

November's Theme is 'Mission and Vision'.

Mission asks, "Why do we exist?" "What is our purpose?" "Whom do we serve?" Vision asks, "What is the picture of the future that we want to create?" "What do we want to become?" Mission is a congregation's North Star. Vision describes the distant horizon envisioned. Both are essential. Some say that the mission of our congregations is to transform people who will transform the world.

Read through each of these sermons. Pick one that you like best.

Thank you for sharing this wisdom with the rest of us!

The Services Committee

11.0: Sermons & Sermon Excerpts

11.1: Having a Clear Mission Statement by Rev. Fred Hammond (Excerpt 690 words, full text 998 words at <https://serenityhome.wordpress.com/page/21/>)

...I mention our mission statement every opportunity that I get, not because I think people have forgotten it but because I believe that we must always have our mission before us. All of our actions need to be consistent with our mission and embody it. Every person needs to be able to either recognize the mission statement from the activities or be able to quote it. Every person, from the most veteran member to the person who walks through our doors for the first time, should be able to tell another person what the mission statement is.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, the author of *The Little Prince*, is quoted as saying "Love does not consist in gazing at each other, but in looking outward together in the same direction." It is the same with a community that seeks to make a difference in the world; we must be looking outward together in the same direction. This does not mean that we all see the same things in the horizon nor does it mean that we understand everything at the same time or in the same manner. It certainly does not mean that we will always agree with one another. It does mean that our intention for what is best for the community is headed in the same direction. One way of ensuring our intention is to remind ourselves daily of what we have stated our mission to be here in this time and place. The intention of this congregation could change, but for now, in this time and place, our mission is to be an open and nurturing community. Everything that we do from greeting people at the door to our sermon topics, from the artwork we display on our walls to the religious education we teach our children, from the leaders we elect to the landscaping outside need to be reflecting this mission statement. Together, we gaze our eyes in the same outward direction."

So many congregations have mission statements that are too long, too convoluted, too verbose for anyone to really take the congregation seriously. They read like they were trying not to offend anyone and, in the end, become unable to offer direction to the congregation. Mission statements are not about stroking anyone's egos or intellect. They are about purpose. The best mission statements are succinct and many of these are under twenty-five words. The best mission statements are easily memorable.

The guide then to any action that is proposed by the congregation is the question: How does this fit the mission statement? How does this action that we are proposing advance our mission statement or purpose?

...Mission statements point to who is the primary focus of the mission statement. To whom does the congregation belong? Is it the board of directors? Is it the matriarchs or patriarchs of the congregation? Is it the shareholders or the investors—metaphorically speaking? Is it everyone in the congregation?

A good mission statement for a congregation should empower every member to participate in the fulfilling of that mission. The most senior to the youngest person should be able to participate in the mission statement being achieved. If this is not true, if there are areas in the congregation where the mission cannot be fulfilled then this is the area that the congregation has work to do.

The mission statement can point out where the growing edges within the congregation lie.

Alice Blair Wesley in her 2000-2001 Minns Lectures entitled *Our Covenant*, summarizes the classes she took with James Luther Adams thus: “Strong, effective, lively liberal churches, sometimes capable of altering positively the direction of their whole society, will be those liberal churches whose lay members can say clearly, individually and collectively, what are their own most important loyalties, as church members.”

A mission statement should be able to point towards those loyalties. Everyone should be able to articulate this clearly and with conviction. Where our loyalties lie will also indicate where our energy is going to be for the growth or status quo of the congregation. Having a clear mission statement is a step towards being able to grow a congregation.

11.2: *Building the Beloved Community* by Rev. Fred Small (Excerpt, 1,172 words, full text 2,184 words at <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/sermon/building-the-beloved-community>)

When I was in third grade at Evergreen School in Plainfield, NJ, my best friend was John Carvana.

At 8 years old, I was awkward physically and socially, and I was drawn to John’s intelligence and easy grace. The friendships of young boys are less about whispered secrets than about hanging out and kicking around. I don’t know how deeply John and I saw into each other’s souls. I just liked being around him.

In 1962, after fourth grade, my parents sent me to private school. One morning that July, John rang our doorbell, but we were packing for our family vacation, and I told John I couldn’t play that day.

I never saw him again.

Over the years, I wondered what became of John. He was young and black and male in a dangerous time to be young and black and male. On his last visit, he’d come to our back door. Looking back, as I learned about racism, I wondered if he’d felt he *had* to come to the back door of a white family in a white neighborhood in 1962.

Passing through Plainfield in the 1980s, I tried to locate John but found no record of him.

Two days ago, I found John Carvana online. He’s a career coach in California. I dialed the phone number on his website.

A voice answered, “This is John”—and the years fell away.

He remembered me after only a moment’s hesitation, remembered my house on the corner of Kensington and Thornton. A conservative Republican, John acknowledges racism but refuses to be limited by it. We talked about his spiritual journey and mine.

I asked him if he could remember why he came to the back door nearly half a century ago. “Oh,” he said, “that was just the direction I was walking from. I didn’t think of you as my white friend. You were just my friend.”

Our relationships across race are laden with doubt and uncertainty, with symbolism and misunderstanding, with inferences accurate and inaccurate. Often, despite our best intentions and efforts, our friendships fail under the weight of so much painful history.

I look forward to renewing my friendship with John Carvana.

I look forward to a society in which these friendships are natural and commonplace. There's a name for that society: the Beloved Community.

...Martin Luther King Jr. envisioned a Beloved Community of love and justice, where the races would be reconciled, and the deep and terrible wounds of racism finally healed. "Our ultimate goal," King said, "is genuine intergroup and interpersonal living—*integration*." Physical desegregation is not enough, King insisted, for it leaves us "spiritually segregated, where elbows are together and hearts apart."

In 1966, after the March to Montgomery, King was among several thousand people delayed at the airport. "As I stood with them," he marveled, "and saw white and Negro, nuns and priests, ministers and rabbis, labor organizers, lawyers, doctors, housemaids, and shopworkers brimming with vitality and enjoying a rare comradeship, I knew I was seeing a microcosm of the mankind of the future in this moment of luminous and genuine brotherhood."

And today he'd say sisterhood, too.

Many of us ...remember Martin Luther King Jr. Still more of us have heard his voice and been uplifted by his dream—a dream deferred.

But you and I need wait no longer. We can build the Beloved Community right here in this church.

...The mission statement of this congregation proclaims your commitment "to be a force for social justice" as you "work... to create Beloved Community."

Time after time when you've been asked your values, your goals, your aspirations, you have answered: we want to be more diverse.

When you gathered in "Finding Our Future" house meetings..., two of the four themes that emerged were more diversity and social justice/outreach.

The report from your "Renewing Our Calling" cottage parties ...called for diversity and "a fearless attitude of pluralism."

...It's no mystery how to grow a multiracial, multicultural congregation. We now have solid empirical data on racially diverse churches, from which seven principles emerge.

First comes intentionality. Diversity happens not by accident but by decision—conscious and explicit.

There are many people of color hungry for what we offer—spiritual freedom without shame or dogma, affirmation of the inherent worth and dignity of every person, including gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender sisters and brothers, commitment to social justice—but we must let them know they are welcome here.

Second is diversity of leadership, both lay and ordained. People need to see themselves reflected in faces of authority.

Third is inclusive worship embodying a variety of styles and traditions. The more upbeat and demonstrative the music and worship style, the more diverse the congregation.

Fourth, location matters. ...Most multiracial congregations are *more* diverse than their surrounding communities, not less.

Fifth is consistent outreach to these communities with meaningful ministries.

Sixth is adaptability. We have to be willing to examine our old ways of doing things and see if they still serve us and the diverse congregation we seek.

We have to be willing to change—not our values, not our principles, not our spirituality—but our habits and prejudices. To be open to new people, we have to be willing to learn from them.

Seventh, racial diversity cannot be itself the ultimate goal. It must be part of a larger mission. Our mission is love and justice. Love and justice are incompatible with de facto segregation.

We are entering a new era. By 2042, white Americans will no longer be a majority. Today, three out of four Americans age 70 and older are Caucasian. Of Americans age 10 and younger, only one out of four is Caucasian. Young people are far more comfortable than their elders with relationships across race. . . .

If [we] remain overwhelmingly white, we will lose our relevance and forfeit our standing in this changing world.

When we build the Beloved Community, our every passion and program will be deepened and strengthened.

In the weeks and months ahead, I invite your ideas about strategies and steps toward the Beloved Community. . . .

When she was in her twenties, Ginger Ryan lived with friends on an old farm in the Hudson River valley. None of them knew anything about vegetable gardening. They spent a lot of time turning over the soil, forming rows, and planning what and where to plant, but they really didn't know what to do next.

One day when they were standing around the garden, the previous owner, an old Sicilian named Mr. Solari, dropped by. Ginger's friend Erika was playing the violin to encourage the soil.

Mr. Solari laughed.

“When are you gonna plant? What are you waiting for?”

He grabbed a package of corn seeds, dug his hands in the dirt, and planted the whole row, three seeds to each hole.

When are we going to plant? What are we waiting for?

A dream deferred awaits our hands and hearts.

Let's dig our fingers into this fertile soil and grow the Beloved Community.

11.3: *Loss of Vision* by Rev. Joseph Boyd (Excerpt, 989 words, full text 1,155 words at <https://uuyo.org/sermon-sept-16-2018-loss-of-vision/>)

Consider this: Turning points are rare opportunities. The dissolution of our deeply held beliefs, the questioning of our basic fundamental thrust through life, the doubt that we are instilled with suddenly and profoundly is not something we would wish on anyone. These are all the characteristics of disillusionment. Disillusionment is not a rare occurrence. It happens to all of us at some point, and it can occur at every stage of life. The disillusionment of teenagers when they discover their parents are people and that society is not always just or fair, the disillusionment of those in their twenties when the job market is not kind and the future looks uncertain, the disillusionment of middle age when the life you've built does not feel like the life you hoped for, at least not completely, the disillusionment of later years when current demands and circumstances cause you to question everything you've put faith in. This list is only scratching the surface. On top of these generalizations we will most certainly encounter the particular disillusionment of unexpected emptiness or sense of loss, the particular and sudden feeling of disorientation and a loss of direction.

This is one of the most difficult moments, and one of the most profound. It can give birth to depression and a feeling of being stuck. It can also be a turning point.

There are people gathering in living rooms, gathering in churches, gathering in bars and coffee shops, all asking the same question: Where do we go from here?

...Religion is not just about church or denominations or clergy who wear stoles.

Religion is what we hold to be true and worthy. It includes our personal narratives—stories of who we are, where we've come from, and where we're going. It includes our vision for civic, economic, and political life. It includes the beliefs we've chosen intentionally, and the beliefs we've taken for granted growing up in the time, place, and circumstances we've found ourselves.

...It's a scary thing to lose our religion. It's a scary thing to experience a loss of vision, and thus a loss of direction. It's actually unbearable to stay in that place of disillusionment. We were not meant to stay there. Did you notice how Saul got to Damascus after he temporarily lost his sight? People helped him. They literally carried him to Damascus.

He arrived to Damascus in the dark, disoriented, unable even to see or identify the people who were helping him. He knew he was safe, but he was in unknown territory, in an unknown house, taken care of by unknown people.

Most Christians will focus on the second part of this narrative, the part where Saul gains his vision, converts to Christianity, and begins his ministry. They focus on the transformation of Saul to Paul, a complete change of identity. But I find the first part of the narrative more compelling. I believe the change of identity is predicated on the thorough loss of identity, that a depth of vision only comes when you've been able to let go of illusion, and risk disorientation. I'm more interested in the temporary loss of vision that comes suddenly without warning, and only much later is seen for what it really is—grace, a gift, something that was given but not asked for. Disillusionment is not on most people's wish list, but disillusionment is not a negative thing. One spiritual teacher told me: If you're disillusioned, it just means you were illusioned in the first place.

That being said, disillusionment is also a real pain. It's deeply unsettling, and breeds mistrust, fear, and the yearning for quick fixes.

It's especially a pain if we wish we could go back to the way things were, or more accurately to the way we thought things were. It will be tempting to find a someone or someone's who will promise they can take us back to the dream, that place before awakening and clear seeing.

I think it is better to lose our sense of direction rather than continue down a road we know will never fully deliver us. It is better to trust that this loss of vision is not a permanent condition, but a prerequisite for something more real and expansive.

This is the time we are in, and make no mistake about it: it is a turning point. We are at a point where we are yearning for a collective vision that is more real, more worthy than the one we've been given. Instead of being sent out in the world to persecute like Saul, I think we are being asked to convert to a way of life that notices all the people that surround us, full of disillusionment, stuck in the road. It's a way of life that in humility says "I don't know the full and complete answer, but I do know this: you need sanctuary. Here, let me help you get there, because I need it too."

But in order to get there we must be willing to lose our religion. We must be willing to at whatever cost to give up any belief that falsely asserts that I am separated from you and thus more superior.

We must be willing to surrender the narrative that due to the color of my skin, or my level of education, or my level of ability, I deserve to have sanctuary while you toil on the road. This is false religion. We must be willing to go out on the road and meet the disillusioned with ultimate care and concern. And when we are the one disillusioned on the road, we must be willing to receive help as we stumble toward sanctuary.

Turning points are rare opportunities. They are opportunities to move forward in a way that we've never before considered. It is a time for tenderness and solidarity. In that tenderness and solidarity, we will find our religion.

11.4: Recovering the Universalist Vision by Rev. Stephen Edington (Excerpt, 950 words, full text, 2,760 at <https://www.fculittle.org/sermons/recovering-the-universalist-vision/>)

...[Woody Guthrie wrote,] "This is the highest activity of your mind and heart, this Oneness, this Union; to see all the relations and the connections between all objects, forces, peoples, and creatures... This is why all great religions preach the central idea of Oneness."

...This idea of the essential unity of all persons and things ...can ...become the basis for a broad-based religion. Such was the case in this country, beginning in the late 18th century, with a religious movement called Universalism.

This faith was brought to America in 1770 from England by a one Rev. John Murray and quickly took root in New England.

...Universalism originally meant universal salvation; everyone, that is, would eventually be saved by the love of God. ...Their fundamental theology was that of One loving and reconciling God.

The Universalists' understanding of what this Oneness meant changed over the course of their history. In time they moved on from their debates about heaven, hell, and the afterlife to exploring some deeper meanings of Universalism, as they looked for common, universal themes in many of the world's religious faith traditions.

Their theology may seem quaint to many of today's Unitarian Universalists, myself included. But their larger vision, above and beyond their early 19th century theological origins, is one we would do well to keep before us. It is that vision, and its ongoing implications, to which I'd now like us to devote our attention.

I'd like us to consider this universalist vision from a few different, but related, angles: The global, the national—with respect to what's happening in our country right now—and then within our own Unitarian Universalist movement.

To start with the global, ...the great religious divide today, is not *between* the various religions of the world, but *within* them.

This divide within some of the world's faiths, particularly the monotheistic ones, is between the exclusivists and the universalists. ...The exclusivists hold that their faith is the one true one and those outside of it are infidels. The universalists see their faith as a piece of a larger whole, of a larger truth, that will probably never be fully known or realized, but can still be aspired towards.

...It was a non-theologian ...who ...has given us a wonderful metaphor of our universal and common humanity. I refer to the late astronomer, Dr. Carl Sagan, who [wrote]: "A Pale Blue Dot." (See <http://www.planetary.org/explore/space-topics/earth/pale-blue-dot.html>) His words ...speak for themselves...: "The earth is the only world known so far to harbor life. There is nowhere else, at least in the near future, to which our species could migrate...for the moment the Earth is where we make our stand."

...Those words are both promising and frightening all at the same time. Promising as to the heights to which we as a human species may yet rise; and frightening if that universalist vision of a common humanity is lost and we tear ourselves apart.

The irony, as I've come to see it, contained within this universalist vision is that the greatest threat to it is the fear of the loss or the diminishment of a personal, or even group, identity within certain sectors of our human family. I feel the best symbol for our common humanity is not some kind of a melting pot amalgam, but rather a mosaic in which all the varying and multi-faceted tiles have their own kind of beauty, their own kind of specialness, their own kind of affirmed identity, while also being a part of a whole that is indeed greater than the sum of its parts.

I ...want... to speak to how I feel the vision of our early Universalist spiritual ancestors could inform and enhance our current UU movement.

...I continue to be struck by how our Universalist ancestors could put forth a very simple message—one that was at the same time quite profound—that the love of God is available to all, that we can form loving congregations based on this greater love; and have that message resonate with such a broad spectrum of the American public. I have come to believe, after nearly four decades in the UU ministry, that the future life and vitality of our movement depends upon our putting forth an equally broad and appealing message and mission that will reach across class lines.

This message and mission need not, and will not, contain the same language as 19th and early 20th century Universalism. But how about a message from us to all who can hear it, that says you are part of a greater Love, a Greater Spirit of Life that enfolds us all; you are loved and blessed by that which is greater than you know; and we offer a welcoming community, where in the company of seekers, you can learn more of what this greater love and care is all about, and you can be a part of it, and act on it for others—and it's not tied to your station in life or to your level of education, or to any other such thing as that. This is the truth that our Universalist forebearers were attempting to live out, however they may have expressed it in language other than what I just used.

I hope the spirit of this message I'm suggesting can find even greater resonance in our sister and brother UU congregations around the land. For I believe that the more that message is heard, really heard, the stronger we will be and the more diverse we will become as Unitarian Universalists. And I also think it would allow us—as small a place as we occupy on our nation's religious and spiritual landscape—to hold up a vision of the possible.

11.5: Parabolic Vision: Making Sense of Faith by Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland (776 words)

“Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it had not much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil; 6 and when the sun rose it was scorched, and since it had no root it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. And other seeds fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.’ And he said, ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear.’”

There he goes again. Jesus. Talking to anyone who will listen. Talking incessantly about the Kingdom of God, telling us that the Kingdom is like a seed that grows by itself, even when people are sleeping. Telling us that it is like a tiny grain of mustard seed that people took and sowed in the fields. Or, that it is like a pearl of great price sought by a merchant. Telling us that

it will be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom. Telling us that the Kingdom is within us or it is nowhere.

All he did was speak in riddles, in parables, those so-called wisdom stories that are cryptic at best, unfathomable at worst. The author of the gospel of Mark said that Jesus “did not speak to them without a parable.” A parable is a meta-metaphor. It compares one thing to another seemingly unrelated thing. And the mystery is revealed if you have eyes to see, ears to hear, a heart to love. Jesus was possessed of parabolic vision, a way of seeing the world and others that was as powerful as it was unique.

All Jesus did was try to help people make sense of faith, which, of course, makes no sense. Why have faith when we live in a world with so much tragedy and problems that seem to grow exponentially. And yet, without faith, what would be the point of anything. In a sense, faith is hope beyond hope, trust beyond trust, and love beyond love. It is an orientation toward life that goes beyond the senses. It informs a vision seen by the heart that our eyes always miss. It is grounded more in intuition, than in how we sense the material world around us.

I believe that a mature faith takes into account all of the reasons in the world for pessimism, of which there are many, weighs them in light of what is possible, and finds reason for optimism. I believe a mature faith never allows the enormity of a mountain to get in the way of trying to move it bit by bit for as long as it takes. I believe that a mature faith understands the leap of faith as one made “half-sure and whole-hearted.”

It is not an indication of pride or arrogance to say that you have faith in yourself. It is a statement of necessity, although faith in your self is hardly sufficient. As Reinhold Niebuhr wrote, “Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime; therefore, we are saved by hope. Nothing true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore, we are saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore, we are saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as from our own; therefore, we are saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness.” When we begin to examine our faith, to make sense of it, we understand how vital it is to life itself.

Without faith, we have little reason to even get out of bed in the morning. With faith, our reasons for living and loving multiply exponentially. Faith cannot be prescribed or proscribed. It must be uniquely fashioned out of your experience of life. Unlike belief, faith is individual. No one else has your experience, your values, your dreams, or your faith. You can share and examine your faith with others in this religious community as a way of making sense of your faith. Through such examination, faith becomes an even more compelling motivation and compass in our lives, a vision of what is possible, as it ignites our own fire of commitment. Since we are made of the stuff of stars, let our faith burn brightly pushing away the darkness.

11.6: Eyes Wide Shut by Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland (959 words)

Our vision is often far more limited than we realize. This was certainly true for me as I entered seventh grade. There was such a stigma associated with wearing eyeglasses that I memorized and cheated on the annual eye exam in every grade school. I was with members of the youth group at the church I attended. A girl in the group had just gotten new glasses and everyone was trying them on for fun. When my turn came and I put them on, the world before me changed. What had been so blurry for so long suddenly emerged from a visual fog into a clarity that was almost overwhelming. The world in fact had sharp edges, not blurry one. Within three weeks, I had my own pair of glasses. Without them, my vision was 20 over 200, which meant that without glasses I was legally blind, and had been so for many years.”

Whether corrected or not, our vision is far more limited than we realize. Too often, we do not see people as they are, but as we are. This happens when our vision is affected by our assumptions, prejudices, and attitudes, all of which impede our ability to see. It can also happen because of neurological issues as Oliver Sacks famously recounted in his 1985 book, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*. We believe that we have eyes wide open, when in fact, they are wide shut or at least closed in some way that limits what we can see.

This story of my family has to do with the limits of sight. We spent the morning and the early afternoon visiting the Po Lin Monastery, which is located on Lantau Island near Hong Kong. The monastery is home to Tian Tan, a bronze statue of the Buddha that is 112 feet tall and took 12 years to build. The Buddha faces north, looking over an expanse of the South China Sea toward the people on the Chinese mainland. By 'we,' I mean my wife, Carol, and our then two-year old newly adopted daughter, LinsiAn. Exploring the statue meant climbing 268 stairs from the monastery to the base of the statue. Visiting the statue and exploring the monastery was followed by a delicious vegetarian lunch in the monastery's restaurant. We then got in our small tour bus and headed back along a narrow winding road in the direction of the 5-star Regal Airport Hotel where we were staying. The hotel adjoins the Hong Kong airport and we were flying out the next morning. Our driver decided to give us a treat on the way to the hotel by stopping beside a beautiful beach to let us wade in the South China Sea. I was mesmerized by the beach and the water, and I wanted LinsiAn to take in the incredible beauty. I turned back to where she was sitting in her umbrella stroller to point to the water, only to see her eyes wide shut. She had fallen asleep again. I say again, because at key moments in our sightseeing since she had become part of our family two weeks earlier, she had fallen asleep. This happened when we visited a statue of Lord Bao in her hometown of Hefei, as well as a statue of Zhang Liao. Both men were famous in the early history of the city, which was first settled in the second century BCE. Carol and I had gone to China with eyes wide open, trying to see everything we possibly could, and LinsiAn was leaving China with her eyes wide shut.

As I think back on that experience, I fear that my eyes were wide shut. Although I was looking at anything and everything, I wonder how much I actually saw in a country that was so different culturally from where and how I was raised. I was looking at China with Western eyes.

Because of that, how much was I actually blind to or unaware of?

"Back safely in our room in the 5-star Regal Hotel beside the newly constructed Hong Kong International Airport, LinsiAn stands on our bed, points to her chest vigorously and says, 'Wo!' again and again. 'Wo!' 'Wo!' 'Wo!' We are baffled. We look the word up in our Chinese/English dictionary and realize that it means 'me' or 'I.' The toddler whose eyes were wide shut now wonders if the same is true of her new parents. My sense in that moment was that she was asking, 'Do you see me?'

"The next morning we would fly to America. We couldn't explain that to her, but perhaps she sensed that a big change was about to happen, a change as big as the adoption itself."

Do you see me? The question has nuances depending on which word you stress: "you" or "see" or "me."

Do you see me?

It is said that the eyes are the windows to the soul. Do you see me? The truth is that those windows should be transparent in both directions. Our eyes should also have the capacity to see the soul of others, as well as the soul of the world.

Do you see me? The French writer and aviator, Antoine de St. Exupéry, understood the essential nature of this question, the existential nature of this question, which is why he had the fox in

the book, *The Little Prince*, say, “It is only with the heart that one can see rightly. What is essential is invisible to the eye.”

Do you see me? Do I see you? The real me! The real you!

Only if and when our heart has trained our eyes to see with compassion. It is likely that we are all in need of those corrective lenses if we are to transform seeing into vision.

11.7: Objects in the Mirror are Closer than they Appear by Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland (942 words) Mem Fox, in her book, *Whoever you Are*, writes “Little one, whoever you are, wherever you are.

There are little ones just like you, All over the world. Their skin may be different from yours. And their homes may be different from yours. Their schools may be different from yours. And their lands may be different from yours. Their lives may be different from yours. And their words may be very different from yours, but inside their hearts are just like yours. Whoever they are. Wherever they are. All over the world.” It is a book about culture and the common humanity beneath culture.

Ilya Prigogine, a physical chemist who won the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1977, said, “The world is richer than it is possible to express in any single language.” Did you know that there are approximately 6,700 languages in the world? I would expand Prigogine’s words by adding, “The world is richer than it is possible to express in any single culture?” Of culture and language, Unitarian Universalist minister Jacob Trapp wrote, “I go to the bilingual services at Cristo Rey because I like singing... the very singable Spanish hymns. It helps that I can’t translate them completely; the words do not get in the way; there is more numinosity, [more mystery.] ...Sometimes one should sing or pray only in an unknown tongue, let the mystery within us reach out to the mystery beyond...”

In August 1998, I attended a six-day train-the-trainer workshop on Prejudice Reduction in Washington, DC led by Cherie Brown of the National Coalition Building Institute. The event ended with a unique talent show. Groups of two or three people had to explain their culture to the rest of the participants. I was teamed up with a woman from North Carolina. We had no idea how to begin. That is the problem when you are part of the dominant culture because it is impossible to see what you have taken for granted as the norm all of your life. As we talked, we discovered that we had grown up in neighboring states, she in West Virginia, and I in Pennsylvania. I grew up in the city of Pittsburgh and she grew up in a holler in West Virginia. We assumed that there was nothing in common between our urban and rural upbringings. But as we began to share stories about our childhood, we discovered that we had both grown up poor in the Appalachian culture, which stretched from Pittsburgh in the north, down through West Virginia, and into northeastern Kentucky. We shared a common culture in terms of food and games and values and even the fact that neither of our childhood homes had a bathtub, meaning as young children we both took baths in galvanized steel washtubs in the kitchen on Saturday night to get ready for church. I know she would also resonate with Victoria Williams song, *Polish Those Shoes*. Williams describes my childhood experience every Sunday morning: “Sunday morning, getting ready for church/ We thought we looked fine, oh but it just wouldn’t do/ You better polish those shoes, you better polish those shoes/ No one should see the dirt you’ve been through/ Get in there and polish those shoes.”

Even polishing shoes is a part of culture.

The reality is that objects in the mirror are closer than they appear. Our culture is so close to us that we can’t even see it. When we try to look at someone else’s culture, we end up looking in that same mirror, the side mirror on the car that clearly warns us that it is distorting what we are

looking at. In truth, every mirror we look into distorts what we see, if only by reversing the image. You can't see culture, your own or another, by looking in a mirror. As Sydney Harris said, "The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows." But it is easy to fool ourselves. We work to look through a window to see into another culture, but there is always the temptation to compare that culture with our own. As soon as we begin comparing, we find ourselves again looking into a mirror. "Mirror, Mirror on the wall, whose culture is the fairest of all?"

My invitation to begin to develop cultural competence. Greet others with wonder, with the curiosity of a child. So much is conditioned by our own culture that we must cultivate the ability to see with new eyes. As an example, throw out everything you think you know about beauty. When all the conditioning and prejudice is gone, you may be surprised at how much more beauty you see in the world. You may be surprised to discover that what seemed strange to you is now extraordinary. The truth is much of culture is invisible: values, norms, worldview, relational expectations, thinking and emotional patterns. As Antoine de St. Exupéry said, "What is essential is invisible to the eye, it is only with the heart that one sees clearly." If we are really going to explore our own culture or that of another, we must take it in slowly, in small amounts allowing that culture to "touch the heart." In this way, we will be able to "see" a person in their cultural context so that we can also see the deeper humanity that transcends culture. And this is what it means to have vision—the deeper way of seeing. As Mem Fox writes, "But inside their hearts are just like yours. Whoever they are. Wherever they are. All over the world." This is the way to learn to see clearly.

12.0 Readings from the Common Bowl

Mission

"A leader's responsibility is to cause a mission and vision to have tangible results in the real world." Henry Cloud

"My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style." Maya Angelou

"Make your life a mission—not an intermission." Arnold Glasgow

"Here is a test to find whether your mission on Earth is finished: If you're alive it isn't." Richard Bach

"My mission is to create a world where we can live in harmony with nature." Jane Goodall

"Many pastors are leaving ministry or retiring earlier. Many laypeople have given up any hope of having a thriving church. I'm convinced the primary reason is the absence or loss of a personal mission in life that is bigger than their own lives." Bill Easum

"The church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning." Emil Brunner

"A mission-focused institution is inevitably a growing institution." Robert Latham

"When a congregation is not mission-focused it loses its way and its purpose for being." Anonymous

“A mission to survive is not a mission.” Thomas Bandy

“Life is a mission, not a career. A career is a profession, a mission is a cause. A career asks, ‘What’s in it for me?’ A mission asks, ‘How can I make a difference?’” Sean Covey

“Our mission …is to confront ignorance with knowledge, bigotry with tolerance, and isolation with the outstretched hand of generosity. Racism can, will, and must be defeated.” Kofi Annan

“When you see people only as personalities, rather than souls with life missions to fulfill, you forever limit their growth and possibilities....” Shannon Alder

“A mission statement is not something you write overnight, but fundamentally, your mission statement becomes your constitution, the solid expression of your vision and values. It becomes the criterion by which you measure everything else in your life.” Stephen Covey

“Without a mission statement, you may get to the top of the ladder and then realize it was leaning against the wrong building!” Dave Ramsey

“Would you be willing to give your life to save the world if no one ever knew your name? If anonymity was the price you would have to pay for significance, would it be too great a price? To live a life of courage is not a guarantee of prestige or adulation. It only matters if you live and die fulfilling the mission you were born for.” Erwin Raphael McManus

Vision

“Your visions will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.” C.G. Jung

“Where there is no vision, the people perish.” Proverbs 29:18

“There is a simple and familiar cycle through which organizations tend to move. The movement is from initial vision to maintenance to decline.” Lovett Weems, Jr.

“Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare.” Japanese proverb

“Leaders keep the conversation alive… in the congregation, allowing the vision to be shaped by past history, current practice, and future opportunities.” Gil Rendle

“Everyone takes the limits of his [or her] own vision for the limits of the world.” Arthur Schopenhauer

“The real voyage of discovery consists of not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.” Marcel Proust

“Having a vision is not enough. It must be combined with imagination, determination, faith, hope and passion. It is not enough to just stare up at the stars… we must become the stars that the stars

shine down on.” Victoria June

“Don’t let the limitations of others limit your vision.” Roy Bennett

“The most pathetic person in the world is someone who has sight but no vision.” Helen Keller

“Visions are worth fighting for. Why spend your life making someone else’s dreams come true?” Tim Burton

“Create a vision for the life you really want and then work relentlessly towards making it a reality.”
Roy Bennett

“Your identity and vision are composed of a certain constellation of ideas and feelings that surfaced from the depths … within you. To lose these now would be to lose yourself.” John O’Donohue

“When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.” Audre Lorde

“Vision is ongoing and never-ending.” Peter Senge

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