

We often have wonderful ideas about the future. We create a vision or impression in our heads of what that future should look like. Most often, if truth be told, our vision or image of the future is pretty pedestrian. Our sense of the future is often merely some version of our current reality, what we already know and are familiar with.

Our vision might be another child, a bigger house, a bigger and better job that pays more. Or maybe, its a partner or spouse that's easier to get along with. So often our vision, image, sense of the future, is close-in, in time, and is constrained by what we see in front of us.

So often, we interact with our sense of the future, our hopes and dreams, as if they remain "out there", in the future, disconnected, in a very real sense, from us and from what's real. You know the story, one day you wake up and you ask, "What happened?" "What ever happened to that future I envisioned?"

I used to take my kids on road trips, it was the cheapest way to travel, and they'd often wake up from a nap or sometimes they'd refuse to nap,,but at some point, one or the other would ask, "Are we there yet?" The adult version is like treating the future like Christmas, "Is it here yet?" Did Santa bring the future?

We often act as if the future will materialize, right in front of our eyes, or appear on our doorstep. We may be very patient, hopeful, try to play by the rules, and we expect the future to come to us, just as we imagined it. Fully, dressed, decked-out and wonderful. I won't ask how many of you have had your future, wrapped in a bow and delivered to you!

For most of us, life intervenes. We get married, sick, pregnant, or lose our jobs. The car dies, or the kids don't turn out as expected. Generally, we try to live into our future; we really do, ... at least for a while.

We make efforts in a particular direction, and too often judge the results disappointing. Or we look around and life doesn't look like we thought it would, like we thought it should. So what do we do? Often, we change our idea of the future, let go of that dream we had. We give up or change course. Have you heard of that thing called a mid-life crisis?

So the question becomes, how do we make our future come alive? How do we stay connected to our future? And what's the nature of this thing we call the future, anyway? I can't promise you answers to these questions. But I think exploring the territory may prove to be very valuable. If we can gain some understanding of these issues, it might make a difference in our lives, for us as individuals and for our life together, in this faith community.

Certainly, we have to begin by accepting the notion that we are not in control. No matter how hard we try, no matter how well formed our sense of the future may be, we can not "will" the future into existence. So by definition, we must also accept the very real possibility of serendipity, the unknown, mystery. Sometimes our futures do find us.

But I've come to believe that there's nothing that beats conscious intentionality. Clear focus, dedication, commitment, patience and a willingness to work for our wants must be involved in this process. And faith. Faith must also be an integral part of the process. At a minimum, we have to have faith that the sun will come up tomorrow in order for there to be a future.

I also want to suggest that there is something important about our headset, our attitude, *how* we think about the future, that is important. What if the future, wasn't wholly "out there" and down the road? What if the future was not literally separate and distinct from the here and now? Our perception of the future would have to shift. We could no longer think of the future in exactly the same way.

I've come to think of the future as an extension of the present, an extension of the here and now. With this kind of perspective, the future is no longer a disconnected entity, out there, separate, in a different time zone. This shift in perspective has allowed the future to become more real for me. It brings it alive, it gives it some substance. It gives me something I can almost reach, something to build toward.

Thinking of the future this way, as an extension of the present, means, we have to also include the past, in our sense of the future. If the future is in some way, an extension of the present, then the present must be an extension of the past. This, I think, is a holistic viewpoint. The past, present and future are interconnected. It's another version of the interconnected web of life.

It seems to me, any useful vision of the future, has to be grounded in our current reality. And any useful interpretation of current reality, as Conrad Wright told us earlier, can not afford to view our past as dry bones and a faded wardrobe. He said our present experience, whether we acknowledge it or not, includes a particular kind of relationship to the past.

Speaking about groups, Wright argues that a group's image of its own past is critically important as it tries to make sense of the present. He pushes us to be diligent in assessing the past and to use it as a way of increasing our self-understanding. He warns us however not to be indiscriminating in rejecting the past, nor indiscriminating in our reverence for it.

So we must value the past, and assess it for whatever learning we can glean. In order for us to do a credible job of assessing our past, we need, candor, brutal honesty. And we are only able to be brutally honest in assessing ourselves or our group if we have a sense of compassion. We must be able to be compassionate with our selves and with others. Otherwise, brutal honesty becomes merely a weapon with which we damage ourselves and others.

With compassion comes humility. Now I don't know which comes first, humility or compassion. But I do know that humility is a necessary ingredient in being able to credibly assess our present reality. We have to have compassion *and* humility if we have any hope of getting a clear view of what's real.

In assessing what's real, we need to look at what's good. What's good about us, what we do, how we are? We also need to be able to see what's not so good. What are those things that we do that get in our way, are hurtful and harmful or lead us in a wrong direction. And we need to be open to seeing what we would prefer, how we'd like things, us, to be different.

With humility comes an ability to accept that we are not in control. Accepting that we are not in control creates an environment for the unknown, the mystery to emerge. Making room for the mystery is important because we can not possibly cover all the angles, have all the right questions, and certainly, not all the answers. This is the space, I'd argue, where faith, hope, love and God reside.

Years ago, in the late 80's and early 90's, I worked with a woman named Margaret Wheatley, Meg. I learned a great deal about organizations from her. It was just my luck that I worked with her just *before* she gained significant notoriety by publishing a Business Management best seller. I want to mention her second book about Chaos theory because I think she captures some essential elements required in Building a Future. In this book she adapts notions of Chaos Theory to apply to organizations.

Many have credited her with strengthening their resolve to more fully explore complexity, messiness, confusion and contradictory information. They came to understand that we create futures constrained by the past if we refuse to live with the messiness, contradictions and confusion associated with complexity. Let me repeat that. They came to understand...

These people learned that if we trust our natural tendencies to create order, we can incorporate mystery and complexity into the process of Building a Future. They understand that this requires conscious intentionality. It requires us to intentionally choose, to live with messiness for a while, if we want to build a future that goes beyond where we have already been.

Wheatley writes, "Life, free to create itself as it will, moves...into defined patterns of being. Pathways and habits develop. Over time, these become boundaries, limiting the freedom of self-expression. Who we are, becomes an expression of who we [already] decided to be. Our choices become limited as we strive to be consistent with who we already are."

That makes building a future, different from where we are, a difficult process. It's imperative therefore, that we make a conscious decision to not be constrained by our past and present realities. We have to choose to be willing to, as Wheatley says, be nudged, titillated and provoked by one another, into some new ways of seeing.

She goes on to say, "Understanding that life is self-referential gives us insight into the process by which change can occur in a person, an organization, an ecosystem or a nation. Every change is fostered by a change in self-perception. We will change our self if we believe that the change will preserve our self.... We must be able to see that who we are will be available in this new situation."

I continue to quote: “Thus, we can influence each other only by connecting with who we already are....We encourage others to change only if we honor who they are now. We ourselves engage in change only as we discover that we might be more of who we are by becoming something different.”

So that’s how I think we build a future! We build a future, day by day, deed by deed, based on how we choose to see ourselves and others. We build a future with intentionality, patience, compassion, humility, the courage to live with mystery and messiness, and with a zest for life.

But most fundamentally, we build a future by connecting with who we already are, and who we can become. And then, to be willing to share that sense of self, with the world. In other words, we have to be willing to engage and to be engaged, to be in genuine relationship. And lastly, we have to honor one another.

That’s the way I think we should go about building a future.

Amen