

Dreaming the Dream. We all have dreams don't we? Our story this morning was taken from our Jewish scripture source. The Hebrews had a dream they wanted to be a free people. They longed to be in the land of milk and honey. The Exodus took 40 years to complete - they did not always behave themselves well, there were mutinies, and false idols and arguments and fear and ... Sounds little like a congregation doesn't it?

The Hebrews considered themselves the chosen people. Being chosen is pretty special, but they were still simply people. Being chosen didn't change that for them.

We UUs don't usually consider ourselves chosen but we are people, and like the Hebrews we have things that we long for. It is an interesting thing how we long for something. Dreams can orient you, give you a direction. Someone who longs to be who dreams to be a doctor has a pretty good understanding of what they need to do to get there. And dreams can be hard to follow. Even the Hebrews at one point in the desert journey complained to Moses that it would have been better to die in Egypt than to starve in the desert.

This morning I want to talk you about our congregation and our dreams and about how we can do to make them real.

Some churches long for the time awhile back sometimes referred to as the golden age. Around here maybe it was the time during David Blanchard's ministry when we had grown in size to where we almost needed to go to two services there were just too many people on a Sunday and there were not enough seats for people. Or perhaps it was during the era of Dr. Reamon who was the pastor when we built this building and moved from downtown to here, or perhaps it was during the era of the maple sugar dinner. The golden age may be different for different people it might be tied to a particular minister who was here, or a particular small group, or a particular activity.

Some of us dream of a time when this congregation will be great again. And again this is different for each of us, maybe it will be when we have a children's education program that is busting at the seams, maybe it will be when the choir is overflowing, maybe it will be when we have a Black Lives matter banner on the church, and we are regularly known for our justice work in the community.

But you know what we already are great. For those of you who have been here 10 years or more think of where we were 10 years ago. This congregation was in the middle of a big conflict. People had left this was a hard place to be. Blessings to all of you who stayed and loved this place to where it is now.

We have a booming Jr. high group 14 strong
We have a booming Sr. high group something like 30 members
Those two programs are collaborative with May Memorial others in the UU world see that as a bit cutting edge
Our Sunday attendance numbers are up
We have a new website
We have a black lives matter study group
We routinely are helping and working with the eastern farmworkers. Did you know that about twice a year they hold a medical clinic here for the people they work with?
We have shown up - at our local mosque, at the gay pride parade, at the Westcott festival.
We have members who mentor kids, who are struggling, others who help adults learn to read
The congregation is considering moving from having me hired by Board of Trustees, to having me called by the congregation
We will have a student intern minister next year
We have a new roof and are looking at how to get some other much-needed repairs done
We are home to increased number of renters who would be hard pressed to find another place
We hold leadership positions in our District and in the national association

Our members care for one another. Quietly and behind the scenes phone calls are made, casseroles are dropped off, rides are given, cards are sent. We care for one another.

It is fairly common for me to run into someone I know, who is not a member or participant here, who says ohm yeah your the pastor at First now aren't you I'm hearing a lot of good things about that place.

So these are not the happenings of a congregation that might be great

again these are the happenings of a congregation that is already great. But we still have dreams don't we?

Our Canvass theme this year is "Dream a Big Dream." The canvass team chose that theme because they think we have the capacity to dream big, and they know that big dreams have big impact. And this morning is our kick off for our canvass, or fundraising drive.

When I was writing this sermon I went looking for some funny stories about raising money for churches because well ... because talking about money can make people anxious I thought it would be good to lighten the mood some. What I found first was a lot of articles from more traditional churches about how much you should give and why you should tithe. It was a disquieting because there was clearly a theology that I could not agree with - like the more you give the more likely you are to get into heaven.

So first of all we are Universalists - if there is a heaven we believe that everyone gets in no matter how much or how little one gives to their church. We believe in the inherent worth and dignity of each human being. Your value is not increased if you increase your pledge. So as a Unitarian Universalist minister I cannot bribe you into pledging - by promising heaven, I cannot guilt you into giving. I could beg I suppose but that never works too well.

So I did find this one story about a novel fundraising strategy:

One Sunday a minister told his congregation that the church needed some extra money and asked the people to prayerfully consider giving a little extra in the offering plate. He said that whoever gave the most would be able to pick out three hymns. After the offering plates were passed, the minister glanced down and noticed that someone had placed a \$1,000 bill in the offering. He was so excited that he immediately shared his joy with his congregation and said he'd like to personally thank the person who placed the money in the plate. A very quiet, stately, older woman all the way in the back shyly raised her hand. The minister asked her to come to the front.

Slowly she made her way to the minister. He told her how wonderful it was that she gave so much and in thanksgiving asked her to pick out three hymns. Her eyes brightened as she looked over the congregation. She pointed to the three handsomest men in the building and said, "I'll take him and him and him."

Ok so joking aside that probably also is not a good fundraising strategy either.

What I can do is plain and simple is make the case to you why it is a good idea to pledge and how it can help us achieve our dreams.

Imagine that you are offered a job and it is one that you would like. When the offer is made you reasonably ask how much you will be paid and the answer they don't know you will just have to trust them that you will get paid. That is the first reason that we ask that you make a pledge. Because it helps us to know how much we will have to spend. A pledge is your promise to make a financial gift to this congregation.

What size pledge that is your decision. We ask that you think what this place means to you and compare that with what money you have and make a pledge where those two intersect.

This year we are enlarging our dream. We have set a big goal. We would like to receive pledges totaling \$111,111.11. In order to reach that we need folks who have not pledged to start pledging, and we need folks who have pledged to increase their pledges. Our canvass team will reach out to each of you and invite you to a house party where you can learn more about pledging and about what we do and then make a pledge.

So what I want to talk about here is what dreams could we reach if we had \$111,111.11 in pledges?

We could fund our music program a bit better. I heard a lot of good things about Merry Mischief last week, and everyone seems to like Dan and Peggy at the Christmas Eve service but guest musicians have to eat too - they cost money. We could increase our support to RE. RE supplies are budgeted 950.00 a year; we have 45 children and youth registered that is about 21 dollars per child or youth. I know our children mean more to us than that. We could increase Tina's hours so that she and Christine Smith the chair of the Lifespan Faith Development committee could offer more opportunities for adults. Did you know that Claudia Klaver has been leading our Black Lives Matter discussion group - that has pulled folks from outside our congregation into it? What other kinds of study groups, or adult experiences could we have? We could strengthen our small group ministry, our chalice circles.

What if we raised enough money that we could afford to offer some space here for a support group for transgender youth at no charge? What if we raised enough money that this building could become not just a meeting place for us but could be a place where folks could come and find safety and respite from their world of troubles? What if we raised enough money to sponsor a refugee family, or partner with a church on the near Westside or the south side and do our part to help improve Syracuse?

You heard this morning from Dennis and how this place has had a positive impact on him and his family. Over the next few weeks you will hear more folks talk about what this community means to them. You will hear how we have changed people's

lives. Our theme this month is liberation.

Much of our justice work is about liberating folks, and much of our educational and spiritual work is around liberation. So many folks who come through our doors and stay do so because they found a faith, and a community that could affirm them, could accept them. How can we make that more accessible to folk?

I don't want us raising money so that we can go back to our greatness that was. I want us to raise more money so that we can build on our greatness that already is. We have been working with a bare bones budget for too long.

I want us to continue to be a place where folks are welcomed and are free and even encouraged to question, to ponder to explore what it means to be a person of integrity and morals. I want us to be that for our children also. I want us to teach our children and our adults what it means to be a compassionate person of integrity, I want you our folks to take that compassion out into the world. I want to see that compassion ripple out into our community beyond these walls.

It's a big dream but we can make it happen.

In a world without end may it be so.