

Presentation on Active Hope

By Randy Blasch, May 3, 2020

Our **call to worship** this morning are these words by Joanna Macy:

*Active Hope is not wishful thinking.
Active Hope is not waiting to be rescued
By the Lone Ranger or by some savior.
Active Hope is waking up to the beauty of life
On whose behalf we can act.
We belong to this world.
The web of life is calling us forth at this time.
We've come a long way and are here to play our part.
With Active Hope we realize that there are adventures in store,
Strengths to discover, and comrades to link arms with.
Active Hope is a readiness to engage.
Active hope is a readiness to discover the strengths
In ourselves and in others;
A readiness to discover the reasons for hope
And the occasions for love.
A readiness to discover the size and strength of purpose,
Our own authority, our love for life,
The liveliness of our curiosity,
The unsuspected deep well of patience and diligence,
The keenness of our senses, and our capacity to lead. None of these can be discovered in an
armchair
Or without risk.
(Macy, 2012, 35 -36)*

Meditation:

Our meditation this morning are these words by Joanna Macy, edited by Tom Atlee:

When you act on behalf
of something greater than yourself,
you begin
to feel it acting through you
with a power that is greater than your own.
This is grace.
Today, as we take risks
for the sake of something greater

than our separate, individual lives,
we are feeling graced
by other beings and by Earth itself.
Those with whom and on whose behalf we act
give us strength
and eloquence
and staying power
we didn't know we had.
We just need to practice knowing that
and remembering that we are sustained
by each other
in the web of life.
Our true power comes as a gift, like grace,
because in truth it is sustained by others.
If we practice drawing on the wisdom
and beauty
and strengths
of our fellow human beings
and our fellow species
we can go into any situation
and trust
that the courage and intelligence required
will be supplied. (Macy, 2012, 114 - 115)

Sermon:

Just 3 weeks ago, as we sat in our homes for service, we watched the video “The Great Turning” as our Earth Day celebration. As soon as it was introduced by Jennifer Radcliffe, I said out loud to the TV and the dog “I KNOW THIS”. The “Great Turning” as described by Joanna Macy in the video we watched is just one piece of a puzzle she describes in her book “Active Hope” which she co-authored with Chris Johnstone, and it just so happens that I actually finished reading that book for seminary just that week. While the book Active Hope is primarily addressing the climate crisis, it can and should be applied to other areas where change needs to happen.

The book and the video laid out three “dimensions” that need to be accomplished in order for the great turning to occur. They are “Holding Actions”; “Life Sustaining Systems and Practices” which lead to the last piece “A Shift in Consciousness”. And in the book she describes in detail how all of these lead into each other in a great, never ending cycle. Now I could get out charts and powerpoints and show you how all this works which would lead

to a mass changing of YouTube channels. I do plan on digging into Active Hope deeper and maybe it could end up being a class we could all do together. But that's not what today is about.

Today is about seeing what Active Hope can look like, not in theory but in an actual real world example.

Part of my time in this first year of Seminary has been a year long class called Community Studies, the purpose of which, in a nutshell is to get students working directly with a non-profit and more specifically in an area you have not been directly involved with in the past. I was lucky and blessed to be involved with Freedom University.

If you've been at UUMAN for the last year, you've heard about them. About a year ago they came and gave a presentation for us in service, that's where I learned about Freedom U. But in case you weren't here that Sunday or not been involved with me begging for help with their lunches, let me tell you a little about them.

Their mission is pretty powerful in itself - "Empowering undocumented youth & fulfilling their human right to education". (Soltis, "Freedom-University", Freedom University, www.freedom-university.org, Accessed April 28, 2020).

That is so important, I want to say it again... "Empowering undocumented youth & fulfilling their human right to education". But its mission statement is just that, an aspiration, what they claim they are about, it is a HOPE. Well I can tell you they are absolutely living their mission, and more. Freedom University lives Active Hope.

The first part in living Active Hope and achieving "The Great Turning" as explained by Macy is called HOLDING ACTIONS. Macy explains it in part this way, "Holding actions also counter the unraveling of our social fabric, caring for those who have been damaged and safeguarding communities against exploitation, war, starvation and injustice. " (Macy, 2012, 28) Well Freedom U has done that and then some. Just ask our own Rev. Dave Dunn who was arrested in an action protesting the decision of the Georgia Board of Regents. But their actions don't end there. These students regularly make presentations at colleges throughout the state. They speak openly to the media. They were even featured on the Daily Show. Doing all this while in fear, day after day, that they and their families could be visited by ICE. That my friends, is what holding action is all about.

The second dimension, as they call it, is Life Sustaining Systems and Practices, it "involves a rethinking of the way we do things, as well as a creative redesign of the structures and systems that make up society." (Macy, 2012, 30)

Well, all you have to do is look at Freedom University's website to see that courses like - "Bringing Human Rights Home", SAT and College Prep, and CLEP Writing Composition. Real life skills, practices that will serve the students their entire life, truly Life Sustaining Systems and Practices.

And these skills and practices dovetail nicely into the final dimension described by Macy... "A Shift in Consciousness." In describing this third dimension, Macy and Johnstone say "This dimension of the Great Turning arises from shifts taking place in our hearts, our minds and our views of reality." (Macy, 2012, 30)

Now, while I can certainly imagine how the students' consciousness may have been shifted, and that is certainly something I wish I could have discussed with them, I don't know for sure if or how they realized that shift, but, what I can tell you without question, is that this place, these amazing students and staff, shifted mine. Freedom University changed me, deeply in my heart, in my mind and in my soul.

While sometimes in our lives, we aren't really sure when things changed or we had that "realization" that affected our lives, I can pinpoint this moment for me, exactly. On my first day at the Freedom U, I was introduced to the students as a seminary student and the "safe white guy."

I initially smirked at the description, but I had a moment, almost immediately where I understood. Riding with me to and from the site meant that the students were far less likely to be noticed and therefore stopped by authorities. I was slapped right in the face by my white privilege. My heart grew one size that day...

And then, I was invited to their holiday party. It was so much fun, we ate, we danced, we sang karaoke. And they introduced me to songs that they sing that included verses on not being detained and how they are not illegal, but people. And my heart grew a second size...

What I came to realize is I had fallen into a trap, one I think we all can relate to, is I saw them and others like them in the news as the "other, or them". Now don't get me wrong, I always supported their cause in my own way, usually complaining to my UU friends or on facebook, but

knowing them, getting to really understand them and having them burst into my heart the way they did, changed me, really changed me.

I experienced it, first hand, the Great Turning. Maybe you can too. Maybe it will be next month when we have Family Promise back at UUMAN. Maybe it's the environment, the homeless or

teaching RE or that one thing that you are passionate about. Be open to the possibility of that Great Turning in your life, but be forewarned, it will change you, really change you and once you experience that Great Turning, you'll never want to turn back. .

Amen, let it be so.