

“A Plan” Isaiah 42:1-9

“Never ever depend on governments or institutions to solve any major problems,” says Margaret Mead. “All social change comes from the passion of individuals.”

- How are we make a plan for the future when everything seems completely unpredictable?
- How do we plan for tomorrow when the demands of today consume all our time?
- Is there some systematic way to plan for change, a foolproof strategy to ensure our readiness for what we cannot yet know?

We confront these questions every day; nationally, collectively as a church and individually in our personal lives, with our families, and in our work.

*John Buchanan, Former editor of the Christian Century*

"[T]he world and the church are changing more rapidly than we can comprehend...some things are the same: the world and the church desperately need [our] energy, imagination, passion, impatience, intelligence, and love...one of the great biblical themes is that God calls... all of us to walk into the future without knowing exactly where we are headed, to let go of old securities and certainties and trust the God who promises to be with us wherever we go."

In a recent meeting of our newly formed Communications Team the question arose about goals, does the church have goals and objectives? A reasonable question when considering how to project our identity into the community- how else will people know they should check us out?

But the question stopped me dead in my tracks, not because I didn't have an answer, but because the question itself points to a perplexing paradox.

Where are we going and how will we know we have arrived is a measurable medium for a road trip, or with a diet plan, but the question is far more complex in the context of a faith journey.

*"We don't know where we're going, but we have to stick together in case somebody gets there." Ken Kesey (One Flew Over the Coocons Nest)*

From the people wandering in the desert to the disciples around the table at the last supper, it is clear that our people prefer to have a plan, not knowing makes us uneasy. In our collective biblical texts, we see story after story about groups of people thinking they had a clue- only to have their best laid plans completely messed about by the winds of change or the whims of the rich and powerful.

Having finally made it to the promised land and having re-built the Temple for a second time (the Roman Siege in 70 CE) in a completely devastating turn of fate sixth century Jews became once again enslaved as captives of Babylonian rule. I feel quite certain that a plan for a way out of that situation would have come as welcome relief, but even the prophet Isaiah is unable see into the future and offer assurances to his people. He could not tell them what would happen, only that God was about to do a new thing, and they had better be ready.

"I don't know, but get ready"- seems to be the advice most often given to biblical characters looking for clear answers and a decisive path forward. Additionally, Jesus' stock answer to the disciples is to pack lightly and be willing to travel. Not bad spiritual advice really; after all this is the era of downsizing right?

I wonder what Marie Kondo would have to say about our spiritual closets? Well, she would probably tell us to keep only that which sparks joy!

If we had to articulate goals and objectives within the framework of faith, I think it would look something like a commitment to keep doing our spiritual and emotional work, to keep searching deeply and learning more about who we are and how we are connected.

In his book [A New Republic of the Heart](#): An Ethos for Revolutionaries by Terry Patten he writes, "We don't have to figure it all out. We don't have to become tangled up in our unknowable future as if it were an unsolvable dilemma. We can cut through all the mind chatter by asking a deeper and more essential question:

Can I find in myself a no-matter-what? In the worst- case scenario, can I still tap into the well of unreasonable happiness? Can I still relate to my fellow humans, and to all of life, with care and love? Can I still, to the fullest extent possible, remain present as a force for good in every moment?

We can be deeply spiritually happy if our happiness is not based on external certainties (or “reasons”), but rather on our ultimate connectedness with the source of all life. And this noncontingent happiness is free to express itself in the service of others and of creation. If we do these things, we are saying a resounding “Yes!” to life. And that “Yes!” makes all the difference.

Isaiah’s message to the people is that they are called to live righteous lives not for themselves alone, but for the healing of the nations. We know how it feels when we are part of that kind of healing.

Isaiah also reminds the people that God has not abandon them in their moment of despair, but is indeed at work among and through them as they strive to be a blessing to each other.

God’s priorities according to Isaiah, are larger than our agendas and beyond solutions we can wrap our minds around. To be grounded in God’s vision is to be able to think beyond a particular historic moment and to make choices to participate in the future of the cosmos writ large.

There is an indigenous word, “Wojaja” it means we do not know where we are going but we will know when we get there. What we know as a spiritual community is how it feels when we are “there.” We know how it feels to go deep together, we know how it feels to accomplish something big on behalf of something bigger, how it feels when we allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit and watch in awe as it all falls into place. Perhaps more than any sort of master plan, we need to cultivate the courage to follow the truth of that feeling. Wojaja, Wojaja, Wojaja.

Amen

