

Zihuatanejo
Rev. Tony Lorenzen
Pathways Church
Southlake, TX
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In the *The Shawshank Redemption*, the protagonist, Andy Dufresne played by Tim Robbins, is falsely accused of murdering his wife. He's convicted and sent to Shawshank Prison, where he spends twenty years of life for something he didn't do. It's easy to get depressed when you are or even feel mistreated. Yet, while Andy, an educated, dignified man endures the corruption, brutality, and loneliness – the basic inhumanity of prison, he never gives up hope. “Hope,” Andy tells his friend Red, “is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies.”

When Andy finally escapes from Shawshank, he sends Red a postcard, a clue, as to where to find him, should Red himself ever get out. It is blank, simply postmarked, Zihuatanejo, Mexico. That's where Andy's gone to – Zihuatanejo. Zihuatanejo is the place where hope leads you. A place on the Mexican coast, as

Andy Dufresne says, with no memory – why would he want to remember – he’s been wrongly convicted and mistreated.

Zihuatanejo is warm and sunny and free from corrupt prison guards and wardens and random violence and the sins, whatever they may be of the past. Zihuantanejo is the place of peace, and respite, and re-energizing, and soul restoration and dare I say it, resurrection – returning to life. Zihuantanejo is that place where hope leads. If hope is, as theologians say, that virtue that helps us resolutely pursue the end, that makes possible the journey from faith to love, then it’s like a goal that helps us not give up. Like a Heaven of sorts, the place where hope leads.

Hope led me to two places in the last month on my continuing journey from faith to love; two places that inspired me to resolute pursue the ends for which I live and work – the creation of the Beloved Community – the journey from faith to love led me to General Assembly in Minneapolis, MN and to Boston, MA with our Coming of Age group on their UU Heritage trip.

I was filled with hope in Minneapolis even before General Assembly began when Barbara Wells Ten-Hove spoke the UU Ministers Association at our professional development gathering during the worship service honoring ministers who have served 25 and 50 years. Chosen and the 25 year preacher by her reunion colleagues, Rev. Wells Ten-Hove encouraged us to stop referring to Unitarian Universalism as a movement, proudly and boldly stating we are a religion and we need to stop being afraid of being a religion.

I was filled with hope and with joy and with pride as Pathways' own Pam Wat processed in with the new ministers during the worship Service of the Living Tradition and received preliminary fellowship in one the grand traditions at General Assembly.

I was amazed at the wave of hope generated at the Wellspring workshop on the Thursday morning of General Assembly. My first thought when I arrived early to meet the organizers from the Rochester UU Church, was that they booked

too large a room, but by the time we started it was full. I was true to our DNA and told the Pathways story. I told the story of the spiritual deepening that happened here last year through Wellspring. I told them I thought Wellspring helped save Pathways. Saved is another religious word that religious liberals need to reclaim. We don't need to be saved by God, or saved from hell, but we have saving message too and there is a lot of salvation going on here within Unitarian Universalism and at Pathways. When we listen deeply to each other, when we're here for each other, when we're compassionate, when we separate church and hate, we create a saving place and a saving space. When we respect the dignity and worth of every person, we by just listening to them and walking with them on their journey we create a saving space.

I was filled with hope when I hung out at the UU Christian Fellowship booth and at the Micah's Porch booth in the exhibit hall. I had conversations about the spiritual revival happening in our faith with people interested in being a missional church – not

being missionaries – I don't think we need to do that in the old sense of the term, but be missional – to go out into the world – to seek first to be engaged with the world around us instead of first seeking to be attractive – seeking first to offer religious goods and services that draw people to us, to shop at our religious store.

I was filled with hope when the plenary sessions at General Assembly voted to hold General Assembly in 2012 in Phoenix, Arizona and rejected the boycott proposal. There are times and places, such as Montgomery, Alabama in 1955 when a boycott is the right and timely tactic for justice. This time, I am glad we listened to our congregations in Arizona and I am pleased those congregations are working with and listening to immigrant communities. People on the ground are advocating engagement, presence, and so we will go to Arizona in 2012 and when we go it will not be business as usual, we will spend our time there being a missional association – working with immigrant communities on their issues, doing what they ask us to do, learning what they ask us to learn, being involved in eye to eye ministry, assuming an

attitude and a posture that seeks to learn how we can be of help, not imposing with “this is what we have decided we will do for you.” I hope it will go even further and we will get out of convention centers and meet for worship in Black and Latino churches and hold plenaries in local halls. I hope more of us will take advantage of home hospitality and it will be hot and it will be uncomfortable, but it is hot and uncomfortable in immigrant communities now and resting in our comfort and our privilege isn’t changing that situation much.

I filled with hope about going to Arizona in 2012, but most of us realize that is two years away. The real difference will be how we act between now and then. This year’s General Assembly voted to take up Immigration as our current Study Action Issue, meaning congregations are called to focus our attention on the issue of immigration reform as a justice issue. The Arizona law is not just an Arizona problem as similar laws are being proposed all over the country and the attitudes of intolerance and racism that plague this debate are found everywhere and affect all of us. We

called for example to learn Spanish, and it would be very convenient to have a class here in the church, but that is attractional ministry, offering yet another good or service to bring people in. Can we be missional about it? Can we find a place, maybe in an immigrant community, that needs to learn English, can we volunteer there, can they teach us Spanish, can we ask them what they need, can we work eye to eye, can we be incarnational? It's much harder. It takes more effort and it takes more time and we talk a lot about diversity in UU circles, but what we really talk about when we talk about this is culture, and this not about being willing to accept others into our culture, but about being willing and being courageous enough to step out of our own. I am hopeful that we are.

Between now and 2012 can we actively engage the immigrant communities in Northeast Tarrant County and the people who work with them and ask, "what do you need? How can we help? What can we do?" Are we willing to learn. This will not be a popular thing to do, it may not be a popular thing to do in

your home, never mind your neighborhood, or your workplace, or your town, certainly not in Northeast Texas, but it was the call issued to us at General Assembly - we will be missional, we will go to Phoenix, and thus we will go to Fort Worth and we will go to Arlington and we will go to Hurst and Euless and Bedford and Grapevine and Keller and Southlake.

This type of Eye to Eye ministry, asking “what can I do, how can I help?” is the methodology of the UU Service Committee and the UU Urban Ministry. I was filled with hope when one of our Coming of Age students, Stacy Efthymiou, obviously hopeful herself, said after our visit to the UU Service Committee in Cambridge, that she wants to work there, taking up their struggle for human rights.

I was filled with hope during our Coming of Age trip every time an awe of respect for the past filled the hearts of our future. When the group entered the chapel at Divinity Hall where Emerson gave his Divinity School address and where Channing and Emerson and so many more had sat and preached as

students and the entire group got, well, got it, everything went quiet for a second. While we were at Walden Pond, the group became really friendly with Henry David Thoreau, or least really friendly with bronze statue and sat inside the replica of his hut, but once we got to the actual site of that hut out in the woods and to the place where people to this day still place a standing stone as a sign of respect, we all did too, and everyone became quiet of their own accord, not a mean feat with middle schoolers and paid their respects to the woods and the history and trip and each and to Henry David in their own way. That they are the young people they are filled me and fills me with hope.

I was filled with hope during our Coming of Age trip in Boston while at the UU Urban Ministry in Roxbury because without a sound, word or gesture, our young people were captured and captivated by the words of Theodore Parker on a large plaque on the wall of their Putnam Chapel.

I was filled with hope on this trip as I observed our young people, quickly becoming young adults, watch out for each other,

deepen their friendships, and display an appreciation of art and architecture both old and new.

I and also filled with hope because they are just such wonderful young people on the cusp of being young adults. Time after time, tour guides and wait staff, and program directors commented on what fun and well behaved young people they were and what a great group and I just smiled and said, "I know, I know." I was so proud of them. You should be too. They did Pathways proud. A lot of people heard of Pathways last week and heard of us well.

Hope led me to General Assembly. Hope led me Boston. Hope led me back to Pathways, where I found more hope. I held a new-born baby Thursday afternoon. Maybe you have, too. His name is Zachary Gene Craig. There's place right over your heart, where you hold a baby that if you're not careful that baby can put you to sleep. Thanks, Zachary Gene, you filled me as much hope as I needed, I will try and do my best by you.

One place we went on our Coming of Age Heritage trip was Ralph Waldo Emerson's House in Concord, MA – It's called the Old Manse – the preacher's house, built by his grandfather, a preacher. Nathaniel Hawthorne lived there too. Emerson taught us we can find divinity – heaven – in our own heart and mind, any time and any place. He wrote:

“Let us learn the revelation of all nature and thought; that the highest dwells within us; that the sources of nature are in our minds. As there is no screen or ceiling between our heads and the infinite heavens, so there is no bar or wall in the soul where we, the effect, cease, and God, the cause begins.” (Emerson – Oversoul SLT 531)

Zihuantanejo – you don't need to leave home to find it. You don't need to go to Minnesota or Massachusetts. Hope will lead you there on the road from faith to love. There is no bar or wall that can keep you from getting to it, for you keep the source of hope with you always. From faith to love right to your own heart and mind. Have hope. Keep the faith. Zihuantanejo. Send yourself a post card.