

## **“Embracing Hope” by Kasey Castleberry**

Presented online to the congregation of Mountain Light UUC on 2020 March 29

{sung solemnly}

*There is more hope somewhere.*

*There is more hope somewhere.*

*I'm gonna keep on, 'til I find it.*

*There is more hope somewhere.*

If ever there were lyrics fitting a situation, then these seem to fit now. With fears gripping the world, with people panic buying and expecting imminent exposure to deadly disease, hope is a thing with feathers, but unlike in Emily Dickenson's poem, for too many of us, it has flown away.

As I am fond of telling people, I am a spherical relativist. I do not think of time in linear terms; therefore, my Joy Practice generally allows me to experience personal peace and tranquility in the midst of discomfort in the greater, shared reality.

However, there is an interesting side bar to the realm of spherical reality. That being, you are always in the here and now, and this moment in space-time finds me alone at home without the physical comfort of hugs that I should be receiving from my beloved community, my congregational family. Therefore, my here and now is not the joyful routine that I would hope to experience.

For those who prefer to look at time as linear, the isolation can be much worse. Time, for them, seems progressive, built upon the past, and can lead to an expectation of more doom and gloom to come.

Is there more hope somewhere? Just asking that question itself may be more hope than they can muster within a climate of growing fear. What hope can there be when they are mired in worsening conditions?

Even a spherical relativist is not fully immune. After all, if we are only Here and Now, then when the world seems to be falling apart, that becomes the spacious present in which we are always residing.

The “spacious present” is a term used by Seth as channeled through Jane Roberts to describe our existence in simultaneous time. It is a difficult construct to comprehend and does not lend itself easily to the concept of hope to those in the midst of despair.

Luckily, my philosophy uses a different term, the “magnanimous now”. Whilst both terms are essentially interchangeable, the word “magnanimous” has extra benefits in that it implies generosity and forgiveness, definite enhancers of hope.

Magnus - animus, the great soul, is to me the Great Spirit experienced in the present moment. It is a divine promise that everything is eternal, especially hope.

However, for those who choose to see experience linearly and expect things to get worse before they get better, if they get better at all, let us keep in mind the cyclic nature of reality, the changing seasons and change itself. In linear terms, nothing lasts forever, not happiness and prosperity, but neither is the looming darkness permitted to endure without end.

For either philosophical view point regarding how we came to be in this particular here and now and where that might lead, the important point is how we frame our experience. The French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, stated it thusly: "Life has no meaning a priori. [...] It is up to you to give it a meaning, and value is nothing but the meaning that you choose."

Viktor Frankl, author, neurologist, psychiatrist, and Holocaust survivor, gives a good example of this in his personal context:

"We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms — to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

Yes, hope in the face of hopelessness. That is a courageous act of creation, and the sheer act of choosing to embrace hope leads one toward Joy, and Joy is a powerful, unrelenting, eternal force.

Here is how I phrased it in my sermon, "A Celebration of Joy":

"Happiness is situation dependent, and Joy is a state of being. Put another way: Happy people brush against Joy, while joyous people live within it. For me, Joy is the Divine embrace. I believe that we all are so deeply loved by that which created us, whether you call it, God or Nature or whatever, and that if we surrender to Love, we can know nothing but Joy, even in sad moments and in hardship."

This might not make a lot of sense, taken out of context from the more expansive explanation of Mondusaif philosophy, but ALL experience, even pain, teaches us how to be more aware of our lives, how to be better creators of personal reality, how to be more compassionate and kind to others, as well as to ourselves.

Hope, for me, is the expectation that in Practicing Joy, I will attract that which honors my Joy. It is simple physics, similar vibrations resonate with one another, commonly known as the law of Attraction. Simply choosing to vibrate at a higher frequency will shift your reality. It is not so farfetched a notion.

Remember that amongst the terrible news of illness and death, failed opportunities, and casting of blame, there are lots of stories of hope. People in isolation singing to one another across plazas, victims of illness recovering, and acts of kindness and compassion done on a daily basis. We simply must choose to reframe our experiences.

In his poem "Lockdown", Richard Hendrick, a Capuchin Franciscan Brother, tries to help us see hope instead of dwelling in fear. I would like to share it with you now:

Yes there is fear.

Yes there is isolation.

Yes there is panic buying.

Yes there is sickness.

Yes there is even death.

But,

They say that in Wu-han after so many years of noise

You can hear the birds again.

They say that after just a few weeks of quiet

The sky is no longer thick with fumes

But blue and grey and clear.

They say that in the streets of Assisi

People are singing to each other

across the empty squares,

keeping their windows open

so that those who are alone

may hear the sounds of family around them.

They say that a hotel in the West of Ireland

Is offering free meals and delivery to the housebound.

Today a young woman I know

is busy spreading fliers with her number

through the neighbourhood

So that the elders may have someone to call on.

Today Churches, Synagogues, Mosques, and Temples

are preparing to welcome

and shelter the homeless, the sick, the weary

All over the world people are slowing down and reflecting

All over the world people are looking at their neighbours in a new way

All over the world people are waking up to a new reality

To how big we really are.

To how little control we really have.

To what really matters.

To Love.

So we pray and we remember that

Yes there is fear.

But there does not have to be hate.

Yes there is isolation.

But there does not have to be loneliness.

Yes there is panic buying.

But there does not have to be mean-ness.

Yes there is sickness.

But there does not have to be disease of the soul

Yes there is even death.  
But there can always be a rebirth of love.  
Wake to the choices you make as to how to live now.  
Today, breathe.  
Listen, behind the factory noises of your panic  
The birds are singing again  
The sky is clearing,  
Spring is coming,  
And we are always en-compasped by Love.  
Open the windows of your soul  
And though you may not be able  
to touch across the empty square,  
Sing.

{sung joyfully}  
*There is more joy somewhere.*  
*There is more joy somewhere.*  
*I'm gonna keep on, 'til I find it.*  
*There is more joy somewhere.*

Now, let us go forth and find Joy and share it with those who need Hope the most.