

When I Look at the World
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Pathways Church
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When I look at the world, what do I see? Sometimes, I tend to see only the bad things, the way when I sometimes look at others I see only their faults and when I look at myself I see only my virtues. The Talmud teaches us that, “We do not see things as *they are*. We see them as *we are*.” So if we are having a bad day, or we are stressed out, or if our favorite team just lost, or if our political party is not in power, or in the wake of illness and natural disaster, the world can seem like a very dark, dismal hopeless place. And yet there are days in the light of the sun, on the receiving end of a smile, when your favorite team wins the game, and you’re feeling good and manage to hear a heartwarming story and your favorite song is on the radio or your iPod that all of creation seems to be just fine.

Stick around long enough and the world will show you joy and sorrow. Life and death, happiness and sadness both too great to imagine in the middle ground of right now because even if you’ve

been there we seem to have short memories for both tragedy and ecstasy.

When we talk about paying attention, we usually give a lot of that attention to inner work – what is going on within us. Yet it is just as important to take note of what goes on in the world around us. We move through our lives asleep and from a standpoint of individual awakening and being in the moment we could do better, sure. Noticing our breath and how we are feeling and our motivations and reactions, we have had and will have that sermon again, I can guarantee you. What about the world? What does the world show us? And, equally important - what witness do we bear to what we see? What we're shown and what we show are not necessarily the same thing.

The poet A.E. Housman wrote:

Therefore, since the world has still
Much good, but much less good than ill,
And while the sun and moon endure
Luck's a chance, but trouble's sure,
I'd face it as a wise man would,
And train for ill and not for good.

'Tis true, the stuff I bring for sale
Is not so brisk a brew as ale:
Out of a stem that scored the hand
I wrung it in a weary land.
But take it: if the smack is sour
The better for the embittered hour;
It will do good to heart and head
When your soul is in my soul's stead;
And I will friend you, if I may,
In the dark and cloudy day.

Is this true? Is there more ill than good in the world? Or have we become full of dark and cloudy days? Have we given in too much to pessimism? Have war and racism and economic collapse and civic uncivililty, and natural disasters and terrorism caused not only compassion fatigue - we're too tired to care any more, but something worse, attitude fatigue, we've given up on the idea that we change the way we look at the world. Abraham Lincoln famously said that he thought folks were just about as happy as they made up their minds to be. Well, it's a piece of casual advice, but how casually our culture tends to apathy sometimes - even the joke - what's apathy? I don't know and I don't care is symptomatic. But Lincoln's statement is more powerful in context. Looking back, many

people seriously think he battled depression and he dealt with the worst national crisis in our history in the Civil War.

What do you see when you look at the world? Depends on who you are. where you're looking from, and what's in your way. What will bear witness to seeing? Depends on what you make up your mind to share after all of that.

Pat Roberston, the Evangelical Christian, television host, and would be politician sees one thing when he looks at the world today and says:

"And you know, Kristi, something happened a long time ago in Haiti, and people might not want to talk about it. They were under the heel of the French, uh, you know Napoleon the 3rd and whatever, and they got together and swore a pact to the Devil. They said, 'We will serve you if you'll get us free from the French.' True story.

"And so the Devil said, 'Okay, it's a deal.'

"And, uh, they kicked the French out, you know, with Haitians revolted and got themselves free.

"But ever since they have been cursed by, by one thing after another, desperately poor. That island of Hispaniola is one

island. It's cut down the middle. On the one side is Haiti on the other side is the Dominican Republic. Dominican Republic is, is prosperous, healthy, full of resorts, etcetera. Haiti is in desperate poverty.

"Same island.

"They need to have and we need to pray for them a great turning to God and out of this tragedy I'm optimistic something good may come. But right now we're helping the suffering people and the suffering is unimaginable."

Robertson's rather oversimplified theological story comes from the legend that Jean Jacques Dessalines, who led the Haitian revolution against the French Army, entered into a pact with Satan disguised as a voodoo deity in exchange for an 1803 military victory.

I look at the world and see the massive devastation in Haiti that had little, if anything to do with God or a Devil. I see human pain and loss and suffering in the wake of a natural disaster and a history of politics and colonialism and racism that make the entire mess worse than it needs to be.

My colleague, UU Minister Debra Hafner, looks at Haiti and Pat Robertson, sees them both and says this:

I keep thinking about Pat Robertson's stupid comment last week about Haiti. I've been thinking about what I would say to him if I had a chance. I think I've finally got it.

The God I know does not send earthquakes, or floods, or tsunamis or disease to punish people. The God I know sends prophets like Martin Luther King to awaken us to action. The God I know sends us -- you and me -- to make the world a better place.¹

Let us hear that call.

It's easy sometimes, amid all the darkness to see the you's and me's making the world a better place. I see my cousin's daughter Aimee – a nurse living in Boston who went down to Haiti last week with Project Hope on the Navy ship Comfort loaded with medical personnel and supplies.

I also see my father -in law, a guy with an 8th grade education, but wiser by far than I will probably ever be. Like most of that side of my family, Catholic, but not one to want to talk about you believe

¹ <http://debrahaffner.blogspot.com/2010/01/we-are-ones-weve-been-waiting-for.html>

in. He's like most UU's I know, more concerned with how you live and what you show him. Spent a career as a carpenter and then spends a couple of times a year going to Louisiana to rebuild the Katrina devastation and a couple of weeks a year for over a decade now, going to Haiti to build clinics, schools, houses, teaching people how to use tools. Grew up speaking French so Kreol wasn't as much of a jump as for English speakers. Tina went with him once. Doesn't care much if you're an atheist or a Catholic or a UU or Hindu or a Baptist – cares a lot if you have a place to live or go to school or something to eat or medicine. The hotel he stops at on the way to the Haitian country side – gone. The people he'd meet with – gone, injured, sick.

It's easy to look at the world and have your heart grind to a stop with sadness or the sadness of being sad. Compassion fatigue can set in when our hearts break over and over for suffering that's out there, or you can take in what you see and bear witness to it. One way of bearing witness to the pain in the world is by healing it,

by doing something about it. This makes the world a better place and it makes you feel better. Not in a band-aid type of way, so you won't feel guilty about the bad things in the world, but by feel better in terms of feeling engaged and connected.

When looking at the world gets you down, don't ruminate, activate. Don't post something on face book, don't send an email, but get out and get face to face. Meet people, get engaged, bear witness.

Faith, whatever your faith is, whatever it is that has your trust, and our Unitarian Universalist tradition has its own faith and has room for many mansions of faith - Faith without works, as the Rich Mullins song goes, "is like a song you can't sing, it's about useless as a screen door on a submarine."

I don't want to know what it is you believe or don't believe, but I do want to know what it is you are willing to work for. What you're willing to work for tells me a lot about what you believe and what

you see when you look at the world. And it tells me whether or not you've given up hope.

About every other week now I get a call from Moving Home our Tarrant County Community of Churches Interfaith Homelessness Coalition Program that helps put people in Permanent Housing – and I send out emails and make phone calls and people come and move a formerly homeless person or family into an apartment of their own – Stan and Kent and Ellen, and Dino and Allen – they just come – and yes it's inconvenient, but justice is inconvenient and it is a pain in the butt, but love is a pain in the butt.

Don't think homelessness is something that only happens to others, people not like me, or you, because there are people here who are and have been homeless, this is not about being kind to the other, but also about helping ourselves, because in the beloved community there is no "other" we are all in this together. Don't think lightly of this or that this is just charity, because charity is from Latin caritas which is love and there is never anything wrong

with love. This is how they will know we are a special community that changes lives: that we fed the hungry and clothed the naked and healed the sick and comforted the grieving and visited the lonely. It's simple work on a local or international scale and goes beyond what anyone believes.

Someone in the congregation needed a ride to the doctor this week, by the time I checked in with a member of our congregational care team, they had already checked in with the person and had the ride set up. Every week people bring food donations into this sanctuary and every week people take food donations from this sanctuary to others who feed the hungry. On February 7 our Coming of Age participants will choose individual service projects to the congregation and decide on a group service project to the community.

This work of seeing and caring for the world is showing who you are, not telling what you believe. This work is our work. When we look at the world we see the world not as it is, but as we are. So, a

question I have for you this morning is: how are we? How are you?

When you look at the world, what do you see? What will you do?

One final story. When I was in college, a friend of mine named Andi met Dith Pran, the subject of the movie *The Killing Fields*, that tells the story of how Pran survived the genocidal Pol Pot regime in Cambodia in the 1970s. She got Pran to speak at our college. So with my love of baseball, I was especially taken with the tale of Jouret Puk in the latest issue of Ode magazine. Puk was a child when Pol Pot's regime killed his father and separated his family into different work camps as they executed 2 million people in the killing fields. Puk finally escaped with his mother to Thailand when he was 8 and then to Tennessee, where he learned the game of baseball, which he loved because the children playing it smiled and were happy and that never happened in Cambodia. Puk returned to Cambodia in 2002 to bring baseball and happiness to his homeland, to create a field of dreams on the former killing fields so children could experience the joy he knew from a simple game. Cambodia

now has a national team and has won its first game in international play. Fields of Dreams are possible, even from killing fields, when you look at the world – depends, what do you see?