**Your Mission if You Choose To Accept It**  Rev. Jo Green

Our theme this month is mission, the mission of this congregation, of Mission Peak Unitarian Universalist Congregation. What is our mission? And do we choose to accept it? Do you still belong if you don’t? This Sunday we will explore what the mission of this community is and we will also rejoice in those new members officially joining us this morning in our Ingathering Service.

Imagine. Let’s all close our eyes for a moment. Take a deep breath. Now let it out slowly. Take one more deep breath. Now let it out slowly. Let’s imagine.

Let’s look at a new world. Keeping your eyes closed, what do you see? What do you feel? There’s a sun still shining down on us, blue sky above, white billowy clouds floating across the blueness. There’s a feeling of warmth, a feeling of peace, a feeling of calm, a feeling of happiness. As John Lennon said, without any countries, there’s no land to defend, no land to fight and die for. No religion to convert others to, to defend against non-believers or those who want to destroy your belief system. No keeping up with the Jones’s, no overconsumption of goods or food or sex or drugs. A feeling of contentment, a feeling of peace, a feeling that we are all one with one another. He dreams this in his lyrics and I follow him into his dream.

You can open your eyes now, or you can keep them closed.

I can see a world like that someday. I can’t see it today. With all that is occurring in our world today, I don’t see the possibility. But I look to the future and know that someday, someday that could happen. And I want to be a part of that and I want to help make it happen.

That’s mission. An overarching idea encompassing the creation of peace amongst all religions, peace amongst political and cultural entities, peace amongst our neighbors and family members.

But is that really a mission? It’s a primary all-encompassing feeling and commitment that is lacking direct action or direction, ways of leadership, steps to take, concrete methods on how to get us there. That is the part that we humans have yet to figure out. We would love to have that dream that Lennon speaks of, that alternative universe where everything is safe and contented and joyful and peaceful. Our cynicism enters in and almost immediately we discount that that kind of world could ever exist. And I think that’s what John Lennon was alluding to. That that kind of world CAN exist, we just have to believe in it and take action.

So our Mission Statement reads:

*The foundation of Mission Peak is love. We are a spiritual community of open minds, nurturing growth and healing in ourselves and all people. Together we strive to live compassionately and courageously as we work for a nonviolent, just and sustainable world.*

That is a lovely statement. But it seems devoid of the direction or actions or stages on how to get there. I love that we have a foundation of love. We describe who we are as a community. But what is our mission? What is the outcome we wish to achieve? That’s the part I’d like to see in the mission statement. What is your goal? What is your purpose as a community? What objective or objectives would you like your congregation to accomplish? The dictionary definition of mission is  a specific task with which a person or a group is charged. What is your specific task? How do you want to affect this community, this city, our place in the world? A mission statement defines what an organization is, why it exists, its reason for being. Why are you here? What is your reason for being a congregation?

If we put them down on paper, many times it helps to make it more real. We don’t need to spell it out line by line in the mission statement, but I believe that stating an outcome would be a more concrete and definable way to state what it is this congregation wants to do with its life. And yes, as a community, as a congregation, you have a life. You have a common pulse, a common thread that you all follow. Do you know what that is? Can you name it?

I have a quote by the great theologian, Rev. Howard Thurman:

*All around us worlds are dying and new worlds are being born; all around us life is dying and life is being born. The fruit ripens on the tree, the roots are silently at work in the darkness of the earth against a time when there shall be new lives, fresh blossoms, green fruit. Such is the growing edge! It is the extra breath from the exhausted lung, the one more thing to try when all else has failed, the upward reach of life when weariness closes in upon all endeavor. This is the basis of hope in moments of despair, the incentive to carry on when times are out of joint and men have lost their reason, the source of confidence when worlds crash and dreams whiten into ash. The birth of a child — life’s most dramatic answer to death — this is the growing edge incarnate. Look well to the growing edge!* —Howard Thurman

Look well to the growing edge. That is what I am asking of you all this morning. Look at how you can push yourself, personally and as a community. Is fear keeping you from taking a step forward into the unknown? Is complacency keeping you sitting in your chair unable to rise when you really want to? What can you offer this community and are you offering it? Last month I preached on some of the results from the Appreciative Inquiry workshop we held last June. And in these results you all gave me some answers to some of these questions. You gave me your thoughts of what your dreams for this community are. Your dreams show me that some of you want to own your own building, that some of you want to have more outreach into the community, that some of you want more children here and more young adults. Some want to have an endowment for financial stability. You want to afford a new settled minister and you want that new settled minister to do so many things! You want a more racially and culturally diverse community. You want to grow, grow, grow! These are your dreams, your clouds floating in the blueness of the sky. With that I believe you assume that it will be a peaceful community, that you will all get along. That you will all work towards common goals and causes to help make this world a better place.

I love that you all want this. What I say to you now is how are you going to do it? What is your plan, what are the steps you will take, how will you achieve the outcome that you all wish to have?

That could be something to work on in the coming months before I leave. To have some concrete objectives before your new minister arrives would be wonderful for the new minister and for all of you. For your direction that you wish to take ultimately is not determined by who you will take on this path with you, but on how and what you wish to accomplish. I am here to guide you and help you along the way to achieve the goals you wish to achieve. A new settled minister will also do the same. You need to know which way you want to go on the path and you need to know how you wish to get there. You need to step out of that comfort zone, look to the growing edge to reach new heights that you wish to reach. Yes I’m asking you all to look to your own growing edge. It doesn’t matter how young or how old you are, there is always room for a growing edge.

I recently read a piece by Parker Palmer in the Interfaith Observer. In it he talks about different steps you can take to move towards that growing edge. Moving toward it is often as slow as the growth of a plant he says. The first thing to notice is that feeling inside of us that we first see as feeling out of alignment, feeling like we’ve kind of lost our way a little bit, or that something just feels awry. That’s when, he says, “we have to pull over, get out of the car, breathe, acknowledge that we’re lost — and resist the anxiety that compels us to look for the well-marked road and miss the clues that point us toward the heart’s imperatives. Unquote.

That’s where we need to give it to faith, the unknown, that road less traveled, that growing edge that we know not where it leads.

The second stage, he says, is called arrival, although there is an ambiguity as to if this arrival is an ending or a beginning. Our inner work he says is to embrace the paradox that new beginnings are also endings. This reminded me of a song when I read it, Closing Time by Semisonic. There’s a line in it,

Every new beginning comes from some other beginnings end”.

The first time I heard that I never had thought before that to have a new beginning something needs to end. So I researched the song and discovered that the band member who wrote it intended this song to be about his impending fatherhood and knew his bandmates wouldn’t want to sing about that all the time so he made it about a bar. A bar where the bartender throws out the patrons, just like a baby gets thrown into the world. He still had this secret desire to write about this new person soon to be entering into this world. And apparently they have credited this line to the Roman philosopher Seneca the Younger. No wonder it sounded so prophetic to me.

But I digress. We must have an ending to have a new beginning. It’s like the law of gravity, the law of motion, it is the way of life. To have that growing edge, something must change. Otherwise we sit in complacency and yes, nothing changes which can always be safe. Look towards the growing edge.

Palmer’s last step, the third one, he said “could be called surrendering to new life.” The situation we thought we wanted to grow beyond may be killing us, he says, but at least we know the ropes — while the new and the strange may bring challenges we can’t imagine, let alone surmount.

Do you love your life enough to save it he asks? To overcome gravity and surrender to a new life. If you want your mission to come to fruition, you may need to take these steps. Yes as Howard Thurman stated, *all around us life is dying and life is being born.* There are endings and beginnings. The deeper we’ve been able to go into our hardest experiences, the better we’ve been able to understand their root causes, Parker Palmer concludes. Do you love your life enough to save it he asks?

So your mission if you choose to accept it is …. What? That is for you to decide and I hope you do decide soon. You may need to take the time to do it, but it can only get you past your growing edges and onto that new beginning. And you have 4 new members here this morning to add to the collective we of this congregation.

For

Every new beginning comes from some other beginnings end.

May it be so. Blessed be.

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2019/11/8/look-well-to-the-growing-edge>