

Homily: Creativity
Sunday, June 11, 2023
First Unitarian Church
The Rev. Sarah C. Stewart

There's two things that live in the future: there's imagination and there's fear. The pandemic gave us lots of opportunity to open the door to that future fear. When would school reopen? Does school have to reopen? What will we do in the meantime? Does my face look weird in this Google Meet? What about my room? Will I remember how to socialize once I can see my friends again? Will they still really be my friends?

These examples are about being a teenager—because I think the pandemic was especially hard on children and teens. We've all seen the statistics about lost progress in literacy and math. And if you are a teacher or know teachers, you may have experienced or heard stories about young people not being ok after the pandemic. The demand for mental health services at universities has skyrocketed. Young people need interaction with peers to help them grow up and learn to be part of a community beyond their families. Two years of absent or strained in-person interactions took their toll. The fear in the future got bigger and bigger, and its roar became harder and harder to ignore.

But fear is not the only thing that lives in the future. Our imaginations open on a door to the future, as well, and they help us shape the future we want to live in. The imagination is a wonderful place. One of the adults in our congregation, a poet, said that for her, imagination is the place that's free from the clutter and demands of the everyday world. There, she is free. Imagination lets us project ourselves into the future without fear. How will we overcome that problem we see looming before us? What could be out

there for us if we take the next step toward our dreams? And yes, it can also be a place of foreboding: a place where we allow ourselves to imagine the worst thing that could happen. But even then, imagining the worst thing is better than actually living it, and by imagining possibilities, even bad ones, we can also imagine solutions and alternative futures.

The poet also told me: imagination creates meaning, and then we can use that meaning to help make sense of all the clutter in the world. Sometimes we're stuck in the forest and we can't see our way out. We can't see the path in front of us, or the opening in the trees we're sure was there. Imagination gives us a new perspective. What if we climb a tree to get a better view? What if we call for help? What if we retrace our steps, or reframe our goal? Imagination changes us, so that we can see the world in new ways.

Remember, too, that everyone around you is busy using their imaginations and fighting off their own fears. When you don't understand someone, ask yourself what they might be going through—what stories their mind is telling them. Ask them what they dream of, what they hope for, what future they're imagining. And parents, I invite you to share in the imaginations of your children—when they were infants, they needed everything from you, including imagining their future, but now they have dreams of their own. “You can give them your love but not your thoughts, for they have their own thoughts,” Kahlil Gibran wrote. We can no longer dream their dreams for them, but we can be lucky enough that they will share their dreams with us.

Graduating seniors, I hope one thing this religious community has given you has been faith in your own imaginations. We Unitarian Universalists believe that every single

person has a divine spark within them. We don't think that God's love is only for a select few, or that some people are more holy than others. Every one of us has holiness, and as co-conspirators with God, every one of us helps to make the world a better place.

We believe in the power of human community to build a better world and to open our hearts to one another. And we believe that it is in community that we become our best selves, by merging all those imaginations of the future together. If each one of us has a little bit of the spirit of God in us, then by coming together we create a larger holiness, a greater sanctity, a more inclusive faith. Go forth and be part of communities that will use imagination to change the world. I love you all. Amen.