

*Until It's Disproved***A sermon for All Faiths Unitarian Congregation****By the Rev. CJ McGregor****Delivered on October 1, 2017**

John Lennon said: "I believe in everything until it's disproved. So I believe in fairies, the myths, dragons. It all exists, even if it's in your mind. Who's to say that dreams and nightmares aren't as real as the here and now?" Dreams and nightmares may inspire or frighten us. They may make us lose sleep. They may make us more fearful, or make us feel a sense of euphoria, but we do not expect to subject our dreams and nightmares to the rigor of peer review, or to the scientific method of the physical sciences.

Until it is disproved: I choose, like Margaret Meade, to believe that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. I also believe that in order for that small group of citizens to change the world, they must have a shared belief in many of the same fairies, myths and dragons. By that I mean that their fairies (or joyous aspirations), their myths (or stories that define them); and their dragons (or fears), combine to create a worldview that defines their common shared personal truth. Religions, interest groups, and political parties are made of people who have aligned their personal truths. Their common truth, their shared dream, or their worldview, exists only in their minds until they act on it, to bring it into being.

When my family first found Unitarian Universalism my oldest son was 8. Religious Education for children was a big reason we returned again and again. My son's religious education classes were held in the basement of the church. I remember his Sunday classes were taught by cultural Jews. They called themselves "Jewnitarians." Every Sunday, he was taught by cultural Jews for whom the Holocaust was still a very personal and very real memory; and who fiercely rejected creedalism in any form. They taught using the Socratic method. They never told my son what to think. Rather, they asked him what he thought, and with slow and careful questions requiring his responses, taught him how to find and express his personal truths. I remember my son being frustrated. He didn't understand why these adults expected kids to have answers to THE BIG QUESTIONS, or why he had to express his personal theologies. Some days they would just bring in a newspaper article and have them read it. Then they would discuss it in the slow questioning Socratic method. Sometimes they would be split into teams and argue different sides of the issue. I think my son at the time might have preferred my Catholic Sunday school. I just had to memorize stuff. Why couldn't his Sunday school teachers just tell him what to think?

My son's teachers knew what it was to live in a society that had a common truth, a common dream or world view: an Ayrian dream that proved fatal for their loved ones and for their families. It was the goal of his teachers to raise a generation of Unitarian thinkers who would know how to form and articulate their own truth, and to recognize when the realities of the world are being distorted by the dreams of others. They prepared him to move into the world as people of conscience; prepared to carry forward their dream of peace and to recognize threats to that peace. They prepared him to recognize when truth was distorted by an unjust dream held by a powerful group of people, and to respond. I AM SAYING TODAY: TRUTH IS BEING

**DISTORTED BY AN UNJUST DREAM HELD BY A GROUP OF POWERFUL PEOPLE,  
AND WE MUST RESPOND.**

As unlikely as it might seem today, in the first half of the 20th century the Republicans were the party that most strongly supported scientific work, as they recognized the diverse ways in which it could undergird economic activity and national security. The Democrats were more dubious, tending to see science as elitist and worrying that new federal agencies like the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health would concentrate resources in elite East Coast universities.

In recent decades, of course, the Republicans have lurched rightward on many topics, and they now regularly attack scientific findings that threaten their political platforms. In the 1980s, they generally questioned evidence of acid rain; in the 1990s, they went after ozone science; and in this century, they have launched fierce attacks not just on climate science but, in the most personal fashion imaginable, on climate scientists. Many Republicans resist accepting the overwhelming scientific evidence of climate change because they fear it will be used as an excuse to expand big government. Here's what should give them pause: by delaying action on reducing global carbon emissions for more than two decades, we have already significantly increased the likelihood that disruptive global warming will lead to the kinds of government interventions they most fear and seek to avoid. Climate change is, in fact, already causing an increase in the sorts of extreme weather events—particularly floods, extreme droughts, and heat waves—that almost always result in large-scale government responses. The longer we wait, the more massive the required intervention will be. These people have a dream of denial: A dream that denies climate science; A dream that denies structural racial injustice; and a dream that declares that America is #1 in any comparison. Measurements of greenhouse gases and sea levels, taken with instruments of science, and recorded by scientists in our government agencies are spoken of in political discourse as dreams that are to be believed or disbelieved, as though there were no consequences for action or inaction. The instrumentation and expertise assembled in our government agencies to advise elected officials, who have no expertise; and purchased with our tax dollars to protect our safety are dismissed as OUR widely held dream of fools; in spite of the proof that exists.

I believe in gravity. I believe in the self-correcting mechanism of the scientific method and peer review. I believe in a Gallilean Solar System. I believe that if I cut myself I bleed. I believe that if I count two objects then there ARE two objects. I believe that sea level satellite data is observed fact captured by instrumentation engineered and calibrated for accuracy, and confirmed by data collected by instrumentation capturing tidal data on buoys in the ocean. I believe the time lapse photography of disrupted glaciers; the saltwater I see with my own eyes bubbling up through storm drains; the time lapse photography of the rapidly melting Greenland ice sheet and the Antarctic ice sheet; and the atmospheric sampling and measurement of greenhouse gases are all real. And they are my nightmares, and I must respond. There is no widely held dream of denial that can “trump” peer-reviewed science and the rising costs of sea level rise infrastructure maintenance. But the widely held dream of denial can kill people if it prevents action.

Dreams of denial of climate change and dreams of denial of structural racial injustice cost lives. What does it look like when there is structural racism inherent in climate injustice? It looks like Hurricane Katrina, or even Irma, and its aftermath. What does it look like when there is structural racial injustice inherent in environmental injustice? It looks like Flint, Michigan. What

does it look like when there is structural racial injustice in Southwest Florida? It looks like a room full of white people identified as “stakeholders” meeting during work hours on weekdays to provide input into adaptation planning when the African Americans and others (whose neighborhoods have standing water for 3 days after heavy rains due to sea level rise and saltwater intrusion) have to work.

We are fortunate enough to be able to stand on the shoulders of those who came before us in our faith tradition as a Unitarian Universalists. We have dreams that are fueled by our faith. We have dreams that are fueled by statements crafted by ministries affiliated with the Unitarian Universalism that are based on our Statements of Conscience and Actions of Immediate Witness. So, I share the dream that the group of people within our congregation and our allies that is the Climate Action Team can change the world. Because until it is disproved, I believe that a small group of committed people can change the world. My nightmare is already real in the world. The dream of denial is creating my very real nightmare. The nightmare that injustice causes the least among us to suffer the most from climate change, while wealthy patriarchal Americans laugh about it in denial in political discourse on television, and I see it over and over as it is Facebooked, Tweeted, and used to distract from serious productive discussion.

My dream is that by working in relationship and partnership, and by always seeking out community-based solutions that challenge the status quo, we will change the world. Climate vulnerability is not just geo-spatial, with maps that show inundation. Social scientists have found that vulnerability is created at the intersection of race, class and gender. We must respond. We will make mistakes, and we will learn. In the process of learning, we will strengthen cooperation in our congregation between our Green Sanctuary Team and our Climate Action Team to combat the structural racism inherent in climate injustice. We will strengthen the bridges between our congregation and the African-American communities in our midst. We will apply for an EPA Environmental Justice Small Project Grant. This is the first grant cycle from the EPA made available to faith-based groups to partner with vulnerable communities to educate about the public health impacts of climate change. In this sense, we are participating in the pioneering efforts to conceptualize a new climate change outreach framework.

My dream is that when my son is a grandfather he and all the people of this world will have air to breathe, water to drink and food to eat; and that neither he nor his children will remain silent when TRUTH IS BEING DISTORTED BY A DANGEROUS AND UNJUST DREAM SHARED BY A GROUP OF POWERFUL PEOPLE, AND HE WILL RESPOND. And because of all of our efforts to build bridges and to work with people of different races and cultures, that my son and his children will be living in the beloved community we hold as our collective dream.

So, Who's to say that dreams and nightmares “aren't as real as the here and now?” Anyone who will stand with me in the fight for climate justice.

May it be so.