

**REVELATION IS NOT SEALED: THE TRUNK AND CONNECTING
THE DOTS**

Umpqua Unitarian Universalist Church

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Good morning again, everyone, and thank you for being here today.

This morning I'd like to invite us to consider this phrase from the Unitarian and liberal religious tradition: "revelation is not sealed" but arises in every generation. Our religious ancestors like Michael Servetus and Olympia Brown believed it. They spoke of revelation not from priests or sacred texts. They suggested that revelation was constantly being renewed and transformed as human beings learned more about ourselves.

What I'd like to ask us to explore is whether revelation (that which is revealed) has different levels. If so, how do they manifest to us and why might they be important to this generation?

In the reading a few minutes ago, Kathleen Norris speaks of a little boy who had suffered a terrible loss of a beloved pet. He had a dream where God comes down a ladder by the boy's tree-house. The boy says with some amazement how the pockets on all of God's clothing had food to feed all the dead birds and dead people.

Ms. Norris reminds us that revelation is

'not an explanation not acquired by reading...it is the revealing of a God who cares for all creatures, even a little boy who lives on a ranch in a part of America that has often been called 'Godforsaken.'

We might equivocate with her belief in a creator God who is loving or otherwise. And I suspect we might be tempted to argue that revelation can be attained by reading books.

Her proposal that revelation is direct experience is important regardless of our religious traditions. Direct experience, after all, is an essential element in Buddhist teachings when we are invited to stare life directly in the eye and face it without flinching. The Buddha talked about direct experience in the

famous story of the poisoned arrow. He asks the student to imagine a situation where they are shot with a poison arrow on a battlefield and need medical assistance quickly.

“Are you going to insist that you know for sure who made the arrow, why it was shot at you, who did the shooting and the exact type of poison? If you insist on knowing all that, you’ll be dead before you can be healed.”

The Buddha was not saying that critical thinking and rational discourse are useless - Far from it. What the Buddha told us in the story of the poisoned arrow is that our search for why things happen is worthy but can distract us from the essential work of pulling the poisoned arrow out.

We could argue the meaning of the recent earthquake in Haiti as did the so-called Reverend Pat Robertson. He proposed that it was a deal with the devil 300 years ago that got Haiti into the series of disasters. We could consider many reasons why the Haitians or the Chileans have been so struck by disasters or we could focus on their humanitarian needs right now. We could have sat here and argued whether they deserved the support we’re giving them in special ways. But no, many of our religious communities went right to the heart of the matter and didn’t worry about causes.

Revelation is not sealed and in every generation comes to life in a different way. The old revelations fade. New ones arise to take up a cause.

So here in the second decade of the 21st century, we Unitarian Universalists throughout the world are asked to carry forward the revelations of Michael Servetus and Olympia Brown among so many others to this newest generation of time and place.

How, then, might we be aware when we experience such a revelation that shakes us to our foundation?

Unlike Moses of the Hebrew Testament, there’s no burning bush in the desert. We aren’t confronted with a great voice that tells us a revealed truth and to then take it to others.

We’re not like Jacob who dreams of his God where he sleeps in the deep desert.

We are modern educated people who might scoff at revelation in a traditional religious package. As religious liberals we probably would understand revelation to be personal that we can discern, discuss and apply in our lives.

Revelation might be an ah-ha moment or a great piece of art that we never imagined. It could be the flash of insight that changes our personal life and pushes us into a new pathway of career, relationship or location.

That's one level of personal revelation. The young boy's revelation in Kathleen Norris' story experiences a deeper sort of revelation that speaks to universal truth. Like the traditional revelations to Moses or the writer of Revelations, these sustained meanings become part of the fabric of life and communities. Such revealed truths include the reality of death or of change.

How, then, do we find a revelation of sustained meaning in the world?

Out of curiosity I explored some of the stories of great religious and social justice figures. I wondered when they had their great life changing revelations that pushed them into a path of deep resolve and determination.

Jesus and the Buddha had their revelations in their 20's.

Gandhi was in South Africa and experienced the injustice of discrimination. He determined to get India and his people free from the benign tyranny of the British Empire from that moment on. He was 28.

Martin Luther King Jr. was a divinity student in the early 1950's. He often said that his moment of greatest insight was reading the work of Gandhi and how non-violence could overturn age old racial prejudice. He was about 25 at the time.

John Muir who is considered the father of American environmentalism was born in Scotland in 1838. His biographers relate that his great insight into the glory and "God-given" beauty of the natural world came in his late teens.

The list of revelations goes on and on throughout history. What seems to be a constant is that great prophets, thinkers, activists, and teachers have their revelations while in their younger years – teens and 20's.

I find it remarkable that the great revealed teachings of Gandhi and Dr. King spread quickly because a communications link of books, media and story. Communications allowed the revelation of non-violent resistance to take hold and spread from Gandhi and his followers to Martin Luther King and many of his disciples. Non-violent presence became an underground river that burst into open streams in places called Tiananmen Square and East Germany, Poland and Hungary. Non-violent bearing witness spread among the nations and still awaits its moment to burst forth.

Just as the little boy in Kathleen Norris' story had to share revelation to make it real and genuine, the descendents of Gandhi and King and so many others passed the revealed truth of non-violence from hand to hand and voice to voice to this day today.

It could not remain in one heart or enlightened mind and be a light to the world. Revelation for those generations of 20th century people had to become a new message of shared commitment and reaction to tyranny. What might be a deep revelation for a generation of women and men at the beginning of the 21st century?

What might the new revelation be?

Here are two quotations you might ponder as we look at that future. One is from a 2008 article about the Millennial Generation of women and men born after 1981.

“They are motivated, goal-oriented, and confident in themselves and the future...They have high levels of optimism and they feel connected to their parents. They are assertive and believe they are “right”. In Canada the Millennial generation is called the “Sunshine” generation. They are group oriented rather than being individualists. They may sacrifice their own identity to be part of the team. They prefer egalitarian leadership, not hierarchies. They are forming a tight-knit generation...They do not want to stand out among their peers; they want to be seen as part of the group. They dislike selfishness and are oriented toward service learning and volunteerism.”

And this second quote from an article in the November 2009 *Utne Reader*:

“Rick Stevens, a journalism professor at the University of Colorado at Boulder who specializes in new media...agrees that

millennials could stand a few more lessons in media literacy. Still, their innate “BS meters” fascinate him. “Millennials are immediately suspicious of people who claim to have all the answers,” Stevens says. “They don’t want platitudes. When they see problems, they want to work on solutions. They have a more try-and-see mentality. They’re more collective.”

I propose to us that we are in the midst of a new collective revelation.

This new revelation depends on communications, collaboration and a belief that no one person has all the right answers but a world wide community does.

This new revelation depends on technology of social networks across the world and in many languages.

This new revelation will be televised like 24 year old Kseniya Simonova from Ukraine who appeared on “*Ukraine’s Got Talent*” – her sand animation of the struggle between the Ukrainians and Germans in World War II was so moving that the audience alternated between applause and tears. She won the 2009 contest and her performance has been watched on YouTube by over 20 million people worldwide.

I sent out the link to the YouTube site of her performance. She lit a candle at the beginning of her presentation just as we light a chalice here.

Then she swept the sand into ever new arrangements that showed pain and fear and love and hope.

She took those little dots of sand and connected them into new patterns that showed how the world could be healed.

At the end of her animation she wrote words in Ukrainian across the sand. Translated they read “*you are always near.*”

“You are always near” are the words of the new revelation for you and me and us and all those around the world.

“You are always near” and that means all generations of women and men and older folk and children connected together.

“You are always near” and no one is left out and arms are held out to tend the wounded, heal the sick and draw the poison from the arrow of life.

*“You are always near” and we are the ones we've been waiting for.
We are the change that we seek.”*

Revelation has come yet again and it is no longer just a dream.

Let us awaken from the dream and begin our shared work wherever we may live or work or love.

Thank you.