



Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens

The Reverend Alison Wilbur Eskildsen, Parish Minister
The Reverend Don Randall, Community Minister

“Moving Mountains”

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Centering Thoughts:

[Jesus] said to them, “...For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.” Matthew 17:20

The most important thing in life is to stop saying ‘I wish’ and to start saying ‘I will.’ Consider nothing impossible, then treat possibilities as probabilities. Charles Dickens

Women, like men, should try to do the impossible. And when they fail, their failure should be a challenge to others. Amelia Earhart

It always seems impossible until it’s done. Nelson Mandela

Sermon:

Aviatrix Amelia Earhart attempted what in her time was considered impossible. She committed her time, talent and treasure to become the first woman to fly around the world. She already had become the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean. She already had created her own women’s clothing and luggage brands. She already had proven the impossible—that women could do what men could do.

But Earhart didn’t stop with these successes. She had this one more impossible feat to accomplish. She and her navigator, Fred Noonan, took off from Miami in June 1937, nearly 80 years ago, but they failed to complete their journey. One of history’s great mysteries, the pair and their plane disappeared as they neared Howland Island, their refueling site in the Pacific.

Before leaving on her final flight Earhart said prophetically, “Women, like men, should try to do the impossible. And when they fail, their failure should be a challenge to others.”

Her failure to circumnavigate the globe not only challenged others, she inspired women to fly and to soar in whatever field they chose. Earhart remains an inspirational figure for all who dream of trying something others say is too risky, too difficult, or too impossible. But great accomplishments rarely are made by the timid. Great movement forward, whether in human

exploration or relationships, individual, cross-cultural, or ideological, rarely occur without an intentional commitment to do the impossible.

Thomas Edison said, “I am not discouraged, because every wrong attempt discarded is a step forward...I failed my way to success.” Winston Churchill said, “Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm.”

Mahatma Gandhi didn't let the odds against him prevent him from seeking Indian independence. Jimmy Carter didn't let the impossibility of an Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty stop him from trying. Rosa Parks didn't let fear stop her from doing her part to gain equal rights for black people.

Impossibility should not prevent any of us from reaching for our dreams. I dream of peace and harmony in our nation and in the world. I dream of arresting climate change. I dream of communicating with extra-terrestrial life. I dream of traveling to nearby galaxies. I have faith and hope these will be accomplished one day.

To believe otherwise would have me live in despair. To believe otherwise would have me accept mediocrity. To believe otherwise would have me accept the status quo. To believe otherwise would have me and you accept that we are powerless to improve the world. To believe otherwise would have me and you accept that the moral arc of the universe cannot bend toward justice. To believe otherwise would have me and you live without purpose.

I believe one way we give our lives meaning is by setting challenges for ourselves and then working to meet them. And when we move mountains, we find joy in our accomplishments.

According to the gospel writer, Matthew, Jesus told his disciples who complained they couldn't heal the sick that all they needed was just a tiny bit of faith and they could move mountains. They needed faith in themselves, faith in Jesus, faith in a divine power, and faith that the impossible is possible.

But with faith must come hope. Faith that it can be done and hope that it will be done. And whatever it may be, it needs our commitment. John F. Kennedy set before the nation a goal of reaching the moon and he committed the nation's resources to make it happen. The young space agency, NASA, received resources – financial and human – to make this dream a reality. Faith and hope without intentional commitment and action accomplishes little.

Intention and commitment may be more than simply a person's will power or determination. In 2004, the late Wayne Dyer, philosopher and self-help author, published *The Power of Intention*. He posited that *intention* was an actual force in the universe that exists in all things and surrounds all things, a bit like the Jedi's Force in the *Star Wars* universe. Just as a Jedi knight taps into the Force for power and insight, Dyer believed intention could similarly be tapped into. He believed that when you set an intention or made a commitment to something, you can tap into this energy or force to make it happen. As if by naming your intention you bring it into existence.

To me, the power of intention sounds like the power of prayer. If you pray for something, believers have faith that it will be answered. Pray hard or often enough and your prayers may

come true. (As an aside, I find this kind of faith in prayer wanting. If you're sick, for example, and you aren't miraculously healed, then Matthew's gospel message tells you it's your own fault. You must not have had even the tiniest amount of faith. Alternatively, God is punishing you for some evil you've done. I don't find either reason theologically or rationally satisfying.)

Whether or not you or I believe God will answer our prayers or the force of intention will help us achieve our desires, I believe when we make an intentional commitment we change ourselves and our perception of the world. Dyer said, "If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change."

I believe something happens when we decide to move meager hills or massive mountains. I believe we set change in motion. It's as if we rewire our brains when we make a decision. It's not for nothing that we make resolutions at the start of a New Year. We may not follow up our commitments with action, but if we never made that little act of intention, we aren't likely to make any change in our behavior. If I lost 10 pounds without intention, I'd either be very sick or it would be proof that miracles happen—and I'm not ready for either.

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "Once you make a decision, the universe conspires to make it happen." And the philosopher William James said, "It is our attitude at the beginning of a difficult task which, more than anything else, will affect its successful outcome." Setting our minds to something forms the first step in realizing a goal.

In our troubled times there are many goals we can set. Ending the political divisiveness is high on my list. Even reaching our capital campaign goal so that we have an opportunity to serve our mission better is high on my list. But neither of these will be accomplished if we think they're impossible and we give up or don't even try. If we combine our collective faith, hope, and intentional acts of commitment, we can change the world. I believe we can move mountains together.

Rollo May said, "The relationship between commitment and doubt is by no means an antagonistic one. Commitment is healthiest when it is not without doubt but in spite of doubt."

Don't let doubt stop you from trying to move mountains. Together, we can do anything.

May it be so.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. What motivates you to try something difficult? How might you benefit by failure to achieve it?
2. Have you accomplished something others said was nearly impossible? How did it change you?
3. Can reframing a task make it appear easier to accomplish? Have you done this or could you?