your minds and hearts to be with the pain, longing and hope expressed.

Opening Song: *There Is More Love Somewhere*, #95 from our Hymnal (2:10)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zfHxmZT0ewk>

Sharing Joys & Sorrows - Susan

As we journey through life, each of us reaches high and low points. By sharing the peaks and valleys of our journeys and other significant events in our lives, our sorrows are lightened and our joys enhanced.

Let us know if you have a joy or sorrow you wish to share so you can be unmuted and speak briefly.

.... And let us acknowledge and honor the joys and sorrows that are unspoken, but kept in the confines of our hearts and minds.

Sharing our Generosity and Commitment - Susan

Imagine now, that baskets are passed to collect our contributions of time, energy intentions, represented by our financial giving. Remember to continue, as you are able, giving to the church in the spirit of love and sharing.

BEGIN RECORDING – Bill (*check that your zoom is in Speaker view*)

Message – Susan

A note about my talk as given and as written -- in the written version, which will be posted on our UUCY website, I have identified in the text the authors and titles of sources for all of the quoted material. To facilitate smoother delivery of the spoken message, I credit the sources of shorter quoted material here: Daniel Gilbert, book, *Stumbling on Happiness*; Thomas Moore, book, *The Re-enchantment of Everyday Life*; and Rev. Ashley Horan, “Another World Is Possible”.

“A People of Imagination.” What does this mean? What are the challenges and blessings of not just opening ourselves to imagination, but of strengthening our ability to imagine, of pursuing more active imagining, and of allowing our imagination to lead us to action.

In the midst of my preparation for this message, on Wednesday, January 6, I joined many of you, I am sure, as well as American and world citizens in witnessing what had previously been unimaginable. A riot, an insurgency, a violent coup – a mob stormed our capitol, terrorized our legislators, vandalized our national seat of democracy. To date, five are dead including the murder of a police officer and the shooting of a rioter trying to vault herself into the House of Representatives chamber.

The reports and images in the days since are stunning and heart-breaking. The “whats” of this day are being sorted out. The “hows” will continue to be investigated. And the “whos” and “whys” – well right now the answers to these continue to be at least partially subject to partisan interpretation. Accepting that this indeed happened in our country and determining “what’s next” is where this present concern intersects with today’s theme of imagination. I will circle back to consideration of what happened in Washington, DC later in this talk, but first let’s take a step back and consider more broadly our call to be a people of imagination.

Imagination is often relegated to children. Young children's imaginations are encouraged or at least tolerated and sometimes celebrated. "Shh; he still believes in Santa Clause... Tell us about your imaginary friend... Make up a story about your pet turtle..." Willy Wonka can sing about "Pure Imagination" because, with his childlike fascination with candy and color and master of the absurd, he is not completely an adult.

As a child advances in school and life becomes more serious, imagination is less valued and less often encouraged. "Stop daydreaming and do your homework." Nevertheless, for many children, if they are lucky, there are times and places where they can continue to exercise their imaginations – perhaps spaces outside, art rooms, libraries. While growing up I had two places – a crook in a large cottonwood tree about fifty yards from my house and a granite boulder down a slope from the house.

About six feet up from the ground, the first heavy branch of the cottonwood provided a seat while the trunk of the tree was a backrest, and it was to this "lounge chair" that I would bring my current book to read. It was far enough from the house that I had plausible deniability when Mom asked, "Didn't you hear me calling you to do this chore?" And it wasn't where my older or younger siblings typically hung out. Made more comfortable when I smuggled a pillow for my bum and another for my back, it was my spot to read and to imagine myself in those times and places and situations.

I also spent time there watching the bugs, usually ants, going about the warm summer afternoon, imagining where they had come from, where they were going, what they were doing. And looking up and out from the tree, seeing the blue Montana sky through branches with buds in the spring, overlapping and shimmering curtains of green leaves in the summer, and stark limbs in late fall. (The Montana winter wasn't a good time for sitting in the tree.) I remember looking up more than looking down from that tree. The ground seemed too, well, grounded, as my perch overlooked the path beside the pig pen I trudged on my way to change the sprinklers, the small irrigation ditch I periodically shoveled clear of weeds and debris, and the huge garden, every inch of which required planting, weeding and picking. So of course, with time on my hands by myself, I

looked up. And did you know, that if you are very still and you look up to the top of a very tall tree, you can see or at least sense the rotating of the earth. I am convinced to this day that this is not just my imagination!

My second spot, the granite boulder, was far enough down the slope that the house wasn't visible. The slope was uncultivated scrub, below was a hayfield, and up and ahead was the Sapphire Range that lined the east side of the Bitterroot Valley. Of course, there were neighbors visible between me and those mountains.. but if I squinted a bit the houses and barns and roads blurred and I could imagine myself alone with the boulder, the field and the mountains. This wasn't a reading spot for me; it was more of a sitting and being spot. As the sun set over the western mountains behind me, I could watch the line between sunlit and dusk move up the lower slopes and finally the upper reaches of the Sapphires. I don't recall specific imaginings, except perhaps the very precious sense that I was in my world, with my world, belonging. And that is a sense that cannot be felt until it is imagined.

I'll pause for a moment now to give us all a little time to remember, or to imagine, such times and places in each of our lives.

At least partly because of my childhood times and places that allowed for imagination, I found the children's book, *The Everything Seed*, speaking to me. No matter your background experiences, I encourage you to welcome your own childlike imagination and sense of wonder to take in the images and words of this book.

Story – Susan

The Everything Seed: A Story of Beginnings by Carole Martignacco,
Illustrated by Joy Troyer.

“Imagine how you / and all that is here / once came from / the tiniest speck / of an Everything Seed...” This reflects our seventh principle: Respect for the interdependent web of all existence.

We know that our natural world, of which we are only a part, is gravely at risk. Geneen Marie Haugen in her article, “Wild Imagination,” posits, “The mysterious human imagination itself may be our best resource for experiential recovery of a vibrant, participatory, and wildly sacred Earth.” She continues, “Once upon a time, waking visions, night dreams, messages from angelic beings or guardian spirits were regarded as true guidance, even for people of the Western world. In our own time, such guidance might be commonly regarded with skepticism or even ridicule.”

Yet, “Seasoned or intrepid explorers of the imaginal might return to the everyday world with images or experiences that make no sense to the ordinary mind, but which nevertheless become guiding, even life-altering, encounters.”

Geneen Haugen acknowledges the seductive distractions of the pervasive onslaught of images and words that may overwrite our own imaginations and program us “to believe, to want, to dislike, to crave, to shun, to desire.” There is danger in that, “Right now many of the images projected into the collective psyche are a nightmare of eco-degradation, governments unraveling, resource competition and violence – rather than a vision of a thriving Earth community, a collaboration of true visionaries, an honoring of the great mysteries of the cosmos.”

She recognizes that, “Political soap opera – as alluring and distressing as it is – may also be theater that distracts from the on-going diminishment of Earth’s life support system. It’s challenging to pull away from the narratives that are being determined for us, and to engage, instead, directly with the wild Earth, or with the deep imagination.”

For her, time in nature provides a lifeline. “I felt the nearly-excruciating revelation of waterlilies, butterflies, or the Milky Way as if they were guides toward a possible world, one where all human beliefs and actions were coherent with such splendor.” But, she assures, don’t despair if you cannot physically take yourself out onto the land, because we can use our “organ of perception called imagination...Even the modern mind can still access more free-ranging, wilder

perceptions. We can sometimes find that portal through radical, purposeful acts of imagination.”

“Radical, purposeful acts of imagination...” opening our path to again feel part of our natural world and thus be inspired and empowered to work for environmental justice.

Rev. Sandra Fees sermonized to her UU congregation, “the intentional practice of imagination” is also a requirement of spiritual growth. The “larger vision” we seek as a religious community “requires exercising imagination... to be able to hold out an image of what does not yet exist.” In our coming together we can encourage and support each other in our personal practices of imagining what we can be at our best, so that we may collectively “model and embody a new way of thinking and being.” With a nod to the Christian roots of our faith, I quote Walter Brueggemann, an Old Testament scholar, “The church meets to imagine what our lives can be like if the gospel were true.”

“If the gospel were true,” what would we be called to do in the arena of social justice? Here, too, imagination plays a critical role.

If we sing a hymn such as “There Is More Love Somewhere,” without an awareness of the lives and times from which it came, what is the point? Note that I introduced it as a traditional African American hymn, what used to be called a Negro Spiritual. The value and power and lesson for us is in imagining what might have been the thoughts and feelings, the days and nights and hardships of the people who felt compelled to sing. Imagine the longings, the temptations to despair, the triumph of enough faith to keep on. And understand how singing that there is more love, hope, peace and joy somewhere is a triumph of imagination, because nothing in their present lives held the promise of more.

The ability to imagine the lives and experiences of those who are different is essential in recognizing the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and practicing justice, equity, and compassion in human relations – our first and second principles of Unitarian Universalism. Martha Nussbaum, in her book,

Disgust to Humanity: Sexual Orientation and Constitutional Law, gives this example:

That 'terrified' gay teenager needs, and deserves, equal respect, and a sphere of liberty equal to that enjoyed by others. Before he is likely to get these things, however, something else also has to be present in our world: the capacity to imagine his experience and that of other gay and lesbian citizens. Disgust relies on moral obtuseness. It is possible to view another human being as a slimy slug or a piece of revolting trash only if one has never made a serious good-faith attempt to see the world through that person's eyes or to experience that person's feelings. Disgust imputes to the other a subhuman nature. How, by contrast, do we ever become able to see one another as human? Only through the exercise of imagination.

Yet, an opposite, dark, side of imagination can also arise. If, rather than imagining yourself in another's experience, your imagination is constrained by pre-conceptions and stereotypes, you may imagine the worst of others. Claudia Rankine succinctly states, "Because white people can't police their imagination, black people are dying." Adrienne Maree Brown expands on this:

We are in an imagination battle. Trayvon Martin and Mike Brown and Renisha McBride and so many others are dead because, in some white imagination, they were dangerous. And that imagination is so respected that those who kill, based on an imagined, radicalized fear of Black people, are rarely held accountable...

... Imagination turns brown bombers into terrorists and white bombers into mentally ill victims. Imagination gives us borders, gives us superiority, gives us race as an indicator of ability. I often feel I am trapped inside someone else's capability. I often feel I am trapped inside someone's imagination, and I must engage my own imagination in order to break free.

To what degree was this dark side of imagination limited by distorted expectations evident this past week? Contrast the Washington, DC of this past week, with the images from the Washington, DC Black Lives Matter protest last summer.

I'd like to think that my imagination for people and situations is open and compassionate. But I still have work to do.

I admit I am challenged in imagining my way to understanding the rioters. I want to share the feelings behind the comment that has been repeated several times by several people, "This is not who we are." I want to believe this, but I honestly can't quite buy it.

We might think that imagination yields possibilities, even fantasy. But imagination can also reveal what is real and true. To confront, "This is not who we are," I have to imagine the people at the capitol as fellow citizens, neighbors, maybe even acquaintances. This imagining helps me accept that this IS who we are. Not all of us all the time. But can I imagine the frustration, the sense of empowerment, the susceptibility that may be part of what moved these people? This does not, in any way, provide an excuse. But dealing with a cancer, whether in a body or a body politic, requires understanding the causes, the symptoms and the impacts.

As I said at the beginning of this talk, determining "What's next?" is served by imagination. To forge a new path, we must picture a different way. [Daniel Gilbert, exploring the power of imagination in his book, *Stumbling on Happiness*, explains] "To *imagine* is to experience the world as it isn't and has never been, but as it might be. The greatest achievement of the human brain is its ability to imagine objects and episodes that do not exist in the realm of the real, and it is this ability that allows us to think about the future."

[Thomas Moore, in *The Re-enchantment of Everyday Life*, wrote] "We tend to consider imagination too lightly, forgetting that the life we make, for ourselves individually and for the world as a whole, is shaped and limited only by the perimeters of our imagination. Things are [and become] as we imagine them to be, as we imagine them into existence."

First, is our belief that "Another World is Possible," then the imagination to conceive of the world, then the work to achieve it. [Written by Rev. Ashley Horan]

Another world is possible.
We say it, again and again,
even when the proof lies somewhere beyond the horizon,
beyond our reach,
beyond our imagination.
This is our faith:
Another world is possible...
...There are many routes toward liberation;
toward freedom.
But the abundance of options does not absolve us of
the responsibility of acting.
Another world is possible...

Exercise your imagination and let it serve you in connecting with the natural world, in prompting your spiritual growth, in bringing you hope, in seeing what is and what could be, and in growing your courage to reach that future you dream.

Our closing song, “Imagine” by John Lennon, is familiar and perhaps predictable in a service about imagination. After this difficult week I find some reassurance in the calm lyrics, “Imagine... It’s easy if you try... Imagine...It isn’t hard to do... You may say I’m a dreamer but I’m not the only one. I hope someday you’ll join us and the world will be as one.”

Closing Song: *Imagine* by John Lennon (3:08)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6svOHFSAH8>

In closing, I offer these words by Rev. Sara LaWall, “The Imagination Awakening Us to Possibility”

How do we pray for hope?
How do we bow down or look up
or sit in silence or walk among the trees
to make hope come alive,
when it feels so far beyond our grasp?
We breathe. We look within. We listen. We reach out.

We hold in the depths of our heart, that knowing
That hope is a gift we cannot destroy
It is the heartbeat always stirring within us
It is the imagination awakening us to possibility
It is the unfolding of faith in action.
May we hold on to hope
And carry it for one another
and for this broken and hurting world.
May we be vessels of comfort and compassion
May we be vessels of peace and justice
May we be vessels of hope and healing
May love prevail.

Extinguishing the Flame

We extinguish this flame
but not the light of truth,
the warmth of community,
or the fire of commitment.
These we carry in our hearts
until we are together again.