

Vision without action is a daydream.  
Action without vision is a nightmare.

Vision and action what do they have to do with each other - what does the big picture have to do with what we do each day.

At a church I worked at a very long time ago I remember being at a meeting where at about 2 hour and 37 minutes I thought ... well I won't quote myself directly but I did wonder why is this going on so long - do we really need to talk this much. But really the talking was about sharing the vision and trying to get to an agreed vision. I in my youth wanted action to get going to get moving and I didn't understand that it is hard to work to act as a collaborative community if you don't share a common vision.

We are in a time where fewer and fewer people are choosing christianity. Which we here in a UU congregation could look at as a good thing. But actually fewer and fewer people are choosing church. We can see this as a problem or we can see this as an opportunity. People are still looking for community for transformation and more importantly they are looking for impact. In a world where folks often feel faceless, voiceless, powerless (except when it comes to what they buy) we offer something else. Deep community, connection causes each of us to grow that growth moves us to serve others **that service changes the world.**

Conservative Christianity is viewed by many folks as narrow and judgmental, well earned I think by the way. Catholicism has shown itself to be corrupt beyond belief. Folks are leaving Christianity. And that negative judgment about christianity washes over us too. That can be hard on us because we see ourselves as the good church people. Sometimes when I tell folks that I am a minister I get the reaction - "Really but you seem so nice, so authentic." That says way more about someone's view of church and ministers than it says about me.

We have an image problem because lately when church hits the news it is bad. And it is an opportunity because we are sooooo different than the churches that hits the news. We have an amazing opportunity because this world is desperate for our message. Over the summer I watched queer eye. If you aren't familiar with this emmy winning show watch it. Five queer guys spend each episode giving one guy a makeover. And it's not just clothes or personal hygiene. Yes They pay attention to his home, his schedule and activities his values. You can look at it as a crass example of consumerism and there is that. But more than that the show highlights a transformation to a person. It's powerful. People are hungry for positive change for transformation. We are lucky that is the business we are in transforming lives and by doing that transforming the world.

Still that word church can be a stopper for people. Technically we are a society and so you might think we have solved the problem but we haven't. I have talked to folks who are not part of this community who hear society as kind of hoity toity - like we are some kind of privileged academic group. It goes to show that there is no perfect word.

I think it less about what we call ourselves and more about how we communicate ourselves. Lets remake the word church, lets remake the word society. Let's reclaim those words. We have this vision of ourselves that is different than what is church on the news or in TV shows. We are a beloved community - not the only one but we are part of the movement that is working hard and playing hard at making the beloved community real in this world now. That is the vision that we need to get out into the world around us. Because the world is so in need of this message.

Our vision of beloved community is beautiful - justice, equity, respect, all people having enough, all people being loved, all people being safe and that is just the beginning of our vision. But without action that vision is just a daydream. We really do need to showup. For some of us that means public actions, picketing, and acts of civil disobedience and for some of us that means making the coffee at coffee hour here so that we can have this community that as a whole is working for beloved community. Not all of us need to be on the front lines and in fact no one can be on the front line all the time. Some of us can cook the food, bring the water, do the support work. Some of us can keep this building in shape so that we can use it as a place to gather not just for planning and meetings but a place to gather together and feed our souls. Changing the world is hard work. It will take all of us and all of our differences to do it. Georgia Gilmore wasn't in the papers during the Civil Rights movement, she wasn't picketing, or lobbying. She knew what her strength was, cooking, and she used to support Rev. Martin Luther King and other civil rights workers. Even activists need to eat, even activists need community.

We need a vision a big idea to direct our actions. Georgia Gilmore's actions had vision. ACTION without vision is just a nightmare. You all have been at some meeting, like the one I was at so very long ago, or an event that has no vision, no big idea. It's a nightmare - people working at cross purposes, and not listening to one another. Social action without vision is just busy work at best and a nightmare at worst.

Why do we need a vision a big idea? It is said "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea."

Antoine de Saint-Exupery

With a big idea with a vision we will reach we will stretch we will grow we will have hope and we can share that with the world. We can offer healing to those of us here in this community and we can share that healing with the world around us.

I clearly am a white person and I cannot really participate in the Black Joy that Rev. Kimberly Quinn Johnson spoke of. Remember her words “ It is the joy created through our collective healing — our laying down of burdens, to be picked up and shared by our people, our community. This is not joy in spite of suffering — a mask put on to hide pain, an armor put on to push through pain. This is an embrace, holding and soothing us in our suffering. This Black Joy, is joy created through our being together. This Black Joy reminds me that I am not alone, that trouble don’t last always, that I am held and carried forward by a power beyond what I can comprehend.”

We can create something like that here. We can put down our masks, stop hiding our pain, stop putting on the armor. WE can all stop with the stiff upper lip stuff. We can lay down our burdens here and trust that someone in our community will be able to pick up those burdens and make the carrying of the burdens easier. We can remind each other that we are not alone. I am not alone in this ministry. Yes I am up front almost each week but it is all of us that makes it happen. That is the vision our building the beloved community is not solitary work the joy is that we do it together.

Hear again those opening words of mine:

if you are hungry there is food

if you are lonely there are friends

if you are anxious there is calm

if you are joyful there is celebration

if you are grieving there are arms to hold you

if you hungry to change the world we got you

if you ready to try something new we will cheer you on

If you are questioning we will dialogue with you

if you are shy we will leave you be

when you need a home we will give you space

when you need respite we will be your quiet

when you need encouragement we will be your nudge

when you need joy we will be your smile

when you need water we will be your lake

Beloved community is not about chatter is about action- life saving world changing action. Beloved community is about transformation - about opening yourself to a love that will lift you up turn you around and set you down in a new way with a new way of being. This is what we have to offer.

It is not I who is going to do that. It is you. Our best resource is YOU it is not our staff it is YOU it is not our building it is YOU our people. You get this faith you are here seeking and struggling, answering the call to love. You are our best resource and I want you out there beyond these walls equipped to the gills with what you need to bring our message of love and life to a world that is literally dying waiting for our mess age. I want some of us to make the coffee and cook the food, wash the dishes and sweep up, I want some of us to check and make sure the lights get turned off and the windows get closed so that others of us can do the activism - and do the care of others. All our work can be pointed toward the transformation that Justice Love and Joy offer us. Because that is our big idea our vision "Justice with Love and Joy open to Awe." This year as we make our choices in this community let Justice Love and Joy direct our work, direct our action, direct our prayers.

Let our vision inform our actions, Let our actions live out our vision.