

“What Vision Will Guide Us?”©

Sermon by Rev. Duffy Peet

Shared with the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship on September 30, 2018

Harold had an idea. He wanted to go for a walk in the moonlight. Many people have had such an idea. Taking a walk in the moonlight holds a certain appeal. There was just one problem. There was no moon on the night Harold decided to take his walk. But that didn't stop him. You see, Harold didn't just have an idea, he had a vision and he had a purple crayon. By vision I don't mean what he could see with his eyes. No what I am referring to is Harold's ability to perceive something that was not visible or present. With his vision and his purple crayon, Harold not only took a walk in the moonlight, he had an amazing adventure. An adventure that was far beyond what he or we initially imagined.

The story illustrates what visions do. Visions take us places where we haven't been before. Places that we couldn't fully imagine or comprehend when we first began to follow the vision. Sometimes the vision takes us to places that are exciting and wonderful. Sometimes we find ourselves in places which are challenging, frightening, or possibly even disheartening. A vision definitely doesn't take us where we have always been before, where things are comfortably familiar.

Each of us has had a vision at some point in our lives. As children many of us would imagine what we were going to be or do when we grew up. The vision might have been as simple and time-limited as taking a walk in the moonlight when we became old enough to be out after dark. It might have been as involved and as long-term as changing the world for the better. As we grew up, our vision or visions probably grew and changed as well. It is quite likely that over time we let go of some of the visions we held at a younger age. Letting go of visions is something that is essential in order to adopt one that is even grander and more meaningful.

At some point in our lives most of us become part of a group with a vision. That group may not be large, it could be just two people. Any of you who are married or in a committed romantic relationship know about sharing a vision. A group may be just two people or it may consist of a great number of people. The number of people in the group is tied to the collective vision that is shared.

The founders of this country laid out a vision in the Declaration of Independence when they wrote, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” This vision of all men being created equal has become significantly more inclusive over the past 242 years. Today it isn't just all white men that, under the law, are considered to be created equal. Today what is written in the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights applies to women and men, no matter the color of their skin. Let me be clear. I am not claiming that we have attained the vision that is written in these documents. What I am saying is that today many more people identify with, and claim as their own, the vision that was set forth so long ago in these documents. I refer to these documents and what they contain to make a point. Collective visions can be shared by very large numbers of people and can last over an expansive period of time. A collective vision can contain a tremendous amount of power—power that can shape the course of millions of lives. It is

also important for us to remember that it was a rather small group of people who proposed the vision that is found in these documents. A group of people who have long since passed away. A collective vision isn't dependent on the person or persons who first expressed it. A collective vision, when it is clear and speaks to hopes and needs that are commonly held, is often easily accepted and adopted by greater and greater numbers of people. And it will live as long as it addresses the hopes and needs of those who hold and carry it.

With Harold, his purple crayon, and the founding documents of our country in mind, I want to shift focus to this Fellowship. I want us to consider the question that is the title of this sermon. What vision will guide us? It is important for us to consider this question because it was more than a dozen years ago that members of the Fellowship adopted the last Vision Statement. The title of that document, "UUFB Vision Statement... to be realized by 2015," indicates the reason I am asking us to focus on the question I just mentioned. The Vision Statement that has been our guiding light had an end date and that end date was three years ago.

The people who created that Vision Statement had a significant amount of foresight. I say that for a number of reasons. One reason is that they recognized the vision they had put to paper was not, and should not become, the grand vision of this Fellowship for all time. They were aware that the Fellowship would need to review and reimagine its vision years down the path. They understood that those who would take up the task of crafting the new vision would need to base it on the realities of a future time, the time we are currently at. Like Harold in the story, those who craft the new vision would need to consider whether the moon was out before they began their walk in the moonlight. I don't know if any of the people who wrote the "UUFB Vision Statement... to be realized by 2015" are present, but if they are, I would ask you to please stand or raise your hand if you would. The people who crafted this statement deserve a heart-felt thank you for the time, energy and imagination they invested in creating it.

A few moments ago I stated that the crafters of the Vision Statement had a significant amount of foresight. To support that assertion I will share with you some of what was written more than a dozen years ago. Following each quote I will provide information or comment on each of the quotes from the document.

I want to begin with the first sentence. "We envision our community as a mid-size congregation of 150-300 members and friends, growing, and recognized as a welcoming place for those who value our liberal principles." Some of you heard me say from this pulpit two weeks ago that our membership currently stands at 138. When I last checked our list of friends there were more than 80. We are well beyond the 150 members and friends that were envisioned. And we are definitely growing. More than that, we are recognized in this community "as a welcoming place for those who value our liberal principles."

The third paragraph begins with this sentence. "We meet in a large building, with adequate classrooms and a sanctuary space which can be modified for social activities." Look around. How would you assess our building in relationship to what this sentence states. I will point out that there is a very important something that is true about this building which is missing in this sentence. What is missing are the words, "our own." "We meet in our own large building..." Having a building of our own has been

a vision which many in this congregation have had for decades. I believe while it wasn't specifically written in the vision statement, it was implied. I say that because the sentence just prior to the one I just shared with you begins with "Our building..." and the first sentence of the following paragraph echos that language again when it states. "Our building is occupied almost every hour of the day and evening..." We haven't reached the point where our building is occupied almost every hour of the day and evening yet but our building is definitely being used a lot. Our space is being used so much that some UUFB activities and events are difficult to schedule. As a result, we are already needing to revise our Building Use Policy which is less than a year old.

The following paragraph begins with this sentence. "Our justice activities are focused in one area of need which was determined by the Social Justice committee." Before I began my ministry here in 2015 the Social Justice Committee had not met in many months. Today we have an active and engaged Social Justice Committee that has encouraged and empowered us to engage more than "one area of need" as our focus. When this Vision Statement was written none of us could have foreseen the current situation in our country or in our world. If our attention to issues of social justice are going to be both meaningful and significant, we need to have the flexibility to shift our focus when the need arises. That said, we continue our long-term support of the Fork and Spoon Café and Family Promise. And as we are doing today, we donate our offering plate on the second and fifth Sundays of each month to organizations that put into action our beliefs and hopes as a Fellowship. Prior to today's offering we had already given away more than \$7,200 to feed the hungry, provide for the poor, and offer support services for those who are in abusive relationships as well as those who have mental illness. These are only a few of the areas our efforts and our money has been directed toward.

There is much more in the Vision Statement that I could speak about but our service time is limited. We have accomplished much, but not all, that is contained in the Vision Statement I have been referring to. We deserve to feel very good about what we have accomplished. Now, with our accomplishments in mind, we can begin to look to the future. The future of this Fellowship is in our hands, our hearts and our imaginations. Very little has been decided yet about the process we will go through to create a new Vision Statement. Like our new Mission Statement, it is likely that many people will be asked for their input before a final version of the new Vision Statement is adopted.

The time has come to reimagine what this Fellowship will look like, act like and feel like 10 to 15 years from now. Like Harold, it is time for each of us to get out our crayon box and pick our favorite color. And once we have chosen our favorite crayon, we need to make sure it is sharpened and ready to go because we have a vision to draw up together. A vision that will guide us as we continue our journey together. A vision that will allow us, as a Fellowship, to become what today we can only begin to imagine.

So may it be.