

***The Betrayal of Vision***  
**The Reverend Cyndi Simpson**

**A Sermon Given to the Second Unitarian Church of Omaha, Nebraska, September 16, 2018**

This month our theme is Vision. This can be understood in so many ways. With our Water Communion, we celebrated our Vision of being a people of Welcoming. Next week, Preston Love, Jr. will return to preach about the civil rights history tour for teenagers that he led this past summer. That is a tour we contributed to for our Share the Plate several months ago. Preston will be here to share the story of the tour and its Vision, and to tell us what the trip meant to the youth who journeyed.

In this congregation, we have our Dream, our Vision, of becoming a multicultural, multigenerational religious community that is a place of profound meaning and spiritual growth. A religious community that works to change the world. And each of us also has dreams and visions for our own live.

We have dreams, we have plans, we have visions. Yet, what happens when we do not accomplish our plans? What happens when our visions do not come true as we hoped and expected? Even when we've worked towards them? What do we do, as individuals and as a community, when that happens?

Let's start with a story that may be familiar to you, depending on your age. A cartoon story. It is the story of the desert dweller, Wile E Coyote. Wile E had a singular vision for his life – to destroy the Road Runner. Not sure why. Not sure what he hoped to accomplish. But Wile E yearned for this vision. And he tried. Over and over and over. He did not succeed.

Here's a bit of his story – we will see him on a very particular day, when something seemed to change for him. When something special happened.

**This** is the amazing moment of insight from Master Coyote.  
Let's read it together: "In Heaven's Name - - What Am I **DOING?**"

Coyote had that moment of insight regarding his vision. A moment of questioning his vision, of questioning his expectation of what he really wanted to do. What he was trying to accomplish. It was just a moment, though. Then, it was on as usual, to the usual end.

The lesson – when your vision seems to betray you by not coming to pass, no matter how hard you try. The place you start is with questioning your vision and what it does for you, what it means to you, what it means **FOR** you. And even to question whether it is a good vision in the moral or ethical sense.

To do this questioning is to engage in **awakening**. What Coyote had just a teensy bit of. What David Whyte wrote of in our Meditation. Writing about Sweet Darkness. Not the Darkness of failure. But the sweet, abundant and fruitful darkness where you can reflect. Where you can question your vision. Your dream of life. Who you are in relationship to that dream. The "What in heaven's name are you **DOING?**" reflection.

As David Whyte said in our reading this morning:

***When your eyes are tired  
the world is tired also.***

***When your vision has gone,  
no part of the world can find you.***

***It's time to go into the night  
Where the dark has eyes  
To recognize its own.***

John O'Donohue, the late Irish poet, author, and former Roman Catholic priest, speaks to what can come from your Sweet Darkness in his essay, ***The Question Holds the Lantern***. He talks about how vital it is ***to awaken to who you are and where you have landed***. To ask: "Who am I and how did I get here?" "What in Heaven's am I doing?"

O'Donohue writes of this spiritual work:

***Once you start to awaken, no one can ever claim you again for the old patterns. Now you realize how precious your time here is. You are no longer willing to squander your essence on undertakings that do not nourish your true self; your patience grows thin with tired talk and dead language. You see through the rosters of expectation which promise you safety and the confirmation of your outer identity. Now you are impatient for growth, willing to put yourself in the direction of change. You want your work to become an expression of your gift. You want your relationships to voyage beyond the pallid frontiers to where the danger of transformation dwells. You want your God to be wild and to call you to where your destiny awaits.***

In other words, as David Whyte says: when you start to awaken, what you learn is that ***Anything or anyone that does not bring you alive is too small for you.***

There's an important bit there, in O'Donohue's writing. ***You see through the rosters of expectation which promise you safety.*** The rosters of expectation.

Let's see where those ***rosters of expectation*** leads us as we wonder what can happen, what can we do, when our vision fails.

Teresa Shimogawa, who describes herself as a storyteller, feminist and human being trying to do good things, writes about what happens when your vision, your life expectations, do not come to pass. Like most of us, she had expectations of how her life was supposed to go. Her whole life – from beginning to end. Good career, a loving partner, four children – no more, no less, a house together. Her adult children would come by every year, bringing their own children for family celebrations. After a rich and long marriage, she expected that her husband would leave this world first and then she would join a travel group for old women and see the world with them.

We all have life expectations, life visions like that in some form or fashion. They are often linear, with accomplishments and achievements and joys following one after another. And, Teresa attained much of her vision by the time she was 34. She had a good career, a beautiful home, a loving partner. Three children, with the fourth scheduled!

And then, when she was 34, her husband died suddenly at home before breakfast one day. And in all her intense grief and being overwhelmed over the loss of her beloved partner, she experienced another grief – the grief of the loss of the life she thought she was going to live. Whether that particular grief happens at 34 or 54 or 74 – it is a very hard one.

And Theresa chose to go deeply into all of her grief. And see where that led her. This was not a sweet darkness experience in many ways, but there was awakening.

And she writes:

***It's such a disappointing, embarrassing revelation when you realize that you never actually had complete control. It feels like you were lied to. All of those years you spent with your first-world blinders on, thinking that you could plan every detail. It was cute while it lasted. Now it just felt stupid.***

***I realized what expectations really were.***

***Nothing.***

***My expectations were never real. They were nothing more than thoughts in my head. Assumptions. Desires. Never guarantees . . .***

***My expectations have been a thing that I've had to live with my entire life. I've always had high expectations for myself. Failure was not supposed to be a thing. As a widow, I found myself floundering in a new reality where I felt like I was constantly failing. Legitimately not capable of doing what I once could . . . It was impossible to get rid of the expectations completely. I'm only human. Besides, expectations do serve a purpose. They've helped me in life. They've also hurt me . . .***

***The middle ground, I decided, was finding "flexible expectations" . . .***

***I needed to be less attached to a prescribed way to live.***

Okay. We've heard from some wise and creative folks that the rigid roster of expectation, our actual VISIONS of how it's supposed to be. Whether they come from within or without, can pull us far astray. Should we not even HAVE dreams or Visions? Why would we want to, if all they do is trap us? Or betray us?

Peter Senge, who is a systems scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, helps us out. He writes:

***It's not what the vision is, it's what the vision does. In other words, rather than obsess about realizing my vision, consider it as a force for change, a way of aligning my actions with nature's unfolding. When you operate this way, what happens may not be exactly as you imagined it in your vision, but what happens would otherwise not have happened. You could hold a vision of a genuine perfection in some domain and, although you might never realize that vision, you might also achieve things that would have never been achieved otherwise . . . In this spirit, pursuing a vision is a way to live in harmony with your deeper intention. In this sense, vision is a tool for orienting our energies . . . But when we obsess about whether or not our exact vision is being achieved, we confuse the animating force behind our being with an idea created by our mind.***

Peter says:

***In this spirit, pursuing a vision is a way to live in harmony with your deeper intention. In this sense, vision is a tool for orienting our energies.***

We saw this in the story of the Ba'al Shem Tov. He went to the forest and lighted a fire and prayed a special prayer when the Jewish people were in danger. Those rabbis who came after him ultimately didn't remember any of his process or weren't able to do it. But their deeper intention, their true vision, was to save the Jewish people. It wasn't about the proper clearing in the forest. Or the fire. Or even the prayer. It was the deeper intention animating them that mattered.

So our visions are tools for orienting our energies. Does doing this thing or that thing send our energies towards our deepest intentions, our true vision? Then do this thing. Then do that thing. What animates you, what brings your spirit alive, is what matters. Not the expectations, the ideas created by our minds, the thoughts in our heads. Not those in and of themselves.

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All of this is true for groups of people, including religious congregations, as well. As you might remember, a while back the Prophet Pam Curtiss-Smith asked **why was it that this congregation doesn't do what we said we were going to do?**

This congregation has often struggled with that. And gotten distracted by something that was not its collective deepest intention. And then got stuck.

So reaching that beautiful dream, that vision, of being a multicultural, multigenerational, vibrant congregation that changes the people in it and the world around it. That is a deep and beautiful intention. In the spirit of that vision, all kinds of energy can be harnessed to move us there. Like building gender-inclusive, fully-accessible bathrooms on this floor, as a matter of love and justice. Right over there. Like refinishing our parking lot so it is safe and attractive for all the feet and paws and wheels that cross it.

Some of the things we might choose to do together may not obviously, or even actually, lead to our dream, but it is likely we will learn and grow from whatever happens. As long as our highest values and principles are our touchstones. Along with the rich and deep intentions of our shared vision.

For your spiritual homework, I invite you to spend some time in the Sweet Darkness. Ask yourself Master Coyote's question: "What – in Heaven's name – am I DOING?" Let that be your question. Let it be your prayer.

For our life together, in this religious community, I close again with the words of Margaret Wheatley:  
*There is no power greater than a community discovering what it cares about.*

*Ask: "What's possible?" not "What's wrong?" Keep asking.*

*Notice what you care about. Assume that many others share your dreams. Your visions.*

*Be brave enough to start a conversation that matters.*

*Talk to people you know. Talk to people you don't know. Talk to people you never talk to.*

*Be intrigued by the differences you hear. Expect to be surprised.*

*Treasure curiosity more than certainty.*

*Invite in everybody who cares to work on what's possible.*

*Acknowledge that everyone is an expert about something.*

*Know that creative solutions come from new connections.*

*Remember, you don't fear people whose story you know.  
Real listening always brings people closer together.  
Trust that meaningful conversations can change your world.  
Rely on human goodness.  
Stay together.*

So may it be. Blessed be. Amen.