

"Six Words Can Uplift Our Spirits"

January 30, 2022

Welcome and Lighting of Chalice - Margaret Rieser & UUFES Youth

Welcome. Here we seek justice and truth and understanding.
Here we celebrate life and contemplate mystery.
Here we seek healing and wholeness. Welcome, all.

Centering - "Arrane Y Ven-Thie (Invocation to Brigid)"

Traditional Manx for Imbolc

Performed by UUFES Music Director Shana Aisenberg

Shared Affirmation

Hymn - "Step By Step"

A Time for All Ages - Alice Posner

Many people find hope in children, and I agree. I also think we need to present them with hope. I don't think this has to be completely sheltering them from hard things in the world, which obviously varies depending on their age, or presenting a completely sanitized version of life. I think it can be the small reframing of language and ideas that can be so helpful. Sometimes it only takes a few words, six perhaps, to transform something hard into a message with more hope. Without hope we are unable to move. Where there is hope, there is agency, possibility, the ability to act.

My daughter loves a song - "the north wind will blow" you may know it, (and we shall have snow) and it talks about how a robin will shelter in the barn when it gets cold, ending with a sweet, "poor thing, poor thing." We changed it one day so the second refrain instead says "clever thing" and it shifted the whole energy of the song and her eyes lit up. She still cares about the robin, but as a scrappy survivor of winter, instead of a victim of the world and the weather.

I've been getting together with some other parents through the pandemic in an outdoor play group. We get together in most every kind of weather, which at the moment means the adults huddle around a small fire, as the children play for hours in the snowy landscape around us. We've tried many kinds of organized activities, circles and games, but what seems to work best is when we leave the children to play, as they come up with their own wonderful ideas, and the adults get out of the way by cooking lunch over the fire.

This was not the early childhood experience any of us expected to have with our children, but with a small pivot, and a willingness to go with the flow, we stopped trying to control everything so carefully, because we could not. We instead accepted the gifts of space and supplies: a fire pit, old kitchen implements for snow toys, from other well wishers, and we have created something that I think will continue to work, is resilient, and will get us through the winter without isolation. This may seem like a small, short sentence in life, but the words of one text a parent sent out recently really summed it up for me (this is paraphrased):

"I am so grateful for such a wonderful, easy going, welcoming and uplifting circle of folks on a regular basis. Today was so fun. It's a bright light in all this craziness of the times we are in. It's such a joy to get to know everyone more and more."

This short text made my day, and I am grateful how these small moments, statements, events, can pivot us towards hope.

I will end with a very short hopeful book of well, often six word phrases, which perhaps good board books are really, unsung masters of. This is “The Peace Book” by Todd Parr.

Reflection - Hope Hutchinson

As a child I liked my given name and it's alliteration with my last name. (My parents didn't give me a middle name.) I didn't mind when people sang to me “high-i-i hopes” or asked if my sisters were named Faith and Charity. I mistakenly misquoted Corinthians saying, “Faith, hope, love abide, these three; the greatest of these is hope.” When I was young, I did not think of Hope as an intention or a charge. I just liked that it was a nice, unique, easy to spell name. I didn't/don't mind when I'm called Faith or Holly - which happens.

When I was a senior in high school, soon to graduate with no direction in mind, no wish to go to college, no career or life goal, “hope” was in limited supply. I decided my middle name should be Lesley. I reported it as such to my high school. My diploma reads “Hopelesley” Hutchinson. A few years later when my adult life was beginning to take shape a dear older friend told me my middle name should be “full.” It began to take hold - I became more and more hopeful.

I've also come to understand that hope is not just a feeling – it is an action. Hope is optimism and faith in the future if it comes with both expectation and action.

On a bike ride I hope to reach my destination each day whether that is 10 miles away or 60. My action – pedal. I hope to live in a country which supports the underdog, provides for the needy, maintains good roads, works to lessen climate change. My actions – vote, serve on a town committee, drive less, write to my congressmen. I hope to remain close to my geographically scattered friends and family. My actions – write letters, make phone calls, send cookies.

Nelson Mandela said, “May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears.” So confront your fears, the dark places in your soul, the negative news on the radio, the uncertainty of our times. Decide what can be done to change your own life, and your community. Ellen Farnum has improved the recycling program in Tamworth, Nicole Nordland has created a new community gathering place in Madison, two women are working to increase the affordable housing stock in Conway.

Cheryl Strayed, the author of the book WILD, wrote' “You will learn a lot about yourself if you stretch in the direction of goodness, of bigness, of kindness, of forgiveness, of emotional bravery. Be a warrior for love.” I'll misquote her and say - be a warrior for hopefulness.

My hopeful 6-word stories:

Energizing Water - summer swim, winter dip

Bicycle - exercise, transportation , exploration, friendship, fun
My hand made cards send love

Musical Interlude - "All Shall Be Well"

Words by Julian of Norwich, music by Shana Aisenberg

"All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well."

Joys & Concerns - " Prelude #21" by Frederic Chopin

Played by Eve Goss

Hymn - "Spirit of Life"

Prayer and Meditation

Dear Source of Wisdom and Love: We are grateful to be together this morning, grateful to have survived yesterday's storm, and feeling compassion for those who may not be faring as well as we are this morning. Our hearts reach out with tender love and care to the families of Mark Allen, and Ted Osgood, two members of our community who died recently. Death is a mystery that many of us wish we understood better, but since we don't, we must bind together during times of incomprehensible loss. In light of this, may we act as a source of hope to each other through hard times and learn to let go when we must.

Spirit of life, may we continue to be a comfort to each other, and to find joy where we can. We've made it halfway through this winter season. May we enjoy the snow and set our hopes on the coming spring. And if we lose sight of spring, just ask the foxes. They know it's coming.

Reading: "Letter to Someone who Believes the Future of Humanity is Bleak" by E.B. White
North Brooklin, Maine

30 March 1973

Dear Mr. Nadeau:

As long as there is one upright man, as long as there is one compassionate woman, the contagion may spread and the scene is not desolate. Hope is the thing that is left to us, in a bad time. I shall get up Sunday morning and wind the clock, as a contribution to order and steadfastness.

Sailors have an expression about the weather: they say, the weather is a great bluffer. I guess the same is true of our human society—things can look dark, then a break shows in the clouds, and all is changed, sometimes rather suddenly. It is quite obvious that the human race has made a queer mess of life on this planet. But as a people we probably harbor seeds of goodness that have lain for a long time waiting to sprout when the conditions are right. Man's curiosity, his relentlessness, his inventiveness, his ingenuity have led him into deep trouble. We can only hope that these same traits will enable him to claw his way out.

Hang onto your hat. Hang onto your hope. And wind the clock, for tomorrow is another day.

Sincerely, E. B. White

Reflection - Margaret Rieser

I believe that hope is essential. And that it is born of suffering, of struggle. E.B. White writes that "hope is the thing that is left to us in a bad time." Why did enslaved African Americans

sing, “There is more love somewhere”? Because singing together must have provided a feeling of hope; a sliver of a reason to get up in the morning.

At times in our lives, hope does come in slender threads. Edith Egar, a survivor of the Holocaust writes that “In Auschwitz, when hopelessness overwhelmed me, I’d think of what my mother had told me in the dark, crowded cattle car on our way to prison: “We don’t know where we’re going. We don’t know what’s going to happen. Just remember, no one can take away what you’ve put in your mind.” In order to honor the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, which was January 27th, let’s stop and consider Egar’s mother’s words. No matter how bad things get, “no one can take away what you’ve put in your mind”.

When hope is all but gone, we still have our imaginations, our thoughts, our memories. Hope does not mean distorting or whitewashing reality until we believe things aren’t so bad. Hope means acknowledging the brutal world and choosing to put into your mind things that will keep you going. Even if it’s simply remembering the apple blossoms in the spring. Or singing together that we shall overcome someday. Or sharing a 6-word story of hope.

Several weeks ago, the Sandwich Board was going through a difficult spell, related to people expressing conflicting beliefs about the pandemic with no resolution in sight. The Sandwich Board is a Google group on which folx who care about the town of Sandwich share information. In order to break the spell of negativity, a member of the board offered this: “I present a community challenge. Write a 6-word story that is hopeful. NO POLITICS OR COVID ALLOWED.” What emerged from this challenge felt like magic. The change in the energy on the online board was palpable. Thoughtful UUFES member Melanie Hodge shared the challenge with the Tamworth Exchange, another local Google group. Members of both towns were off and typing, and over a hundred stories poured in. Actually they weren’t all stories. No matter. Some were reminders, words of encouragement, or observations. What matters is that the writing of each one was an action geared to self-expression, and to bring meaning to other people. People responded with joy and delight. Such energy! And we all started communicating in 6-word sentences.

One neighbor, Richard Posner, commented: “This is a perfect example of what I term ‘Citizen Poetry,’ an outpouring from the poet I believe is in all of us. My definitions of poetry include ‘language at its most concentrated’ and ‘truth as it happens,’ and a six-word one-liner fulfills the criteria accurately. [With the outpouring of these stories, he observed,] a dam of gloom broke, and a lot of pent-up humanity and hope broke forth with joy.”

I’ve been considering hope lately. What is it? How do we experience it more deeply? Why is it such a lifeline? I found this 6-word challenge fascinating, important and hopeful.

As a person in training to be a Unitarian Universalist minister, I have been charged at my seminary with developing my own theology, my belief system, my faith. I ask myself, what is it that drives me to work to be a better person? To support others in their journey to be better? In my own small way to make the world a more just place?

Hope. The belief that one can act to make things better in some way, which is in contrast to

optimism, the belief that things will turn out all right with no need for action on our part.

What do we mean by action? What must we do to rescue hope from being idle optimism? I believe the actions we can take that allow us to feel hope are many and varied. It can be marching at the statehouse. Signing a petition. Composting your food waste. As E.B. White reminds us, winding the clock. Planting seeds. Walking the dog. Reading a book about antiracism, or about anything for that matter. Making an effort to get a good night's sleep. Singing. Writing a 6 word story of hope. Sharing that story with your community.

The Morning Offering - "Hope Comes" (by The Bengsons)

Community Response

Hymn - "My Life Flows on in Endless Song"

Extinguishing of Chalice

Benediction

I remind us of E.B. White's admonition: "Hang onto your hat. Hang onto your hope. And wind the clock, for tomorrow is another day."

Postlude - "Well May the World Go" (Lyrics by Pete Seeger, music traditional)

This service can be viewed until April 30, 2022 at:

https://uuma.zoom.us/rec/share/LVkvXsOGrOhCth2IIWT6B3Uqlo1JInlo41e-9pfQbB0AQB6AMo-QGE3j_zEXdZ-f.krnSYZoiBANWMzn7

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