

“Making Change: The Director’s Cut”
All Souls Unitarian Church
A Sermon Delivered by Debra Garfinkel, Intern Minister
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Chaos Theory says that a butterfly can flutter its wings in one place and set in motion changes that cause a typhoon on the other side of the world. Here we are, at a place where we’re about to make changes. It’s the end of another calendar year. People are talking about their “New Year’s Resolutions.” If you are thinking of making a change, know that making even one change can allow for amazing possibilities.

That’s the key – *making* the change. Change happens. Those of us who are older know this only too well. We can ignore changes. We can pretend that our lives are the same. Then, something happens that wakes us up. We have a choice: continue to allow others to direct our lives OR change ourselves. There is nothing like a shock to startle us out of our comfort zone.

We sometimes refer to such shocks as “wake-up calls.” It reminds me of Bill Murray’s movie, “Groundhog Day.” This comedy takes a light-hearted look at one man’s opportunity for change and the results.

Bill Murray plays the part of Phil, a jaded, cynical television weatherman. He hates having to go to Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania for the annual February 2nd ritual. The fact that the famous groundhog is named Phil, Punxsutawney Phil, doesn’t help, either. Phil, the TV star, makes no attempt to hide his disdain for the assignment and for people who can be amused by a groundhog festival.

On the morning after Groundhog Day, something very strange happens. Phil’s radio alarm wakes him up with Sonny and Cher’s song, “I Got You, Babe.” He goes downstairs for breakfast. He notices that everyone says the same thing they said the day before. In fact, the entire day is an exact replay of the previous day.

Phil thinks he is going crazy – or maybe dreaming. But no – the next morning his radio alarm wakes him up with Sonny and Cher’s song, “I Got You, Babe.” He must repeat Groundhog Day.

Phil is caught in a loop of reliving Groundhog Day. He re-writes his script by changing what he does and says. His changes are self-serving and therefore are simply variations of his normal behavior. Phil continues to wake up to “I Got You, Babe.” Welcome to the opening scene of “Eternity: The Movie.”

After many, many Groundhog Days, Phil finally lets go of his ego. He learns that he has incredible potential. He has fun. Phil risks being himself. He falls in love with his producer. Love, like the weather, is unpredictable.

Mutual caring holds life together. Phil and the people in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, all live the consequences of Phil’s choices and behavior in all of his Ground Hog Days. His direction affects them all.

Phil’s profound personal change transforms his universe. However, no matter what Phil does for an old, sick, hungry, homeless man, the man still dies. All of the

choices made by that man and by the greater community could not be reversed by one hot meal delivered too late.

OK, you say. Enough, already! Haven't we just survived all the sentimental holiday movies with messages of miraculous change? Give me something besides "Ground Hog Day" and "It's a Wonderful Life." Those are just stories. Give me something I can use.

All right.

Imagine some scenes from the film of human history.

Cut to an ancient time:

Think about the changes that occurred
when human beings learned to control fire.

Cut to the Neolithic:

Think about the changes that occurred
when someone made the first tool.

Cut to 1750:

Think about the changes that occurred
after Benjamin Franklin's kite experiment
with lightning and electricity.

Each of these events really happened. We live with the results. We are able to make change happen precisely because we can imagine. It is when we are being creative that we realize amazing possibilities.

What is the key? We don't have to invent the light bulb to cause great change in the world. As so many stories and movies tell us, the key is within you. You have all you need. You are already amazing.

This key is found in the often quoted Christian scripture of today's reading. The disciples ask Jesus who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. This is not about individual ego. Remember, at the time of Jesus, the concept of the individual does not exist. There is a collective culture that operates within a system of honor and shame. So, asking about who is the greatest is an effort to determine who will occupy the socially honorable position in the new realm.

Jesus gives an answer that turns the societal norm on its head. He says, See this child? "Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Jesus tells his followers that they must be willing to be humble, like children. Children are very low on the social scale. Jesus says these people, his chosen disciples, must be willing to let go of any desire for greatness.

Be like children? Yes. And I would say in our culture of *individual* greatness, that does include letting go of egotistical self-consciousness and allowing for positive self-awareness. It means being authentic. It moves us to a place of right relationship with ourselves. Then, we are better able to be in right relationship with the Divine and one another.

For me, therein lies the power of so-called children's stories. Fairy tales confront real fears and anxieties. They present creative solutions. They demonstrate amazing possibilities for relationship and community.

Take, for example, the story that Marlin told so well today. The Princess knows herself, thank you very much. However, she doesn't fit the expectations of people for her particular societal role. The Dragon knows herself, too. As creative beings, these two imagine a world where each can be happily who she is. In this story, the Princess and the Dragon change their world by being authentic.

Being authentic involves risk. Being authentic requires courage. In the movie, "Ground Hog Day," the self-centered Phil risks appearing foolish; he risks showing his vulnerability. Phil courageously dares to act more from his heart and less from his head. The movie makes it clear that this is a process that requires a lot of time – and a lot of wake-up calls.

Wake-up calls are around us constantly. Frequently, it is a lot easier to identify someone else's wake-up call than it is our own. For instance, I notice when someone *else* is being perfectionistic, working extra long hours and not taking good care of himself or herself. Hah! Do I do that? Yes. Now, when I notice that quality in someone else, I try to think, "Hmmm. Why is that bothering *me* so much? Could that possibly be me?"

For some of us, we can't or won't wake up unless it is a very alarming event. Serious illness can have the effect of a wake-up call. So-called near death experiences can do the same thing. Most of us have either had such an experience ourselves, or know someone who has had the experience. When something that is incredibly life-changing happens, just try to keep from talking about it. Telling the story continues to change the teller and offers the opportunity for change to the listener.

We are back to the argument between story and reality. Human beings have always told stories to effect change. For some people, the only stories that make sense are the "real" stories. I think that the operating definition of "real" is factual.

Experience is the key, here – because even in a fairy tale, it is possible to experience authenticity. We often say that something "rings true." In that respect, if we allow ourselves to accept the concepts and work with the metaphors, it is possible for any story to be true. In this way, mythology is sacred story.

So we tell our stories in different ways. We think about who we are and how we want to be remembered. Sacred stories have evolved from the lives and deaths of people important to us, people such as John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., the crew of the Challenger, the women, men and children in the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City in 1995, and the thousands who perished on September 11, 2001. As we try to make sense of death, we struggle to make meaning for our lives.

Each and every one of us looks to other people to provide us with a role model – to be an exemplar. I am blessed with many people who continue to inspire me to, as Ghandi says, "Be the change I wish to see." My teachers and students, friends and co-workers, and my family – you all give me the gift of who you are. Your presence in my life offers me wisdom, guidance, courage, trust and hope.

Know this: the world would be a much different place without you. Each and every one of you makes a unique contribution to our community. If you doubt what I am saying is true, find the time to talk with someone you trust. Tell that person why she or he is important to you – how that person affects your life. Then, ask that person to do the same for you.

Does this sound strange? If you're not accustomed to doing this, it can feel risky. It takes courage to change. Be patient with yourself. Change doesn't happen all of a sudden. Epiphanies and "a-ha" moments are only possible because a series of events and internal processes have been occurring without your even being aware.

Sometimes people feel they shouldn't talk about their special talents or abilities. They adopt an attitude of what I would call false humility. Now, I'm not saying that a person should be a loud-mouthed bragger! However, *you* have something unique to contribute to our community *and you know what it is*.

Pay attention to what fills you with energy and excitement. That's your passion. It is the key to your best contribution to being in right relationship with yourself and beyond. This is your personal treasure of amazing possibility.

By the nature of their very being, children remind us of the joy of discovery and possibility. They are the very models of change. Children aren't the only ones who embody change, of course. Story after story, movie after movie, provides us with a wonderful, engaging kaleidoscope of possibilities within our interconnection. Yes, wake-up calls come in various forms – as we are ready to receive them.

Are you ready? Let's choose our direction! Let us *be*.
I'll meet you at the Dragon's cave!