

Practicing Revolutionary Love

Mark 1: 1 – 8

First United Church of Christ, Northfield, MN

December 6, 2020

Rev. Wendy Vander Hart

May God still speak through these words of scripture and sermon.

“What if Martin didn't stand up?

What if Rosa didn't sit down?

What if Maya didn't speak out?

What if Langston Hughes didn't write it down? Where would we be now?”

In India Arie's song “What If,” she asks what would have happened if Black change-makers like MLK, Rosa Parks, Maya Angelou hadn't sought liberation.¹

Today, I wonder, what if John the Baptist had not cried out? What if John had not embraced the role of messenger? What if the Baptist had not prepared the way? Would the population of the Judean hillside, those lining the banks of the Jordan River or the people in the cities oppressed and colonized by Rome have known to be on the lookout for what God was about to do?

In her commentary on this scripture Professor Courtney V. Buggs notes the necessity of forerunners. She writes about Sarah K. Evans and Claudette Colvin, two black women who refused to give up their seat at the front of the bus. They were forerunners to the action Rosa Parks took that sparked the Civil Rights movement in this country. Buggs writes, “Forerunners are often unseen figures and unsung heroes. Their back stories are unknown. The details of their lives are underimagined or undervalued. They garner minimal attention, because they are forerunners—those who plow the ground, destabilize the terrain, and make ready for change that is to come. They are not The One; they are those who come before The One. Every movement needs those who function as the advance team, that is, those who prepare the way for something beyond the present state of affairs.”²

Since it was blessed in worship in July, the Transition Team of First UCC has functioned as a forerunner, an advance team to prepare us for a new vision and leadership to enact that vision. Tilling the soil of congregational engagement sessions, Northfield Area community leader interviews, demographic data, survey results, discernment and more discernment they are ready to seed a vision, a dream, among you today.

Last week you heard Pastor Lauren introduce our Advent theme, “Those who dream change everything.” Change is a necessary corollary of dreaming. Imagine if John the Baptist had proclaimed in the wilderness, “prepare for the status quo!” Forget about repenting/turning around. Stay right where you are. Hunker down. Risk nothing!

There is great power in dreaming. John the Baptist knew that when he cast a dream of one greater than himself who would bring God closer to the people. Martin Luther King Jr. knew that when he cast his dream for our nation to live fully into its creed. The Transition Team has heard great desire to dream the future of First UCC. As this pandemic has dragged on, as we dig into racial justice work, as we meet digitally and still call it church, we have heard a call for bold action. This upended time has helped us recognize that the bravery of our dream matters. Dreams are meant to stretch us. Dreams are meant to push boundaries. Dreams are built to move us forward to places we individually might not think to go. This is a hard time to dream and cast a vision when our

¹ See Marchaé Grair [Daily Devotional](#) that builds on this song

² Courtney V. Buggs, Working Preacher, Luther Seminary, [Commentary on Mark 1: 1-8](#)

daily needs and challenges are so great. But is it exactly into these kinds of times that God breaks through with remarkable asks of us.

So today, the Transition Team casts the dream, the vision, the mission, the purpose of Practicing Revolutionary Love. The Team felt the phrase coalesced many ideas. You may have seen a definition shared from the book *See No Stranger* by Valarie Kaur. It goes like this, “Revolutionary love is the choice to enter into labor for others, for our opponents, and for ourselves in order to transform the world around us.”

Practicing Revolutionary Love. Practicing because we want to be good at it. Practicing because it takes time and repetition and learning. Practicing because we will fail and need to learn from our failures. Practicing because we will repent and turn around when we see our shortcomings and come together to repair them and find renewed direction. Practicing because we are human and imperfect and yet grace abounds.

Practicing Revolutionary Love. Revolutionary because the times demand it. Revolutionary because that is a way God acts in our lives. Revolutionary because it breaks new ground, innovates, progresses us forward, is not satisfied with the unexamined status quo. Revolutionary because it emulates the way of Jesus.

Practicing Revolutionary Love. Love is what brought the world into being in the first place. And God still so loves this world and each one of us to see the fullness of that love made manifest. Love because it is so needed to bridge the divides, heal the hurts, build resilience and transform the world.

Maybe you hear echoes of Jesus’ call to Love God, love your neighbor as yourself, love your enemies. But our modern ears no longer hear the radical nature of such love and so the times demand provocative language to call us out of complacency and embrace the revolutionary aspect of an ethic of love.

Practicing Revolutionary Love. Imagine this church as a place where parents testify “my children learned to practice Revolutionary Love at First UCC. Imagine adults in their communities of work and play Practicing Revolutionary Love and seeing its impact on colleagues, friends and family. Imagine our neighbors and partners, the ones we serve alongside, saying of First UCC- “I want to be with those people because they practice revolutionary love.”

Those who dream of revolutionary love might just change everything! And so, it is important to pause and ask some questions.

Is this vision of Practicing Revolutionary Love big enough to be God’s vision for us? Will this vision marry our God-given strengths with needs in our community? Will this vision inspire us to be God’s people in a time that requires galvanizing energy? How does this vision inspire what God may be dreaming through you? Dreams, visions, mission, purpose- all map a way. We may never arrive at unanimity of purpose and yet, is there enough of a guiding star, a compelling “why,” a call from God for our ministry present here?

Whether we individually choose to practice the revolutionary love of Jesus or Martin or Rosa or Maya, we do it together. The chorus of India Arie’s song calls us “We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We can change the world, we can change the world with our love, love, love, love. Our love can change the world.”³ Dear First UCC, shall we prepare this way? May God be with us in our discernment. Amen.

³ India Arie, [What If](#)