

Imagination in Faith

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Description

Imagination in Faith

Let's explore the role imagination plays in how we think of and treat one another. How can we use our imaginations toward the liberation of all people? Presented by Annie Scott, CRE, Congregational Life Staff in the Pacific Western Region.

To help you plan a service around this sermon, we are providing some recommended elements.

CHALICE LIGHTING

For Each and For All

We light this chalice for all who are here, and all who are not;
For all who have ever walked through our doors,
for those who may yet find this spiritual home,
and for those we can't even yet imagine.
For each of us and for us all, may this flame burn warm and bright.

READING

Let us sing the magic of imagination. [Susan L Van Dreser](#)

Let us sing the magic of imagination by which we know one another and learn the lives of eras gone by.

Let us sing the magic of creation by which we build the world of our soul and teach its wisdom to others, young and old.

Let us sing the magic of our lives together, holding and shaping by the movement of breath from heart to lung all new life that is to come.

Go now with singing. Go now with magic in your fingertips. Touch this world with life.

My Dreams, They Matter [Phoenix Bell-Shelton Biggs](#)

Though at times I may forget who I am or who becoming,
my dreams: they matter. When I make space for all that is;
When I move away from that which no longer serves me,
When I make space for the new possibility in the circumstances;
My dreams do matter.

They matter; they hold many truths and many turning points;
they matter; though at times I may convince myself they don't, they do,
for they call me back in time and forward still.

My dreams matter. They matter, as they pull me inward and yet simultaneously
push me outside of myself;

My dreams matter; they matter as they speak to the breadth of love, of pain, of
hope, that rest deep in the fabric of my blood and bones.

My dreams matter, as they are connected to the dreams of my ancestors;
connected to all who have graced this earth before, who grace it here and now,
and will be connected to all who grace this earth, when I, when we, grace this
place no more;

my dreams, they matter; your dreams, they matter; our dreams, they matter.

They matter.

HYMNS:

301 Touch the Earth, Reach the Sky!

360 Here We Have Gathered

123 Spirit of Life

Imagination in Faith

I invite you into an exploration of imagination. First, I'll ask you to imagine some things. Close your eyes if you'd like. And just try to enjoy the experience. If all the images don't work for you that I invite you to to ponder, don't worry about it, just try the next one. First, imagine smelling chocolate. Hmm, yum.

Now imagine smelling a tree. Maybe you're walking into the forest, and there's a pine tree or a fir tree. Now imagine cutting a lemon open, and just smelling that beautiful, fresh, tart, poignant smell. I wonder which one smelled the strongest to you in your imagination. Chocolate, a tree smell or lemon? Which one had the biggest response in you?

Now I'd like you to kind of wave your hand if it was chocolate, and invite you to look around and see who else chocolate was the strongest response in you. Now wave your hand if the smell of the tree was the strongest for you. Look around. And now wave your hand if the smell of fresh cut lemon was strongest for you. Imagination.

Imagine swimming in a lake, pool or ocean. How's the water? Cold, brisk, pleasant, hot. Imagine you're swinging back and forth. feeling the breeze on your face. Your body shifting back and forth to keep the swinging going. Imagine yourself bouncing a ball as you walk down the street. Which one of those had this strongest response in you? Swimming, swinging or bouncing a ball as you walk.

As you recall each one think of how your body reacted. The taste of chocolate as it melts on your tongue, perhaps? Water touching your skin or the back and forth of a swing.

Imagination can be joyful. A wonderful jaunt through memories and experiences. And imagination is critical when we're thinking about changing the world.

I came of age in the late 60s. The Vietnam draft lottery was taking classmates into the dangers of war involuntarily. The Civil Rights Movement was in the streets. People were getting hosed and dogs are sicked on them. They were arrested and beaten. We know these stories. Our country was still in a Cold War with the Soviet Union with the threat of nuclear war. Gender roles were being challenged in the workplace and in the home. I was raised to imagine my future

as a nurse, a teacher or a stay at home mom like my mom. My parents modeled very strict gender roles.

In my late teens, I was depressed and unprepared for adult life. I began reading science fiction. Ursula Guin, *Left Hand of Darkness*. Frank Herbert's *Dune*. Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*. Do you rock? Some conveyed words with abused and depleted landscapes and people who could not get along, some portrayed images of worlds where beings got along, respected each other and cared for the earth. I was looking for a sense of hopefulness. I found hope in their portrayal of hate and disrespect that then changed into imagining how they could do things differently. The characters could create better lives for themselves. Their imaginings gave me hope. Unequaled, disrespectful, ugly behaviors, transforming into groups of people, learning how to relate to one another, and the earth with care and respect. I felt more hopeful.

The words of Ursula Guin, the imagination is an essential tool of the mind, a fundamental way of thinking, an indispensable means of becoming and remaining human. Becoming and remaining human.

I think we Unitarian Universalists are committed to each of us becoming and remaining human, and working for a world where all people can become and remain human, in all the best ways, and the complicated ways.

adrienne maree brown, an activist and author of the very important work, *Emergent Strategy*, shaping change, changing worlds. She wrote, we're in an imagination battle. She points out that in the collective white imagination, black people are dangerous. It's built into our culture, television shows, movies, parents all pass on the imaginings of who black people are. And the consequence for black people is not just being disempowered, but their lives are in danger. Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown, Breonna Taylor, they were all black Americans. And they were not dangerous, but the police imagined them to be. Their lives were shattered and ended by the collective imaginings that they were dangerous people.

adrienne maree brown again, imagination has people thinking they can go from being poor, to a millionaire as part of a shared American dream. She goes on, imagination turns brown bombers into terrorists and white bombers into mentally ill victims.

Imagination turns brown bombers into terrorists and white bombers into mentally ill victims.

And she also said, wrote, I sometimes feel I am trapped inside someone else's imagination. And I must engage my own imagination in order to break free.

When I was a child and asked to play catch with my dad and my two older brothers, my dad said, you don't want to do that. You go see what your mom's doing in the kitchen. I was limited by my dad's imagination of what was feminine and appropriate for the girl in the family. I was limited by gender stereotypes that would maintain his comfort, I imagine.

I invite you to think about a time or relationship when you felt trapped in someone else's imagination. They treated you with expectations that didn't fit you. Can you think of a time, a relationship, when you've been stuck in someone else's imagination limited by their ideas of you? A parent, boss, spouse, teacher.

A few years ago I was introduced to the writings of Octavia Butler, African American science fiction writer. She didn't get the kind of attention the white male science fiction writers received. Or Ursula Guin, the one well known female science fiction writer at that time. I read Octavia Butler's Parable of the Sower. It's dark and frightening. Our culture, our way of life was collapsing. A young black woman of about 15 finds herself without parents or any other adults to guide her. She sets out to find something better, and others end up following her. After a long and dangerous journey, they find their way to a piece of land that seems relatively hidden and safe. And they began to build a life, a better life, a sustainable life together.

As dark as the story is, it helped me imagine a better world for my beloved's. My children, their partners, my grandchildren and friends. It helped me see the times we're in as part of the path toward liberation for all people.

In these dark days in the world, it can feel like we're living inside a science fiction story. As faithful religious liberals, we have a responsibility to practice imagining a different world, a world better than the one we're living in. We must face the realities of our current culture. And as we reject that, we need to imagine how to get from here to a better life for all people. Imagination is our responsibility.

We Unitarian Universalists see our faith as a living tradition. A living entity that adapts and responds to changing times, and changing ways of being together in the world. We Unitarian Universalists are in these times we are changing. We are practicing what it means to live with our covenants as living, changing documents and commitments. We are imagining what compassionate accountability looks like, not punishing and ostracizing accountability, but compassionate and loving accountability. We're exploring new way of conveying our values, love at the center, and interdependence, equity, transformation, pluralism, generosity, and justice surrounding that love.

I experienced mean girl practices in my childhood and adolescence, I learned to shun girls who I perceived were different. I watched shunning or exclusion become women's practices as we all grew up. Now I have to wonder if I'm upset with someone, do I shun them? Ignore them? Exclude them in overt as well as subtle ways? I've gotten better at including all people, even those I'm uncomfortable with, or I'm not drawn to, but I still have growing to do.

adrienne maree brown again from emergent strategy, shaping change, changing worlds. We are in an imagination battle. Trayvon Martin and Mike Brown and Renisha McBride and so many others are dead because in some white imagination, they were dangerous. And that imagination is so respected, that

those who kill, based on an imagined radicalized fear of black people, are rarely held accountable.

Imagination has people thinking they can go from being poor, to a bit millionaire as part of a shared American Dream. Imagination turns brown bombers into terrorists and white bombers into mentally ill victims. Imagination gives us borders, gives us superiority, gives us race as an indicator of ability. It can often feel I'm trapped inside someone else's capability. Someone else's imagination. I must engage my own imagination in order to break free.

The Japanese educational system is so revolutionary, that is it currently trains children as world citizens. In Japan a revolutionary pilot scheme called Brave Change. It's a shift in concept. The graduates from the from this educational plan will understand and accept different cultures and their horizons will be global, not national. Raised to be a world citizen and change bravely.

Ursula Guin again, the imagination is an essential tool of the mind, a fundamental way of thinking, an indispensable means of becoming, and remaining human. I would add, imagination is an essential tool of looking back over our lives, and rethinking things we have done, imagining how we wish we had acted. I certainly imagine being kinder as a fifth and sixth grade girl.

Can we imagine board meetings that prioritize relationships over the to do lists? What if boards and committees had a time for imagining as part of their decision making process? With quiet time for all to imagine and then share what came to them? Collective imaginings?

A world without prisons, ridiculous. Schools that fostered the genius of every child, impossible. Work that doesn't strangle the life out of people, naive. A society where everyone has food, shelter, love, in your dreams. Exactly.

Ruha Benjamin, Princeton University professor, insists that imagination isn't a luxury. It's a vital resource and a powerful tool for collective liberation. May we

all engage our imagination in these days, and the days to come for the liberation and freedom of all people depend on it.

Amen. And may it be so.