

## ARE YOU COMMITTED TO THE FUTURE?

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Are you committed to the future?

The message this morning from the Gospel of Mark is about being committed to the future: "The time has come; the kingdom of God is upon you; repent."

It's hard to hear Jesus words. Two thousand years later, after these words have been interpreted in myriad ways, there is so much history, so much baggage. Jesus himself said that those listening to him would see this Kingdom. From that day to this, people have gone to mountain tops anticipating a bang, but gotten only an ordinary Sunday morning.

As Unitarian Universalists, we take the Bible as stories by human beings for human beings. We don't take it literally. Or we say we don't. But with all the historical connotations, when we hear the phrase, "The Kingdom of God is at hand" many of us may visualize a NEW YORKER cartoon with a prophet of doom holding up a sandwich board.

Maybe we are only trying to distance ourselves.

In our reading this morning from Alice Walker, the Hopi Elders use another metaphor, a metaphor from Nature rather than civilization:

There is a river flowing now very fast  
It is so great and swift that there are those who will be afraid.  
They will try to hold on to the shore. They will feel they are being torn apart and they will suffer greatly.

Is it possible to not be afraid, to not think about holding onto the shore? Our politicians today play upon our fears to promote their own ambitions. Is our nation going to bomb Iran? Or is this fear mongering? Has Halloween become our national holiday? No more Mr. Nice Guy; it's Trick or Treat all the way, 24/7?

What about illegal immigrants? Good Lord, what spooks are under the bed, knocking at our front doors and wandering around in back yards. Many politicians and news anchors say, send them back where they came from. Twelve million illegal aliens, send them back? Has Lou Dobbs told you his plan for rounding up twelve million illegal aliens? It took the combined efforts of Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin to kill that many people in the twentieth century. Is that the path America has set out on? We live in anxious times. Let's keep our heads above water.

When does fear-mongering turn into reality? What kind of future are you committed to?

When Jesus spoke of a coming Kingdom of God, it was something to look forward to. Not easy, for sure, hard to repent. But something that would be good, something that people might commit too. It was a narrative constructing the future.

If we understand that Jesus was talking in metaphor, in parable, we can hear him saying, instead of the Kingdom of God is coming, Jesus is saying, We're in the midst of an awesome paradigm shift.

An awesome paradigm shift!

Are you with this paradigm shift? Or are you holding on to the old paradigm? Are you Newtonian or Einsteinian? Are you going with the flow or clinging to the shore?

The Hopi Elders' message is the same as Jesus':

Now we must go back and tell the people this is the Hour.

Paradigm shift! Kingdom of God is coming! The river is flowing very fast. And they say "we must let go of the shore, and push off and into the river, keep our eyes open, and **our head above water.**"

This is what the Inuit Shaman Uvavnuk has taught:

The great sea has set me in motion,  
Set me adrift,  
Moving me like a weed in a river  
The sky and the strong wind have moved  
The spirit inside me  
Till I am carried away  
Trembling with joy.

So it is to not be controlled by our fears, our head above water.

Are you committed to the future? Have you let go of the shore and pushed off?

The Hopi Elders are embedded in Nature. The strange figure of John the Baptist is also a figure close to Nature. He comes out of the wilderness to preach repentance and baptize Jesus. How curious he must have looked to the city dwellers, dressed in a rough coat of camel's hair with a strap of leather around his waist; he ate locusts and wild honey. As with the American indigenous peoples, a simple diet; in a place of magical thinking why not think of John the Baptist as Druid who lost his way to Stonehenge on Samhain 30 AD.

Part of John's teaching is of repentance, of forgiveness. To be committed to the future, we need to repent, to forgive and be forgiven.

So too preach the Hopi Elders

If we are to move with the paradigm shift of a new heaven and a new earth, we must let go. And then this most remarkable advice

At this time in history, we are to take nothing personally. Least of all, ourselves. For the moment that we do, our spiritual growth and journey comes to a halt.

Living in the midst of change, living in paradigm shift, it's going to hurt at times, be painful. Friends won't always understand us. Old jobs disappear and new ones appear somewhere else. It hurts. When we hurt, we want to strike out, get a fix for our pain and suffering.

But really, it's not about you. How, how easy it is to resent that! What do you mean it's not about me? I've invested so much of myself, and whack, the foundation shakes under my feet, and you tell me it's not about me?! Why does it hurt so much?

It's not about you. Don't take it personally. It's the grass growing through cracks in the pavement.

The Elders teach that if we are to continue on our spiritual journey, we must not take our pain, our suffering personally. We repeat over and over again, it's not about me. It's not about me. I'm committed to the future. It's not about me. It's about...I hope it's about generations to come, about a green blue dot in the sky.

The Elders teach us not to take it personally. Jesus, John talked about forgiveness.

An elderly Jewish man visited an old friend, one he had gotten to know in a Nazi Concentration camp years previously. They talked. At one point, he asked his friend, have you forgiven the Nazi's. No, never, his friend responded angrily. I have, the other answered. If you've not forgiven them, he continued, they still have you in your prison cell.

Forgiveness, it's the only way to let go of the shore and push off into the waters. Are you committed to the future? Forgive the past. Move on.

The Elders teach, "At this time in history, we are to take nothing personally. Least of all, ourselves. For the moment that we do, our spiritual growth and journey comes to a halt."

Perhaps you have family or friends who live in San Diego County, California. Have the great fires out there been about them, has god sent his vengeance upon them for their naughty ways? I don't think so. There've had intensive fires in Greece also this year. With global warming, it's the same sort of environment. Greece is part of a Mediterranean climate system. And what you see there is that those very harsh conditions that characterize the Sahara to the south are now attempting to move northwards. You know, the climate is shifting, such that those conditions are going to prevail further

northwards. So, this is part of a global picture. Australia is also seeing extreme wildfires for the same reason. <http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=07/10/25/1454240>

Are you committed to the future?

My step-daughter and her partner live in Atlanta, Georgia. I was talking yesterday with Cliff Shisler and Linda Heath who were in Athens, Georgia, visiting their grandson. Both tell us of the lack of water in Georgia. An unprecedented drought stretching across the southeastern United States has forced some of the region's largest cities to declare water emergencies.

The situation has become so serious that officials in Atlanta, where rainfall totals are more than 16 inches below normal, said they could run out of drinking water in a matter of weeks.

States and cities downstream from Atlanta also depend on Georgia water for supplies. Both an endangered species of bivalve – a favorite food of the blue heron -- and Alabama's Farley Plant, a twin-reactor nuclear generating station also depend on these water supplies. So the beginnings of water wars, long known to the west coast and the Middle East.

Such stories are more than enough to stoke our fears, to tempt us to cling to the shore of the past in hopes that we can find immunity in some encapsulated boat somewhere. Such has always been the temptation, that if we can separate ourselves from the rest of humanity, we can escape the fate of those other people. We seek some other sort of transcendence, one that does not need other people.

On space ship earth, there is no escaping to some safe place, some boat where the paradigm shift of our time, the rushing river will not come by us. It is thus easy to be fearful, because the task seems overwhelming. But we have to remember, as the Hopi Elders say, not to take it personally.

Among other things, that means we don't have to do it all. All we need to do is our part. The Elders urge us all to work on our spiritual journeys. An important part of that is enhancing our connection with nature. Both our Christian and scientific traditions have emphasized our separation from Nature. There are deep roots in Christianity of escaping from this veil of tears, a world which is not beautiful. It is not a vision of sweet fields of autumn but pain and toil. The sweat of our brow as Genesis says; not celebration and hope. Science has responded with a fantasy of controlling the veil of tears, transforming it into a garden of consumer delights.

We need to consider that a connection with Nature is not lost in the Biblical Narrative. For as in the Gospel of Mark we heard that John the Baptist was a simple man of nature, eating locusts and wild honey. And also, after his baptism, what did Jesus do? He went on retreat into nature. "Thereupon the Spirit sent him away into the wilderness" says the narrative.

But the brevity of these references to nature reveal to us that humanity was becoming urbanized, losing connection with our natural roots. Because of fear, driven by ambitious leaders, priests and emperors, people were encouraged to seek solace in another world rather than make justice visible in the only world we share with one another.

Because so much of our culture and religiosity has emphasized we're not part of nature, that we are separate from the birds and the bees, we need now in paradigm shift, to let go of fear based religions and seek again nature loving faiths.

The pre-Christian world was nature based. So at Halloween we need to be restored to our right minds and if only registered for a moment, that Halloween is not just another Hallmark holiday, but has roots in pagan celebrations that embedded our ancestors in the natural world.

In old Celtic times, in ancient Ireland, the rites were known as Samhain.

In the country year, Samhain marked the first day of winter, when the herders led the cattle and sheep down from their summer hillside pastures to the shelter of stable and byre. The hay that would feed them during the winter must be stored in sturdy thatched ricks, tied down securely against storms. Those destined for the table were slaughtered, after being ritually devoted to the gods in pagan times. All the harvest must be gathered in -- barley, oats, wheat, turnips, and apples -- for come November, the faeries would blast every growing plant with their breath, blighting any nuts and berries remaining on the hedgerows. Peat and wood for winter fires were stacked high by the hearth. It was a joyous time of family reunion, when all members of the household worked together baking, salting meat, and making preserves for the winter feasts to come. The endless horizons of summer gave way to a warm, dim and often smoky room; the symphony of summer sounds was replaced by a counterpoint of voices, young and old, human and animal. <http://www.chalicecentre.net/samhain.htm>

The paradigm shift we are living in, the new paradigm, is that we are children of Mother Nature. Can we, will we build a future on that insight? The answer to that question hinges on only one thing:

Are you committed to the future?

There's a new world acoming! Are you with it?