

Imagine...
Sermon given at Palomar UU Fellowship, May 1, 2005
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Imagine...we are imagining beings...

In our story this morning we encountered Harold, a child whose adventures point us to deep truths about our ability, need, our *need*, to imagine and create possibilities for ourselves...

If you were to put yourself in the position of Harold from our story today, what color would your crayon be? Can you imagine what you would draw? Where you would go? What would you carry with you? What would be the moon to you?

I hadn't heard of Harold and the Purple Crayon before Teri suggested it as the story for today. It sounded perfect, especially in relation to the thinking I have done about the power of our imagination to shape our lives and the world – I ran out and bought the book, and then needed to find out more about Crockett Johnson. An artist using mathematics to create his art, children's book writer and illustrator, Johnson created characters – Harold and his Purple Crayon – that seemed to reflect the unconscious and conscious processes involved in imagination...I found myself drawn into the story...

Like Harold, and his adventures with his purple crayon, we are always engaging with concepts and images based on what we experience and know, what we desire and fear.

It's surely a characteristic of our species (and to some extent other species I am sure), to form images of what is not immediately present to us...We can entertain concepts of things not seen...we can wonder what it would be like to be a bat...to go on a journey...

We create new images or ideas based on our previous experiences, our notions of what might be – it is a powerful ability. We all have one crayon or another...and, like Harold, we have *our* moon – our compass point, our idea of what is ideal, our idea of God - to accompany us.

Joseph Joubert wrote that "imagination is the eye of the soul," reminding us that what we imagine – those images we court, the dreams we have, the concepts that we ponder are reflections of who we are and desire to be...what we long for and seek to create...imagination is a function of freedom.

Like Harold we imagine what we would like to journey, we may begin on a straight purple path, but soon discover that we're not getting anywhere, or anywhere we want to be at any rate – at some point we long for relief from monotony, for more or less adventure depending on our disposition, for creative advance – a reaching beyond ourselves.

Through our imagination we find the power of discovery. We journey on not blindly, but toward an idea, an intuition, of what could be - a forest perhaps...

Our imagination contains the power of disclosure – what we imagine can disclose to us our desires, our unconscious, our hopes...and they are a part of us...

When we go where our imagination takes us we discover that our adventures will inevitably be, at times, challenging. Like Harold, just as we create our own small forest so that we don't get lost, we find that there is often more there than we bargained for...We cling too tightly to the promise of tasty apples, perhaps to our ideas of what we or others should be, our designs for the future, the outcome of an enterprise...and imagine that these ideas must be protected.

One of the insights that we may take from Harold's adventure is that much of what we fear is of our own creation. That is not to say that dangers do not exist, most certainly they do, but on occasion – perhaps often – they are dragons of our own drawing.

It is at those times - when we are in over our head like Harold in his ocean - that we can further draw on the inner resources of our imagination. One such resource is found in Jungian psychology. Active Imagination is a practice in which we engage in a dialogue with a created figure in our imagination that represents aspects of our unconscious. Through such dialogue we gain insight into ourselves – it is a boat that we can use to steady ourselves on the journey...other boats may be

used too...affirmations, talks with friends, meditation...the point is that we, most of the time, have the resources available to us – our own trim boat and our moon to accompany us.

As we follow Harold's journey we join him on a beach. Harold had "sailed long enough and made land" – arriving on the beach wondering where he was. And he isn't afraid – he merely makes the association of the beach and picnics and so "makes" his lunch. Now the thing that interests me about Harold is that even though he makes nine of the pies that he likes best, he doesn't gorge himself as one would expect a child to do – rather he samples a bit of all that is there.

Harold shows a restraint of imagination that illustrates for us a model of healthy limiting – a reasonableness, and then a generosity.

Indeed, Harold demonstrates a moral imagination. Rather than wasting the pie he shares it with "a very hungry moose and a deserving porcupine." Interesting use of images here – we can imagine a hungry moose, but Johnson also chooses a porcupine, an animal to which we might not be immediately, or easily, sympathetic. We are given here a clue as to how we can relate both to those parts of ourselves that are needy or prickly, and how we might relate to the world outside of us.

What strikes me at this point about Harold is that he remains calm as he takes this next leg of the journey. Tiring and unable to find his bedroom window, Harold uses his imaginative resources – his purple crayon – and keeping his wits about him – and his eye on the moon - even when he tumbles off of a cliff.

We all encounter our own cliffs – places where, for a moment – or more, we lose our footing and can't see our bedroom window...our ability to trust our own inner resources is *our* purple crayon out of which a soft place to fall is made manifest...

The other remarkable thing about Harold is that he knows that he's tired and *wants* to go to bed! Creating a city of windows - none of which are *his* bedroom window – his resourcefulness does not fail him – as evidenced by the policeman he asks – who is pointing the way that he was already going – an imaginary signpost, an affirmation of being headed in the right direction. Harold nonetheless thanks the policeman...a clue for us to acknowledge and be gracious to our own inner cop.

Harold's journey ends, and challenge is met, when he turns to the moon and remembers the relationship of his bedroom window to the moon. We find our way home when we remember our relationship to the ground of our being, our compass point, our ideals.

This children's tale opens for us an understanding of how our own imagination functions in our lives to create our reality, and hence, our ability to impact the world.

Now, it is, to be sure, simplistic to say that we alone create our own reality – for there is a world beyond ourselves with which we must reckon; yet what we imagine has the power to shape us, who we are what we will become...what we imagine has the power to shape the world in which we live...

The poet Rilke wrote, "our images are our future waiting to be born..."

It is through our imagination that we experience our ability to have sympathy with another – we can imagine what another is going through...in face of another's extreme pain in circumstances we have never encountered we may say, "I can't imagine what that would be like," but even the ability to know that we cannot comprehend another's pain means that we must be able to imagine something of their situation. We feel with the other and offer a possibility to them for hope and healing.

All creative advance has come about because of imagination – the ability to envision things differently than they currently are.

Every great discovery was birthed from the imagination of the discoverer – her ability to imagine what might be and then to find the resources to create it.

We recognize, too, that how we choose to imagine the world makes a difference to those with whom we share our lives...our families, co-workers, fellow congregants.

Building on the vision and dreams of our founders we have created a place where souls are nourished in the warmth of community as articulated in the Fellowship's mission statement – where we welcome new folks in our midst, creating a place where we might imagine a world make more beautiful, peaceful and just...

“A compassionate, liberal religious community:

Where spirits and intellects are free to explore the meaning of existence;

Where the work of social justice and the warmth of friendships are valued;

Where young and old can find joy and comfort;

Where we welcome a variety of people with diverse histories, lifestyles, ideas and dreams;

Where the senses respond to artistic creativity as well as the natural world at our doorstep;

Where we practice Unitarian Universalist values by being true to our own beliefs and cooperating in a self-governing community.”

The words of this statement reflect the imagination of its shapers and they become living words to us and lures to what could be...

IN RELATION TO THE WIDER WORLD - IMAGINATION IN OUR MORAL LIVES

Theologian Carter Heyward states, “Imagination is a recognition that there is more going on than we can realize. Whatever we know something to be, it is always more than we can know...Imagination is the root of creativity and liberation...it is our primary source of knowing more than we think we can...”

In our work in the world we bring the whole of ourselves, and our wholeness is necessary if we are to be able to imagine a better world.

Of all the people living for today...with nothing to kill or die for, living life in peace...Sharing all the world...with no need for greed or hunger, humanity in brotherhood and sisterhood with all life, and the world living as one...what an amazing dream...can you imagine?

After the service, our children – and any others short enough to do so since this year's Maypole is only six feet high – will dance the Maypole. Enacting this ancient rite, originally for fertility, helps us to visualize what it is that we would like to manifest in our lives...from the fertile soil of our minds comes the images of our desires, our needs, our hopes – for ourselves, our community, the world...As the ribbons wind around the Maypole, the ritual makes concrete the concept, the image, the idea... as you watch the Maypole dance, in your imagination dance it too – dance it for healing – yours or someone else's, dance it for hope – for yourself or someone else, dance it for love – for yourself and others, dance it for peace – your own and the worlds, dance it with joy....

With Harold we all have our crayons and we can draw our future...