

There's a cute, funny saying out there...I suspect we've all heard it, it may be sardonic (sorry the word came to mind then I had to look it up to be sure it meant what I thought it did---sarcastic, ironic, derisive): "Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they aren't out to get you." It's a statement that questions our sense of "reality". It raises issues of perspective. It speaks to a focus on behavior rather than a concept, label or diagnosis.

People often debate whether horoscopes are real or accurate. Lots of folks poo poo astrology. Some very serious people, like past First Lady Reagan take it very seriously. In other words, if you find the information is useful, it may not matter a great deal where it comes from or how it's labeled. Years ago, I found very good information, I call it wisdom, on a Salada teabag label. It said "if you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there".

Those few words on a teabag had a significant impact on my life. I've never forgotten them. More importantly, those words have helped to guide my life. Those words helped me to realize if my life was to have meaning, I needed to understand what was important to me. I needed to have a sense of preferred outcomes. Even when I didn't know exactly where I was going, I knew the direction I was headed in. Simply knowing one's general direction rules out any number of decisions or choices.

Looking out at you all, it's clear a bunch of you were TV watchers during the 60's and 70's. Think back, what comes to mind when I say "this tape will self destruct in five seconds"? Mission Impossible. I thought it was a great show; it was the era of spy series...Man from U.N.C.L.E., Get Smart and Secret Agent. Mission Impossible always began with the head agent, Jim Phelps, getting a secret, covert mission from an anonymous voice.

The next thing he did, after the tape burned up, was to open a file and pick out the key players he needed on the team. So not only was the task clear---the WHAT, he also focused on the WHO...who he was after, who was to do the work. The how emerged as the story unfolded.

The Mission Impossible team always knew what their mission was. It always required “doing”; it was an action series. It was not a show about Vision. It may well have had a Vision...perhaps a Vision of a world without bad guys. But the show wasn’t about a high-minded, highfaluting vision of the world. It was about getting something done.

The Mission Impossible team always managed to accomplish their mission within 58 minutes. But that’s the beauty of TV. They can get done in moments what it takes the rest of us half our lifetime to do. They also had the advantage of having their mission defined for them. They didn’t need to take the time to figure it out.

They also didn’t have to take the time to debate the difference between a Vision and a Mission. They didn’t argue about the What. Many of us get caught up in these kinds of conversations, sometimes, whether or not we know that’s the argument we’re having.

Is it a Vision or a Mission? Is it long-term or short term? Don’t we already know what we’re about? Besides, how are we ever going to all agree? (Here’s where you plug in the statement: “we are UUs after all!”)

First and most importantly, if we don’t all agree, we’re likely to all take different roads. All the time assuming everyone else is going to the same place we are! Or worst, we beat up on each other because the other person clearly is not doing what needs to be done to get us where I know we are all going!

I turned to Jennell Evans of Smart@Work for her words about Vision and Mission. She first talked about the lost opportunities when one doesn’t have, or has a poorly written Vision or Mission.

She identifies lost opportunities in: 1) attracting/engaging/retaining talent. 2) building organizational culture. 3) leveraging all resources in service of increasing productivity.

While her focus is on business organizations, I'm sure she'd agree they also apply to a faith-based organization such as ours. She says a Vision: 1) Defines the optimal desired future state - the mental picture - of what an organization wants to achieve over time. 2) Provides guidance and inspiration as to what an organization is focused on achieving in five, ten, or more years.

She contrasts that with Mission, which she says: 1) Defines the present state or purpose of an organization. 2) Answers three questions about why an organization exists -WHAT it does; WHO it does it for; and HOW it does what it does.

Whether we know it or not, we all have some form of a Vision for ourselves and for any organization we belong to. It's probably not very clear in our heads but its there if we poke around looking for it. We also have a sense of a mission for ourselves as individuals, our family, and groups we belong to. Again, our sense of mission is probably poorly formed, but the answer lies in our expectations.

I'm fascinated by how both individuals and groups or organizations can align around a singular vision, then adopt divergent missions to bring about their particular vision. Specifically, the Roe v Wade decision of 1973 is a very good example.

Every since the decision came down, it created a clear line of demarcation between those that accepted the decision and those that did not. The court determined in a 7-2 decision that abortion was constitutionally protected under the right of privacy and explicitly rejected the fetal right to life argument.

Most prominently, two groups emerged in response to Roe; the National Abortion Rights Action League and the National Right to Life Committee. One found the decision was a valid protection of women's fundamental rights, the other found no basis in the constitution supporting the decision. They argue there is no consensus as to when meaningful life begins, so its better to not risk doing harm.

Every year there is a March for Life at the Supreme Court building. Numbers have increased over the last several years. In 2010, an estimated 250,000 gathered. In 2013 an estimated 650,000. Assumedly they all share the Vision of no or very few abortions.

However, they have adopted various Missions. From marching, to employing electoral politics, to legislative action intended to restrict abortions outright or at least restrict access to abortion. Still others attempt to shame women as they enter medical facilities while others have attempted to threaten or harm abortion providers. The who, the what and the how may change from group to group and over time.

No cultural change occurs without an embedded sense of a Vision and one or more Missions, focused on particular behaviors and objectives. This is true of the Abolitionist movement, the suffrage and women's rights movements, the Civil Rights and Gay Rights movements. It's also true of the various liberal religious movements over time.

Change, including growth or decline, does not happen without action. A Vision alone does not, by itself, cause change. Every change requires actions of some sort. We all are involved in some form of action, either collectively or individually. We are therefore part of some change process. Even if that change is to inhibit change or the natural course of events.

I have had a Vision for most of my life. It took years to recognize it as such, and even longer to claim it. For decades, I have had a Vision of the Beloved Community. It's a Vision that "defines the optimal desired future state" - my mental picture of what I want to see come into existence over time. It has guided and inspired my life's work, both in my private life and with the various organizations I've worked with.

My sense of the Beloved Community is one in which we are all accepted for who and what we are, we are acknowledged as playing a particular role in the unfolding of the universe. In other words, there is room and a role to play for each of us; meaning we each have inherent worth.

Every professional job I have ever had was a means to manifest my Vision of the Beloved Community. I only recognized that fact in retrospect during my earlier years. I've paid close attention to my Vision over my last few positions. In large measure it's why I went into the ministry. It was the best way I knew to help manifest my vision. That clarity means I am in fact on a Mission.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus does his most lengthy teaching of any time in the New Testament. Those chapters in Matthew are among the most widely quoted in Christendom. They speak to Jesus' moral teachings, and contain the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer.

I want to bring our attention to the end of that sermon, in chapter 7 of Matthew. After he talks about judging others, and tells us if we ask it will be given. After he tells us of the golden rule, he talks about the Fruit of the Tree.

He says; "A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. **Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.**"

What's key to me, and seems so very true, is the statement, "you will recognize them by their fruit". We can recognize our selves by our fruit. And it's for sure, others recognize us by our fruit. Hence, the colloquial truism: "**it's not what you say that matters, it's what you do.**"

So I ask you this morning to ponder the questions associated with Mission. What defines the present state or purpose of our congregation? *What* is it that we do? *Who* do we do it for? And *How* do we go about doing what we do?

If the Mission that has been proposed adequately states who we are, what we do, for whom and how, you should vote to approve the proposed revised Mission. If you can not find yourself in the words as they are presented, you should vote against accepting the proposed Mission.

If you vote against accepting the proposed Mission, I suggest to you there is work to be done if we are to maximize and leverage who we say we are as the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Poughkeepsie, or say we want to be.

Remember, Evans tells us there are lost opportunities when we don't have, or have a poorly written Mission. We lose opportunities to attract, engage and retain talent; opportunities for enriching our faith-based culture. And we lose opportunities to leverage ALL our resources in service who we want to be.

And I would add, our Mission should strengthen our vision of Unitarian Universalism. In that work, I will join you wholeheartedly.

May it be so. Ashee and Amen.