

**UU Church of Waterville**  
**Stewards of The Board and The Wave**  
**Dennis Perkins, 01/21/24**

I'll start with a couple of observations. First, it turns out almost nobody is listening if a speaker goes beyond 8 minutes. Valuable advice. Second, if you want to sound knowledgeable, speak only of what you already know everything about. But if you want to become more knowledgeable, examine things you know relatively little about. See where it takes you and let others hear you stumble along. As Robert Frost said, "The only way out is through."

Which is how I got onto surfing as the Stewardship topic. Two of our granddaughters take surfing lessons in the relatively calm surf at Scarborough Beach and I get glued to YouTube videos of surfers descending 100 ft waves in Nazare, Portugal. So I know little of waves and boards, except that I know there are great lessons there.

Waves: We're surrounded by them, penetrated by them and even composed of them. Physicists tell us that the physical universe is filled with waves. Electromagnetic waves, gravitational waves, mechanical waves and even quantum waves, all generally unseen and unfelt until they come into contact with something, move through something—or in the case of quantum waves until they are noticed and measured.

Then there are the waves, one following another, that move through our human history. The first wave of modern humanity crested and flowed out of East Africa perhaps tens of thousands of years ago when Homo sapiens headed north and east driven by two great hungers—two hungers without which you and I wouldn't be here this morning: hunger of the body and hunger of the mind. Bodily hunger meant that these early humans had to follow the animals on which their lives depended, while the mind's hunger—curiosity—drove them to explore, experiment and invent. These waves of humanity fanned out eventually across all of the land masses, forming early communities which grew into towns, cities and eventually civilizations, until the most recent historical wave arose and became the one that at this moment we are riding.

Do you have the feeling that we are being carried along by forces and events that are beyond our control? Political events. Military events.

Meteorological events. All the elements of this historical moment. Sometimes I feel like that person in Nazare, Portugal, with the 100-foot wave cresting just behind me. What is one to do as this enormous millennial wave, cut by cross currents of war and peace, of deceit and truth, of autocracy and democracy, of fear of the future and false attraction of the past, as this wave breaks and curls above us?

Again, like our friend in Nazare we have only a fragile board to keep us moving and to keep us alive. Unlike our Portuguese friend, however, our boards are not made from foam, resin and fiberglass. Our board is composed of our UU Principles and of our shared experience, of our principles of belief and behavior and of each other. And like a surfer we need to move back and forth across our board-- always adjusting, always rebalancing as circumstances demand. Let's look briefly at how we need to rebalance among our principles as the wave unfolds.

Our first and second principles are constantly challenged by our national experience. For example immigration at our southern border: while we understand that each nation including our own has a just and inherent right to secure borders, we simultaneously demand that each human being on the far side of the border be treated with kindness in the application of justice and with respect when spoken of. Back and forth on the board, adjusting as the surface of the national water changes.

In our third principle we encourage individual spiritual search and growth and yet may—or should—find at times we may have moved too far away from the need that many of us have for spiritual assurance. Rebalance.

Following our fourth principle, we do not shy away from the pursuit of truth wherever that might lead, but we may find it hard to accept that the end of that search is an ambiguity requiring a humility to which we are not accustomed. Rebalance.

Our fifth principle can be especially challenging. We are willing to acquiesce to the political decisions of the majority, provided that conflicting opinions have been given fair audience and that all who are entitled have been given the right to cast their vote. And yet, even then, we will work hard to see that an unjust decision is revisited again—and again. Because we live in a country and practice a faith that celebrates pluralism, we are constantly having to recognize and respond to the attractions and dangers

of a populism that gives rise to demagoguery, whether political, cultural or religious. Rebalance.

With our sixth principle we long for peace, liberty and justice across the globe and yet we must accept that sometimes these desires can be mutually exclusive. The Holocaust Memorial celebrated next week reminds us that sometimes peace must be sacrificed in the service of freedom. And so we move back and forth across the board of our conscience. Rebalance and balance again.

Finally, we strive to feel our unity with the web of all existence in every moment and yet the frailty of our concentration and the exigencies of daily life draw us apart and distract us. Until we rebalance.

Theodore Parker, one of the earliest and brightest lights of American Unitarianism, observed (in a quote that inspired both Martin Luther King and President Obama): “The Arc of the Moral Universe is long, but it bends toward Justice.” Let us hold that thought as we look around and above us at the curl of this crashing wave of history on which ride.

We will not reach the end, for this is not the last wave through. But we will do our part. We will in our own small ways both as individuals and as a tiny liberal church continually balance and rebalance between individual freedom and social responsibility. We will as individuals, as a church and as stewards of our principles master our board as best we can.

And we can find purpose and solace in these final words by the Rev. Ashley Horan:

Another world is possible.  
We say it, again and again,  
even when the proof lies somewhere beyond the horizon,  
beyond our reach,  
beyond our imagination.

This is our faith:  
Another world is possible.  
Not somewhere else--  
another world, another lifetime-- but here, and now,  
for us and for all.

Another world is possible.  
There is no single path toward that world;  
no one strategy or approach that will restore balance, heal  
brokenness,  
sow wholeness,  
free creation.  
There are many routes toward liberation;  
toward freedom.  
But the abundance of options does not absolve us of  
the responsibility of acting.

Another world is possible.  
The call--the duty--  
of each moment in history is to discern:  
Who are we, and what can we bring  
with humility, integrity, faith?  
What is the context, and how can we address it with agility, resilience,  
skill?  
What is the vision, and how can we realize it with accountability,  
relationship, joy?

Another world is possible.  
In this time of despair, of fear, of collapse-- this time that is both like  
every other era and like no other time in history--  
It is audacious  
to declare our faith  
and to commit our work to a world that is  
more free,  
more just,  
more whole.

But we are an audacious people in good company, with many kin,  
and we are ready to show up and work hard  
and stay humble  
and make friends  
and hold the vision  
starting here, now, today, with us and persevering--  
however long it takes-- until that other world is not only possible, but

Another world is here.