

## **The World Our Hearts Know is Possible**

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### **Reading**

Patricia Jimenez

*From Theology and Anti-Racism: Latino and Latina Perspectives*

“True liberation...requires denunciation of oppression, and then a further step, annunciation-telling what the future will be-regardless of whether the prediction comes true within our history or not. Telling what the future will be, is an opportunity for us to dream. It is an opportunity to tap into the creative magic that happens when each person is encouraged and expected to be a creative agent. When the response creates a new community of love and justice, we become co-creators with the divine. Our survival and our salvation depend on liberation for all.”

### **Sermon:**

Last month,  
I lost a plant.  
Caring for houseplants has been  
My long-time passive hobby  
Until last spring,  
When I moved to a new house  
And joined a houseplant facebook group  
And now I've become that person who walks around other people's houses  
thinking “that sanservia is getting too much light”  
And “that peperomia is yellowing because you've been watering it too much”  
And negotiating with my partner just exactly *how many* plants is *too many* plants.

I digress.  
Last month, I lost a plant.  
Two, in fact,  
A plant which had started as a cutting from a dear friend's plant  
Probably, oh, 7 or 8 years ago.  
Which, despite my relative ignoring of it for several years,  
Was thriving, frequently allowing for new cuttings, surprised me by producing flowers two  
years in, grew so much and so well that I had two large plants now.  
And now all of a sudden,  
About two months ago,  
The leaves started yellowing,  
And falling off.  
On both of my plants.  
And I was so distressed! I had just repotted them, I've had them for so long...  
And no matter what I did—more sun, more water, more food  
Nothing seemed to help.  
Finally, when it seemed that all was lost,

When the stems had gotten really mushy and the bark sloughed off at the lightest touch,  
I did a post-mortem autopsy  
And discovered that the roots had rotted into slimy, wobbly, mushy shells of their old forms.  
And that all my efforts – more water, more sun—had been in vain.  
The yellowing leaves, the dying trunks—  
None of it could be saved with a rotting root system.

I think of this metaphor  
When I look at the exercise that we did with our kids today.  
The things they listed  
(list some here)  
All of these feel like yellowing leaves, withering branches,  
Indicators that something is wrong at the root level.

And yet, sometimes, when we are talking about social change  
We get stuck  
Because we don't fully know where we are going  
Or how to get there.  
What I love about the exercise we did with our kids today  
Is that it asks them to name the flowers  
The things that are truly compelling and beautiful about a better world  
And doesn't ask right away for the blueprint to get there—at least, not yet.  
Because sometimes we can focus too much on what's immediately practical  
That we forget to see the beauty that might be possible  
Dreaming and imagination can have a truly prophetic quality.

When I was in college  
I was an active Unitarian Universalist  
And largely shaped by my experiences in that faith community,  
particularly around anti-racism and social justice community organizing

But in school, I became a women studies major  
And I can see from here several of you suddenly thinking  
“wow, Heather, that explains a lot.”

I really loved everything I was learning in my classes  
deconstructing everything  
social constructions of gender, race, identity, the economy, media, advertising,  
I became my roommates least favorite person to watch TV with  
With my constant sociological critiques.  
But the truth was I was getting burnt out  
in my classes  
and it showed up in increased anger, frustration at others who “just didn't get it”  
Feeling tired about the idea of going to more protests,  
Self-righteousness at family holidays,  
It felt constantly frustrating, and not satisfying.  
And I realized what I longed for was re-construction

a sense of “yes, I know that this idea is problematic, and that story is being told to make a profit, and this narrative upholds the domination of this other group of people... but what can we do *instead?*”

How am I supposed to *live* with all of this knowledge?

What am I going to *do?*

Serendipitously, in that same period of time

I had the opportunity to start working with a group of Unitarian Universalist friends  
Who were working on starting an intentional living community grounded in the values and tradition of Unitarian Universalism.

The funny story behind that is that eleven years ago,  
when my friend Matt, with whom I co-founded the co-op,  
and who will actually be here to lead worship on April 7<sup>th</sup>,  
Told me about this idea that he  
and another mutual friend were throwing around  
About starting a coop  
I turned to him and said  
“Matt, that is literally the craziest idea anyone has ever had,  
but...if anyone can make it happen, I suppose it would be you”.  
I jumped straight to the practical, the roadmap, the blueprint  
Skipping over the beauty of the vision he had

And so I started working on this project, along with a team of 6 or 7 others.  
Casting a vision of housing being used as a means of shelter, not profit  
Of a cooperatively owned venture  
Where people who otherwise would not have access to controlling their own living situation  
Could democratically control their rent  
And decisions about the things that most affect their lives.  
We cast a vision of shared decision making  
Of community wealth growing through home equity  
Of believing that we can better live our values when we live them in community.

I lived there for seven and a half years,  
And those years were harder and more beautiful and more transformative  
than I ever could have imagined.  
And in the time I lived there, I shared a home with over 60 people,  
Went to an estimated 400 two-to-three hour meetings  
Cooked an uncountable number of dinners for 15 people  
Hosted UU youth groups, sang together, shared dinners  
Had conflict and built consensus,  
Shared the work of maintaining a home.

There are so many things I could say about my time living at Lucy Stone Cooperative  
But what stands out to me now is twofold:

First, It spoke to me for so many years  
because it was a way to create the world I wanted to live in,

not just to live with discontent in a world that I knew to be broken.  
It was generating, announcing, dreaming the world my heart knew was possible.  
Which is not to say it wasn't also heartbreaking and devastatingly hard, at times.

Second, those of us who started the community were all amateurs.  
None of us had ever bought a house, or filed papers with the IRS, or read a mortgage  
amortization schedule.

But we learned.

And we had the benefit of not having been convinced  
that this world our hearts knew was possible would be too hard to get to  
We asked for the support of our community, and of professionals,  
but we were not tied to the "way it has always been done"—  
because none of us knew what that was.

It was not utopia. It was not even close.  
And the community still continues,  
it has been a kind of experiment in trying to bring into being  
that world that our hearts know is possible.

It has been an experiment in *announcing* the world that our hearts know is possible  
Rather than simply *denouncing* the world as it is.

Unitarian Universalist historian and scholar Dan McKannan wrote in his book *Prophetic  
Encounters*,

"when human beings encounter one another deeply,  
in the midst of their struggles for freedom  
and equality and community,  
prophetic power is unleashed.  
This is power to denounce,  
to condemn those who would  
"grind the faces of the poor into the dust",  
in the words of Isaiah.  
It is also the power to *announce*—  
to proclaim God's Kingdom that will be realized here on earth, the beloved community"

Dan McKannan wrote this book on Religion and the American Radical Tradition,  
which he describes by saying:

"some would call it the path of the prophets.  
Others speak of the "American radical tradition" or simply "the Left".

It is the tradition of abolitionists  
who called on their neighbors to immediately renounce the sin of slavery,  
of feminists who recognized patriarchy  
as itself a form of slavery,  
of socialists who labored to build  
a "cooperative commonwealth",  
and of pacifists who saw war as the ultimate affront to humanity."

McKannan's use of the words "radical"  
To describe this tradition  
Makes beautiful sense to me  
When I learned – are you ready –  
That the etymology of the word "radical" is "root"  
To take a radical approach is to look at the root causes  
To go back to the roots  
To see what is stemming "from the roots"  
A radical approach is simply to look at the root causes of the ailment.

And I think back to my plant  
The one that was dying from root rot  
And I see these leaves of the system  
And I think: what is happening at the roots in our society?  
Is it racism? Sexism? Homophobia? Transphobia?  
Greed? Isolation? Imperialism? Capitalism?  
I'm not sure I know.  
But what would a radical response—  
A response that goes, remember, to the root  
Look like?

In reading the rest of Dan McKannan's book,  
It is interesting to notice that within Unitarian Universalism,  
Our faith tradition has had an interesting and tenuous relationship  
To those more radical thought leaders and activists.  
In particular, I think of Theodore Parker,  
the fearless Unitarian Boston-based preacher  
who wrote sermons with a pistol on his desk  
to protect runaway slaves,  
Who was branded a heretic by his more conservative  
Unitarian colleagues of the day.  
And yet, now, within Unitarian Universalism  
we lift him up as the originator of the quote  
"the arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice".  
We teach about him in our Sunday School curricula,  
we cite most of our impressive UU legacy of social justice as being grounded in his work.

Similarly,  
Ralph Waldo Emerson,  
Who we laud as being one of the founders of our faith  
Gave a speech at Harvard Divinity School in 1838  
Making comments that were so radical for the time  
That he was banned from Harvard for the next 30 years.

I reflect on both of these men,  
Labeled so "radical", and ridiculed in their time  
Yet revered by history.

I would say that I don't often talk about my personal politics at church  
Except that I do, all the time.  
Because my politics are actually a reflection of my faith  
My faith that says that people are inherently valuable  
My faith that says that people can be redeemed  
My faith that says that black lives matter, that trans lives matter  
That violence is structural, not just interpersonal  
That we are interconnected  
That we are part of something larger than ourselves  
My faith that says that everyone is in,  
My faith that says that every person is worthy of love  
My faith that says that we must do the work to create the beloved community, right here on earth.  
My faith that says that a better world is possible.

My friends,  
Faith is the work of living with a foot on both worlds  
The world that we live in  
And the world that our hearts knows is possible.  
And spiritual maturity is being able to hold both at once—the world that we live in,  
And the world that is not yet.

Sharon Welch, a theologian, writes about what it means to have an “ethic of risk” when working for a better world. She writes:

“The ethic of risk offers a model of maturity  
that challenges the equation of maturity with resignation,  
with an acceptance of the improbability of fundamental social change.  
Within an ethic of risk,  
maturity means recognizing that ideas  
are far from realization and not easily won,  
that partial change occurs only  
though the hard work and persistent struggles of generations.  
Maturity entails the recognition that language  
of “causes” and “issues” is profoundly misleading,  
conveying the notion that work for justice is somehow optional,  
something of a hobby or short term project.  
A mere tying up of loose ends in an otherwise satisfactory social system.  
Within an ethic of risk,  
maturity is gained through the recognition  
that evil is deep-seated,  
and that the barriers to fairness will not be removed easily  
by a single group or by a single generation.  
Maturity is the acceptance, not the life is unfair,  
but that the creation of fairness is the task of generations,  
that work for justice is not incidental to one's life  
but is an essential aspect of affirming the delight and wonder of being alive.”

So yes. I want a revolution.  
I don't know all the steps of what it takes to get there  
And I know it won't be done in my lifetime  
But I know that I want a fundamental transformation  
Right down to the roots.  
I may even be a radical  
But if I am a radical, it is because I am a radical for love.  
It is because my heart believes that that world is possible—  
A world where we value human lives over profit  
Where people have a real say in the things that affect their lives  
Where people of all genders are safe to walk alone at night  
Where coming out is not even a thing,  
because the boxes and assumptions will be gone,  
Where we can have enough and live well without destroying the planet  
Where everyone has healthy food to eat, and a safe place to sleep, and access to healthcare  
Where brown and black and trans and indigenous people are not more likely to die from  
police, or pollution, or in the desert, or from lack of healthcare.  
Where people who harm others are brought to account,  
where relationship is restored and harm is repaired.

And I'm not a policy-maker, I'm a preacher  
I'm trying to announce before I start doubting my vision  
because the roadmap to get there seems too unclear.  
And I know that the world your heart knows is possible might look different,

But in order to start dreaming about that world that our hearts know is possible  
We need all of us  
The dreamers, the architects, the thinkers, the hold on go slowerers,  
The policy makers, the preachers,  
The workers and teachers and artists and parents and healers.  
The elders, the young ones--  
We need to share that world that is in our own hearts  
We need to practice *annunciation*, not only denunciation.

And this is why we come together in church  
Because communities of faith hold out faith that another world is possible,  
that another way of living is possible,  
And we seek to make manifest through our communities that world—  
the beloved community  
We often say that we come to church  
to practice being the people we say we want to be  
But today I say that we also come to church  
to practice being the *communities* we say we want to be  
And we come to church to practice being the *world* we say we want to be.

So friends,

Let us be radicals for love  
Let us look to the roots to find what flourishes  
And what is dying on the vine.  
Let us dream, vision, announce  
The world that our hearts know is possible  
Even though we know that it is the work of generations  
That we will likely see that world in our lifetimes  
That the path to that world may be unclear  
But that together, slowly, over generations,  
With faith and hope and love  
We might get a little closer.

May it be so, and amen.