

Transformation is here. Transformation is happening right now. But its process is so complex and multilayered that we have difficulty teasing out the various elements. Which part is the past? Which part is the present? Is this the future? Like one of Bach's fugues, it challenges us to keep a keen ear for all the elements, catching different notes and rhythms on each listening. Marcellene first played me the fugue she played for you this morning as special music, and she warned me that it takes an intelligent listener to appreciate. I told her she knows how to catch a Unitarian's attention. Just say it demands an intelligent listener, and we're interested. There is so much going on in the piece that sometimes it sounds like tumult, beautiful chaos, and then one catches the rhythm and hears the frame, and the chaos is put in perspective.

The chaos of our life put into a strong enough frame is more beautiful than any work of art. That is why this sanctuary is so structured, and has an almost formal feel. It disrupts our usual way of seeing things. It disrupts our usual way of experiencing ourselves. We need the experience of the foreign, of the strange, of the different to put our life in perspective.

Dogen Zenji, a 13th century monk had a philosophy about time. He didn't believe that we had a soul, or that we had a personality that

remained frozen. He believed that our life was time itself. He thought our life was literally being in time. This time was not linear the way we've been trained to see it with a past, present, and future, but it was all time and space existing in this moment. Time remained a constant. It is our body and mind that moves, not time. Time is always here, right now. The past, present, future all right here. Time is the frame for our life. To put it in more colloquial and simple terms - all of us are a product of our time.

I love that phrase when we say someone is a "product of their time." We usually mean it in a way to excuse negative behavior. Like if someone says or does something uncouth, you'll often hear that person described as a product of their time. But I think it goes far beyond this limited use. In a quite literal way all of us here are products of our time. We were born into a world we didn't create, with problems and hopes and expectations that lived long before our first breath.

We live presently in a world that is a reaction and response to those problems, and we can imagine like past generations a future that fulfills our hopes and expectations. Maybe this last part is not completely true. I think we have a culture that is becoming hyper focused in the way we think of

reality, grounded in the present problems, and wary of imagining a hopeful future. This makes sense to me. It's a way of protecting yourself from possible disappointment. It feels more comfortable sometimes to hedge your hope or expectations, especially when you've been continually disappointed.

But transformation doesn't seem to depend on what we think, at least not completely. It just happens. In fact it's happening now. It's kind of funny that the beginning of our mission contains the phrase to build a transformative spiritual community. It's a funny thing, because we are guaranteed to succeed. Transformation will happen whether we want it or not, whether we plan for it or not, whether we build it or not. The part that is not a guarantee is the kind of transformation that will unfold.

Before moving to Youngstown, of course I read about mills closing in the late '70's and how quickly this place has transformed over the decades, losing population and struggling to find an industry.

I've encountered many people my age who are the children of these steel employees, who have inherited a story, a story about loss and survival, and making due. This is a kind of transformation, but not the kind we are aiming for at this church.

It is true that each and every one of us would not be here without some significant transformation. This transformation could be a move, a loss of the faith we knew, a reminder of the faith we once had, a desire for real friendship and community. The kind of transformation we aim to kindle at this church comes from desire, yearning, wanting something life giving that is both here and not quite here yet.

Buddhists and other faith traditions warn against desire as the root of suffering. And they are correct - desire does lead to disappointment. But it also leads to life. Without some kind of desire, none of would be here.

Perhaps we are time and we are also desire itself.

We are born of desire: the desire of our parents, the desire of this country, the desire of our small, precious bodies to find warmth and food and affection.

We are part of the desire of this city, whether it is clearly visible or not. We are part of the desire of this place, whether that desire expresses as beautiful music or overwhelm and chaos. We belong to it. There is no getting around this. It is not our mission to get around this. It is our mission to get at the heart of transformation, and be intentional about our desire.

It begins with unrest. Right now more than at any point in our history are citizens feeling a massive unrest without a satisfying framework to

express that unrest. In the past that framework has been war. Temporary frameworks are protests and grass roots organizing. Without a framework, that unrest expresses as rioting, looting, and destruction. The most common expression of unrest is violence - violence toward those who are against us, all those who thwart our interests. It will be telling to see what happens after mid-term elections, whether it will lead to some temporary appeasement or further feed a growing unrest.

Like desire, unrest is not something to be avoided. That is where our church comes in. Our mission is to name short term vision and short term action for what it is - short term. We aim to cultivate a mission that is both short term and long term, of a vision that respects the moment of unrest and desire, and utilizes that unrest toward the goal of beloved community rather than loss and destruction. There is another way, and here at UUYO we are a beacon for finding that way. We can respect that time is not moving in a linear fashion...it is all happening right now. Transformation was not a figment of the past before the mills closed, and it is not some distant light in some imagined future. It is here, right here. In this space,

and on these streets. The real question though - Is it in here? In our heart? We must continually begin and end there - at the heart of transformation.

Transformation never happens in isolation. It begins with a choice that each of us make toward the larger community both for ourselves and for future generations.

I recommend that you signify your commitment to your own transformation and the transformation of this community by seeing Lisbet at the stewardship table downstairs and filling out your pledge.

If you have pledged before, I recommend you reflect on what this place has meant for your transformation, and allow your pledge to reflect that. Please sign up for one of our transformation dinners called T-parties, so you can share your transformation with one another, and help our board understand your dreams and priorities for next year. For those who are brand new to pledging, our stewardship team will gladly inform you about how your financial pledge literally feeds the mission and vision of this church, You are also welcome to talk to me afterward if you have any questions. Our pledge drive ends November 18, which means we want all your pledges by November 18, so please turn your pledge in as soon as possible. We are in challenging times. Your pledge allows us to continue to support your

transformation and the transformation of this community. You are at the heart of this transformation. During this pledge drive we get the chance to remind other of an ancient faith: what we need is here.