

Yearnings
UUFP

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Yearning. Yearning. I like the way that word sounds. As a seeker I like the feeling of the word's connotation. I feel like leaning... into the future; Like being pulled into the future.

For any of you who made New Year's resolutions, I hope your resolutions were based on your yearnings. So often we make decisions based on want, or a perceived need, or based on "ought to". If your experience is anything like mine, resolutions based on wants, or ought or should, just don't last. They have a way of fizzling out after a while, usually a pretty short while.

It seems to me, yearning, has a more potent force. Like in the story this morning. A yearning can last a lifetime, and may never be fulfilled. But fulfillment isn't the purpose of yearning, that's not why they exist. Yearnings by their very nature are not easily satisfied.

The dictionary definition of **Yearning is**: a feeling of intense longing for something; a strong feeling or wishing for something, especially something you can not have or get easily. It's a persistent, often wistful or melancholy desire; a deep longing, esp. when accompanied by tenderness or sadness; it's a prolonged unfulfilled desire.

Yearning is similar to, but not the same as want, need or desire.

Want is to have or feel need; to have an inclination; it's a failure to possess, as in being left wanting, needy or destitute.

Need is a condition or situation in which something is required or wanted; an instance of feeling the lack of something; . it's about necessity or obligation.

Desire: A wish or a longing; a request or petition.. Sexual appetite; passion.

This morning, I'm not intending to talk to you about mere inclination, or a sense of obligation or a feeling of lack. Yearning is different, it has the connotation of something of significance, something important, something valuable. It's not a mere desire or want. And its for that very reason, that yearnings have the power to motivate, to captivate to pull or to push us into action.

Ironically, yearnings are all too easily abandoned when they are not soon fulfilled. They can be easily forgotten when our attention is exclusively in the here and now, or on our tasks and obligations. We live in a drive-through world now, a world where we often want and expect immediate gratification. That is not a world that encompasses much yearning.

We live in a capitalistic world, a materialistic world, where things, objects and acquisitions seem always in the forefront of our minds. We live in a fast paced world, where we seem to always want it yesterday or immediately. Just push the button, swipe the card and bingo, there it is. We can shop by pushing buttons on a computer and our item appears at our doorstep via overnight shipping. Bingo, done, next?

We live in a world that can be mean, crass and ugly. We live in a world of violence and hatred, of getting even and hitting back or striking first as a pre-emptive measure. Or at least that's the image of the world we see. And we become defensive, self-protective, cynical and mistrusting.

None of this is the stuff of yearning. As we heard earlier in the reading, yearning is somehow connected to the cosmos, the divine, that mysterious something. It feels connected to the source of life itself. It's a motivator, a driver, a calling. Against all common sense, we can sometimes be compelled, almost controlled by our yearnings.

But that's only if we can remember them. If only we haven't thrown them by the wayside in favor of some more tangible, more easily obtained objective. If only we haven't out-grown our yearnings, letting them go as we assume, so-called, adult responsibilities.

Can you remember the yearnings of your younger years? Do you still have yearnings? When was the last time you allowed yourself to feel your yearnings? When was the last time you were compelled by your yearnings to act?

Now I know a good number of you have yearnings. I can see them in what you do. I've experienced them. I can feel them in the way you carry yourselves. I say yeah! And may you be contagious!

I yearn for a better world, a more peaceful world. I yearn for a world where the deck is not stacked against the low guy on the totem pole. A world where we all have a fair, even if not equal shot, at living a comfortable life, where our skills and talents are recognized and accepted; where we as individuals are valued simply because we are human.

For the first time in a long time, I'm beginning to see signs that our country may be on the verge of changing. I was so hopeful that the Occupy Movement would prompt important questions and conversations about wealth accumulation and equitable distribution of resources. I'd hoped they'd lay the groundwork for needed change. But they were beaten back.

Now, I'm elated that the term poverty is in the news again, 50 years after the war on poverty began. When was the last time we heard politicians and newscasters talk about the need to address issues of poverty? The cynical part of me doesn't really expect much in the way of real change in the immediate future. But I'm excited, none the less, that we're finally acknowledging that almost one in five people in this country live in poverty.

We're making progress I think when we see JP Morgan reach a settlement with the government for \$13B, yes with a B, for the sale of fraudulent mortgage backed securities. The courts recently upheld a multi-billion dollar settlement by BP oil for damage done in the Gulf oil spill. I've heard of a number of record-setting settlements for corporate misdeeds over the last year or so.

That's all good news, leaning us in the direction of corrective action. But I fear that many of those settlements may end up becoming another corporate tax deduction. In other words, essentially, just the cost of doing business. I yearn for the day, when those who authorize these misdeeds go to jail, just like the common thief's in our local prisons. Lets stop letting wealth insulate people from being held accountable for their actions.

My yearnings are not new. I've been driven by some of them for decades. These yearnings are what pulled me into the ministry and informed much of the work I did before then. My yearnings are what led me to decide to come to this congregation. I sensed a kindred spirit here, with the potential for us to join our common hopes, aspirations and yearnings to make a difference in our world.

I was so proud of us for hosting an important conversation on whether or not to build another jail. I'm excited to hear the beginnings of conversations about possibly engaging the subject of mass incarceration and reading the book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the age of Colorblindness*, by Michelle Alexander.

I'm excited because I yearn for us as a faith community to more visibly live out our principles and values and to build on our UU history of being activist for social justice. I yearn for this community to leverage its beliefs and convictions in order to have a greater impact on the larger community around us. I want for us to do good, not just be good.

Perhaps we can help heal the divisions I experience between the City and Town of Poughkeepsie and its surrounding communities. Perhaps we can begin to build more and better partnerships with various parts of the larger community and be a catalyst for change. Perhaps, we can help bring more happiness and joy to our region.

Perhaps we can more fully engage the issues of privilege associated with whiteness, wealth, class, and education. Perhaps we can be of greater assistance in helping to address issues of poverty in our region. Perhaps we can address issues of diversity in our communities, and in the police and fire departments. Perhaps there is other work that is ours to do.

Part of the work we as a congregation need to do is to determine just why are we here? Are we here only to satisfy the wants and needs of our members and friends? Or do we have a larger calling? What is the mission of this unique faith community? What, if anything, are we being called to do?

I urge you to tap into your own individual yearnings. Sit with them and let them marinate inside of you. What, if anything, calls to you, urges you, seeks to pull you in a particular direction? Is there something beyond being a good human being, a good neighbor and partner that speaks to you?

I want to encourage each of us, over the next few months to do a bit of soul searching to determine if you feel called to commit time and energy to something in particular, on behalf of this faith community. Or, said differently, in support of this faith community.

At some point before too long, we'll need to grapple with uniting our individual yearnings into a collective whole. I'm absolutely convinced that when we can identify a collective set of yearnings, that represents and includes us all, we will feel a surge of vitality that will feed our souls. A vitality which in turn, will help us to feed the souls of those we come in contact with.

I offer you blessings on your yearnings.