

Community: Dreaming Big©
Sermon by Rev. Duffy Peet

Shared with the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Bozeman on March 18, 2018

Echoing Carol's comments from the beginning of our service today, welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Bozeman. We are a religious community we are a community of people from many backgrounds and many beliefs. We create spirituality and community beyond boundaries, working for more justice and more love in our lives and in the world. In other words, we dream big.

To offer a sense of just how big we dream, consider our Sixth Principle; "the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all." This is no small goal or dream. It isn't even medium sized. Actually, big is probably inadequate. Enormous or colossal might be more appropriate descriptors. When I consider the communities I am or have been a part of, all of them are tiny when compared to a community that encompasses every person in the world.

As I tend to think in pictures, I have considerable difficulty conceptualizing what world community might look like. When I attempt to imagine world community, I struggle to create a visual image large enough to include every single person on the planet. It is as if I'm trying to take a photograph and the lens on my camera is far too small. There seems to be no way to take in the immensity of what I am attempting to capture. To imagine world community I need a different angle. Peter Mayer, the person who wrote "Blue Boat Home," offers assistance as I seek to shift my perspective.

Some of you may know that I am an avid canoeist. So when I hear the word "boat" the first thing I think of is a canoe. Well, as I sing "Blue Boat Home" — especially the part about sailing the wide universe with my ships companions—the image of a canoe that pops into mind just won't hold everyone. Even replacing the canoe with a huge cruise ship fails. It not only fails, it sinks. So I turned to another of Peter Mayer's songs, one titled "Earth Town Square." In this song he tells of people the world over being part of one very large town square. Here is how he describes it:

At a little sidewalk fair
In Earth Town Square
There are Germans selling Audis
Filled with gasoline from Saudis
To Australians sipping Kenyan coffee in their Chinese shoes
Argentines are meeting Mongols
Over french fries at MacDonald's
And the place looks strangely tiny when you see it from the moon
And there's music in the park, kalimbas and guitars
Bagpipes and sitars
Now, it's feeling like a small town
With six billion people downtown

His suggestion to go out to the moon offered me the perspective change I was looking for. From the moon I can imagine everyone on Earth gathering for one large human family photo. That provides a much different image. I must admit though, the idea of

everyone gathering in a square didn't seem right to me somehow. All of the images I have seen taken of the earth from space are of a globe not a square. The square seemed out of place. No, a square just wouldn't do. The shape needed to fit with the image of the earth and more than that, I sensed the shape needed to be sacred. The words of Black Elk offered me the shape that was needed, the shape of the hoop or circle.

And I saw that the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that make one circle, wide as daylight and starlight, and in the center grew one mighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father. And I saw that it was holy.

With the shape of the circle replacing that of the square I could begin to imagine communities of people gathered together in circles, linked to one another, with infinite numbers of circles interconnected and covering the globe. There were no pointy corners that might poke anyone—only smooth rounded curves which could easily and comfortably overlap. The picture I began to see was that of an earth town round. It is probably evident by now that my path to this image was not a straight line but a circuitous route full of bends which offered opportunities to blend together ideas from various sources. In some ways it made me think of an immense spiral staircase.

It seems to me that by choosing the goal of affirming and promoting world community we, as Unitarian Universalists, are seeking to advance the spiral that others before us have imagined and sought to create. As Black Elk's quote makes clear though, we U. S. aren't the only ones who dream big. For centuries people of cultures from around the globe have been dreaming big and offering visions and hopes for a community that encompasses everyone on our planet.

Like Black Elk, Mo-Tse had big dreams as well. His sense of world community was somewhat different than the visual image Black Elk observed. For Mo-Tse world community emerges from and is nurtured by a feeling, the feeling of love. He recognized that in every community of whatever size love is strong enough, resilient enough, and flexible enough to form bonds which endure change and adversity. Love is the tissue that can hold us together. Love has the ability to heal the wounds that are part and parcel of every life. In the culture he was raised in the family and clan were considered to be the communities of highest value. He argued that people should care for all people equally. He taught the concept of "impartial caring" or "universal love." I find it interesting that Mo-Tse came to this awareness in spite of the fact that his parents demonstrated little love for him as a child. The two most important people in the circle of community he was born into paid little attention to him. This leads me to wonder who in the community of his early life provided him the love he needed to grow and thrive. Clearly he discovered that the community we enter at birth, the family, is not the only community that deserves our attention, loyalty and devotion.

I also find it interesting that both Mo-Tse and Black Elk lived during times in which wars were having a devastating impact on their cultures. Mo-Tse was born near the beginning of what is known as the "Warring States" period in China. As a young boy Black Elk experienced the devastation that was wrought on his people by the U.S. Cavalry and Government as westward expansion by white settlers washed over the

land. In spite of or possibly because of the devastation these two witnessed, both came to recognize the importance of community that was larger than anything they had ever experienced—a community that would include all people.

Visionaries such as Mo-Tse and Black Elk have been promoting the concept of all inclusive community for a very long time. The dream of world community, however, has not yet become a reality. For some, this would be reason enough to claim the dream is beyond reach, it is unreasonable, and we should give it up. I don't share that view. It seems to me that today many people have a more expansive concept of community than has been the case at any time in human history. The song "Earth Town Square" identifies one aspect of the expansion that has taken place.

Yet while our concept of community has grown, we continue to have many of the types of community that have been present for ages. We have family community, both nuclear family and extended family. We have circles of friends. There are communities related to work. And, like our gathering here, we have the hoop of religious communities. Each contains a select group of people. None of the small communities we are a part of can contain everyone.

Each community type I just mentioned seems to have a size limit—a size much smaller than the entire human race. How then can we ever hope to reach the goal of world community? We might find a way forward by uniting the teachings of Mo-Tse with the vision of Black Elk. There are so many people in the world that it is impossible for any of us to have the entire human population in one of our small or even our large circles. We will never come to know everyone. Yet while we can't know everyone, we can strive, within our heart, to feel love for every person who draws a breath. This is what Mo-Tse was teaching and it seems to me this was also the message of the Buddha and Jesus as well. What Black Elk adds to this is the image of the hoop and the idea of many hoops connected into one great circle. The Sioux elders I studied with for years taught me that the flowering tree Black Elk refers to symbolizes the tree of life. All of us are nurtured and supported by this tree. Just as the tree of life flowers and bears fruit, we too have the ability to flower and offer fruit. The most precious fruit we can develop and give back to the world is love and it is in our community circles that we have the opportunity to share the love we have.

How, you might wonder, does this help us reach the goal of world community? As I mentioned before, I think in pictures so I would invite you to take a moment to see what I imagine. Picture for a moment a small, circular pool of water with people sitting along its edge. The surface of the pool is calm and the people are peaceful and loving toward one another. Each person sits in silence wishing to convey to the others the love they feel. One person reaches down and picks up a small, smooth pebble and tosses it into the center of the pool. The pebble creates ripples which expand outward in a circle until they reach the shore. The people sitting by the pool smile. Slowly then, every other person tosses a pebble into the water. The ripples and the circles which are created overlap and entwine yet continue on until they too reach the shore. The ripples from each pebble intermingle creating beautiful patterns and then continue to all edges of the pond. This is what love does. It ripples out into and through the circles of our communities. But love doesn't stop at the boundaries of our community. It has the ability to continue to create ripples in the circles of other communities that touch our own. The more pebbles of love we toss into the pool of life the more ripples of caring wash over

and through the communities we are a part of. But the love we share doesn't always stay confined to the circle we are in. It has the ability to continually flow outward and onward through the lives of those who our love touches. In this way the ripples enter and travel through other pools and circles of community.

The dream of world community has been held by sages and visionaries for centuries. The teachings of Mo-Tse remind us of what it will take to make the dream a reality. It will take the best love we have to offer. The image that Black Elk has given us provides a focus when the goal seems beyond our reach. We can focus on the circles upon circles that make up the one great circle of all. Our task then, if we choose to accept it, is to keep the dream alive. The goal we seek is that someday all of the circles of community that exist will interconnect as a great circle of world community just as Black Elk was shown. Then his words will ring true around the globe. "Then I was standing on the highest mountain of them all, and round beneath me was the whole hoop of the world. And while I stood there I saw more than I can tell and I understood more than I saw. And I saw that it was holy."

So it is and so it shall be.