

**Theodore Parker Church**

**At Play with Delusions of Grandeur**

**January 10, 2021 (following the January 6 Insurrection at the Capitol)**

## **OPENING WORDS**

**Another World is Possible \*\***

***Written for UU the Vote by the Rev. Ashley Horan***

**Found in Content for Inclusive UU Ministry in a Time of Pandemic**

**<https://tinyurl.com/intimeofpandemic>**

Another world is possible.

We say it, again and again,

even when the proof lies somewhere beyond the horizon,

beyond our reach,

beyond our imagination.

This is our faith:

Another world is possible...

...There are many routes toward liberation;

toward freedom.

But the abundance of options does not absolve us of

the responsibility of acting.

Another world is possible...

## **A Collective Experience**

What a week this has been. We're all carrying so much into our time together this morning — perhaps worry, fear, shock, grief, or simple numbness — and certainly weariness. I know that I feel so, so weary.

So this morning, instead of a story, we wanted to make some time and space for us to explore and sit with all that we may be feeling right now, especially if overwhelm or numbness is so present that it's hard to figure out what may be underneath.

Fred Rogers, a constant voice of wisdom and encouragement for all ages, reminds us:

"There's no 'should' or 'should not' when it comes to having feelings. They're part of who we are and their origins are beyond our control. When we can believe that, we may find it easier to make constructive choices about what to do with those feelings."

I would also add that being disconnected from our feelings, and from our bodies, can be a tool of white supremacy. Disconnecting is a way of protecting those in the dominant group by undermining our connection to others, our sense of common humanity. When we normalize the violence committed against “others,” we see its power as inevitable and unchangeable.

That’s why it’s important to pause, to feel, and to name our feelings — as an integral part of how we move into action.

In just a minute, We’d like to invite each of you to share one emotion that feels most present for you this morning in the chat box - just one word, or two - not a sentence: not your analysis or political reaction to what has happened this week, but how it’s landing with you - how you have been feeling in your body, and in your heart.

Take a moment to reflect on how you’re feeling about this past week: what’s rising to the surface, and what word you might use to name it. No rush — I know I feel myself constantly bouncing between different sides of this wheel.

When you are ready, perhaps after a deep breath as you take in YoYo Ma’s beautiful music (First Impressions), we invite you to share how you are feeling in the chat box — again, in just a word or two. We’ll let the music play for a few moments as we take the time to identify, to share, and to take in the range of what we are holding as a community.

## **HOMILY, pt. 1            the Rev. Anne Bancroft**

Thank you for being willing to try to locate where you are, and for sharing what you might be feeling. It’s not easy, is it? I have watched so many reactions and read so many responses to last week’s events. One blogger opened his post by saying “this week was a long decade”! I noticed that I have often felt badly, actually, that I could not locate myself more definitively. Stunned, yes . . . numb . . . incredulous? What is going on? Can this be real? Sometimes locating emotions takes some time, especially as we have had a good four YEARS of outrageous behavior to make sense of.

Did you know the day the Capitol was attacked was Epiphany? That’s the day in the Christian calendar that the Three Kings, the Wise People, the Sages discover the baby Jesus and deliver their gifts. It’s also the day they defy the directive of Herod the Great to come tell him where the baby is. He apparently didn’t want the competition.

From the Book of Matthew, Chapter 2: **11** On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him

with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. **12** And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Their Epiphany, their “discovery” - ironically, I think - may be as much about understanding the threat posed to Herod’s ego as it was of discovering a holy presence in the body of a child, which is the more typically understood epiphany. The kings, or queens, or wise people of some fashion or other discover, finally, that Herod is trying to avoid being displaced as the most important, as “King of the Jews.” According to the story, he is furious at their deception, furious that anyone would defy his position, his power, his authority.

Does that sound vaguely familiar?

**READING**                      **by Darnell Arnout**      Delusions of Grandeur

Have you ever had  
    delusions of grandeur?  
I read all about it  
in a magazine  
on the coffee table  
at Dr. Broadwell’s office.

Have you ever thought  
you were meant  
for something special?  
But you were afraid.  
Afraid if you tried  
you’d fail?  
People  
would think you  
a fool?

You might risk  
everything  
only for  
    delusions of grandeur?

I have.  
Thought that, I mean.

## **HOMILY, pt. 2 At Play with Delusions of Grandeur**

So . . . the kings go home. And Jesus lives and learns and becomes a prophet and eventually changes the world. For better or worse, depending on your own perspective or belief, there is no question his life story changed the world. In 2019 there were somewhere around 2.5 billion Christians in the world, acting on their faith. And, it might never have happened but for the quiet and rarely noticed decision of the wisefolk.

It's interesting to note that this part of the story isn't really given much credence. It's suggested that it found its way there as a reflection of the Passover story, where Moses is saved when the angel of death flies over the homes of the Israelites, sparing their first-born. Jesus is paralleled as the new Moses, an association that would have been important to the fledgling population of believers.

Despite the lack of scholarly credence, the story of the wisemen has gained a lot of traction, so it must resonate: the idea of being the wise people, bearing gifts, who yet turn away from the ruler's edict that, left-unchecked, will destroy the presence of the divine among us.

“Have you ever thought  
you were meant  
for something special?  
But you were afraid.”

Fred Rogers offers a bit more wisdom for us this morning, about important events along the way. "A high school student wrote to ask, 'What was the greatest event in American history?' I can't say. However, I suspect that like so many 'great' events, it was something very simple and very quiet with little or no fanfare. . . The really important 'great' things are never center stage of life's dramas; they're always 'in the wings.' That's why it's so essential for us to be mindful of the humble and the deep rather than the flashy and the superficial."

We're in this weird time right now - in so many ways. If we had asked ourselves a few years back to list the challenges we would be facing in 2021, I doubt we would have things like global pandemic or responding to an assault on our Capitol on the list. Maybe, but I'm guessing not. I'm not sure any of us are that prescient. And the question I want to offer this morning is how each of us imagines responding. How do we imagine being a part of the solution? Having taken the time to at least begin to discern how we FEEL about all of it, how are we going about discerning what to do?

There's always nothing, of course - sit back and watch it all unfold. That is a choice. But,

Have you ever thought  
you were meant  
for something special?  
But you were afraid.  
Afraid if you tried  
you'd fail?

It may not be only fear that stops us, but certainly it does. We are not generally ambivalent people, but I do think we may struggle, as many do, with the fear that somehow we are not enough. Why else would we pause, when doing something, anything, could be counted among the great events of history? Are we worried about not being taken seriously?

You might risk  
everything  
only for  
delusions of grandeur?

I've done some asking-around on this term, "delusions of grandeur" from this morning's poem. Many thanks to Counseling Psychologist, Stan Gross, and psychiatrist, Dr. Mark Bauer for helping me understand some of the specifics around the term - not least that as a clinical term it is considered a pathology - the belief that somehow one is able to do super-human things, like fly or save humanity. Those beliefs are - well, for one thing, false - but also rigid and inflexible. They are fixed, protecting the very vulnerable interior life of a fragile ego. Delusions of Grandeur offer audacious realities to broken self-esteem.

It feels like we have seen some of this parading on the national stage for the last four years, doesn't it?

There is, of course, a more colloquial use of the term, suggesting (less pathologically) that we might be a bit full of ourselves, that imagining we were here to do something special might suggest an overblown sense of agency.

The good news, I suppose, is that most of us don't suffer that idea, clinically or in more casual use! We generally seem to have somewhat stronger, or at least healthier egos - enough healthier, perhaps, to make us question the value of our actions. We have enough self-doubt about our capacity to make a sufficient difference, especially with concerns as large as the ones we have experienced this week. And those don't even include climate change!

But oh, don't you sometimes wish you had a dose more of that delusional audacity? It may be more simply a lack of confidence, but I know I sometimes wish I believed in my ability to do amazing things like cure cancer or solve climate change. Or maybe I just want to lead a rally the way Martin Luther King would have? Or (I don't know) find the right words to convince Trump voters that, in fact, he DID lose?

We know we need to do what we can and hope that it will help, somehow - hope that it will contribute to making our world a better place. And it's reassuring to hear from no less an authority than Mr. Rogers that we might imagine ourselves to be a part of the "humble and deep" that effect "some of the greatest events in American history." Thanks for that, Mr. Rogers.

But I also want us to imagine that we can do a little more. I want for each of us to have a little more of that delusional audacity!

My colleague, the Rev. Fred Small, reminds us that, "Our republic is imperfect and has been from the start. White supremacy, patriarchy, and ruthless power have always shadowed our idealism and patriotism."

But we have the chance to be a part of moving our republic to a new and different place. We have the chance to be a part of a great turning - we just have to keep imagining it, and keep contributing to it in the biggest, boldest ways we can. We were each put here to do something special - we just have to imagine what it might be!

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Let's be audacious, maybe even a smidgeon delusional if it inspires us to do our part.

How grateful we must be to have the opportunities in front of us.

**Amen.**