

# *Hope*

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

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In the past, I have undergone periods of deep depression. These are times that are prominently marked by the fact that I am unable to have any hope. During these times, my future seems utterly bleak and empty. Months pass in meaninglessness until suddenly a subtle undercurrent of hope returns to my outlook on life.

About 7 years ago, I had been living for many months in a profound state of depression, during which I was sure that nothing good could come out of my life, just by virtue of who I was as a person. But one day I found myself online, searching the Bath Bed and Beyond website for items to newly furnish the home I shared with Rod.

Rod would tell me later that he knew my depression was on the wane when he noticed me searching for cushions and rugs that would make our living space cozier to live in – in the *future*. I was once again able to feel that life could be worth living, that life was worth *planning* for, that life could be meaningful. Hope was returning to me, even if I hadn't been able to realize it myself at first. And something striking was that it

was returning without much effort on my part. Also, once hope had been re-established in my psyche, it was as if it had never left.

I suppose I'd never really thought very much about what hope actually is. Perhaps I'd taken it for granted that, as American poet Emily Dickinson wrote,

*“Hope” is the thing with feathers -  
That perches in the soul -  
And sings the tune without the words -  
And never stops - at all –*

But, As I've already illustrated, there have been times when hope *has* stopped for me. This fact got me thinking: If hope is such a crucial part of life, how, then, was I able to continue? The conclusion I came to is this: the people who love me – Rod, my family, my friends – held onto hope in my stead when I could not. They nurtured a sense of hope in the world – as well as maintaining hope in me myself, believing that life was abundantly worthwhile, and believing that I was a worthwhile person – and that I had the capacity to recover.

But it took hard work and dedication for my loved ones to keep hope within their grasp. It took being very intentional and it took pushing forward, even when I made that difficult for them, even if unintentionally, because of my hopeless outlook.

Upon reflecting on this, I realized two things: 1) that my understanding of hope is that it is fostered and maintained through connections and community, and 2) that hope requires hard work. Mariame Kaba, an American activist and educator whose work focuses on transformative justice, among other things, conceives of hope as a discipline. This resonates with me. If I am to truly embody hope, I need to make my goals clear and to dedicate myself to achieving them.

But I think it's important to make a distinction between hope and optimism. As described by Arthur Brooks in his column for the Atlantic:

*Optimism is the belief that things will turn out all right; hope makes no such assumption but is a conviction that one can act to make things better in some way*

Dr. Jane Goodall, who was featured in the video clip I played earlier, is someone who has very much made the world a better place. She is also a profoundly hopeful person. She is acutely aware of the trauma and turmoil that envelops our world, and she is not entirely optimistic about the future of our planet but she has, throughout her long and illustrious career, worked exceedingly hard to bring about change.

Dr. Goodall is perhaps best known for her ground-breaking work demonstrating that chimpanzees use tools, but her legacy goes so far beyond that, including conservation work and seemingly tireless activism that has inspired people around the world to themselves take action.

One thing she has done is to found an educational program called Roots and Shoots that inspires young people to realize their capacity for bringing about environmental change in the world, and although Roots and Shoots began in 1991 with 12 students in Tanzania, there are now Roots and Shoots groups running in over 100 countries.

Goodall has stated that her reasons for hope are human intellect, the resiliency of nature, when given a chance, the enthusiasm and determination of young people when they know the problems and are empowered to take action, and the indomitable human spirit. As someone who works with children on a daily basis, I very much agree with her assessment of the enthusiasm and determination of young people! There is so much zeal and strength and character, and indomitable spirit in each infant I have the privilege of interacting with.

An older demographic than infants, but still quite young, is Generation Z, people born between roughly 1997 and 2012. This is painting them

with a broad brush, I know, but a couple key characteristics of this generation include that, more than previous generations, they embrace diversity, and that they are politically progressive. I find this to be profoundly hopeful.

Members of Generation Z who are making real change in the world include indigenous water-defender Autumn Peltier, climate activist Greta Thunberg, and Malala Yousafzai, who won the Nobel Peace Prize for her work on children's rights to education. Each of these remarkable individuals has been instrumental in inspiring entire movements full of people supporting each other in doing the work of hope – and holding hope for each other when they veer toward hopelessness.

My hope is that we may all hold hope for one another, as a community of generosity, dedication and love.

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### *Suggested Hymns:*

#### **Opening Hymn #347 Gather the Spirit**

~)-| Words & music: Jim Scott, 1946- , © 1990 Jim Scott

GATHER THE SPIRIT 9.9.9.10 with refrain

#### **Meditation Hymn #344 A Promise through the Ages Rings**

~)-| Words: Alicia S. Carpenter, 1930- , rev., © 1983 Alicia S. Carpenter

Music: Severus Gastorius, c. 1675, ed. by A. Waggoner

WAS GOTT THUT 8.8.8.8.8.

#### **Hymn #161 Peace! The Perfect Word**

Another accompaniment, 213

Words: Odell Shepard, 1884-1967

Music: From *The Southern Harmony*, 1835, harmonized by Alastair Cassels-Brown, 1927- , arr. © 1982 The Church Pension Fund

CHARLESTON 8.7.8.7.

#### **Closing Hymn #95 There Is More Love Somewhere**

Words & Music: African American hymn

BIKO 6.6.9.6.