

**Wishful Thinking or Possible Reality?**  
First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ  
Gloversville, New York  
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Isaiah 12; 65:17-25

In 1968, a Dr. Kent M. Keith wrote what he named the Paradoxical Commandments. Some of us have heard or read these before. They bear repeating this morning:

People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered.  
Love them *anyway*.

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives.  
Do good *anyway*.

If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies.  
Succeed *anyway*.

The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.  
Do good *anyway*.

Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.  
Be honest and frank *anyway*.

The biggest men and women with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest men and women with the smallest minds.  
Think big *anyway*.

People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs.  
Fight for a few underdogs *anyway*.

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight.  
Build *anyway*.

People really need help but may attack you if you do help them.  
Help people *anyway*.

Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth.  
Give the world the best you have *anyway*.

Let me start with these additions of mine:

Many people will insist God's promise of a new heaven and a new earth is a "pipe dream," that there will never be a day when peace will be manifest in all of its glory for all peoples. Work for peace and justice and grace and reconciliation *anyway*.

Many contend the efforts of one person or even a group of people, as well intentioned as they may be, is like dropping a pebble in the ocean and expecting it to change the level of the next tide.

Do what you can, where you can, impacting your small corner of the world *anyway*.

Just think of the people we met last week when our Sunday School students introduced us to those who chose to "beat the odds" and do good *anyway*. [Sunday School students paraded around the sanctuary with "masks" - black and white photographs glued to sticks - of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ghandi, Nelson Mandela, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks and Jonas Salk - as other students read of their significance in a "game" of "Who am I?"]

Dietrich Bonhoeffer - he must have known that going *back* to Germany - we heard how it was the last ship from the United States to Germany before the outbreak of World War II - The Rev. Bonhoeffer had to know it was not safe to go back to Germany and once there to stand up to the Nazi regime. He wasn't blind, deaf or dumb to what happened to people who were bold enough to do as he would do - Dachau had already existed as a Concentration Camp for dissidents for a decade - and every knew about it. Yet back he went - he secreted himself around the country, preaching in as many communities as possible - until he was finally imprisoned - Mr. Bonhoeffer's paradoxical commandment would be:

You know what the Nazis will do to dissidents who work for justice, peace and reconciliation - to work in the face of the greatest of evils for a new heaven and a new earth. Work for justice, peace, reconciliation - a new heaven and a new earth *anyway*.

Or the paradoxical commandment in Bonhoeffer's case might be this:

Leave the safety of Columbia University in New York City for the dangers of living in Nazi Germany and you might very well pay for that decision with your life. Leave New York City and return to Germany *anyway*.

Think of the others we "met" last Sunday who spent time in prison or were persecuted for believing in fairness, equality, justice, peace - Ghandi (who experienced injustice in South Africa as well as his native India), Nelson Mandela, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks.

Imagine what went on in Rosa Parks' head on that fateful day in December of 1955. Ms. Parks knew what would happen if she did not give up her seat to a white man. She was Secretary of the local chapter of the NAACP. She was privy to the plans the African-American community

had to protest the unfairness of Montgomery's municipal and supposedly legal segregation laws. Think of the paradoxical commandment that was implicit in Rosa Parks' action that day.

Give up your seat to a white man and avoid arrest and time in jail.

Refuse to give up your seat *anyway*.

Yesterday, when the soft but well spoken pro-democracy leader and 1991 Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi was released in Myanmar (some still call the country Burma) after seven years of house arrest, we were reminded that heroes like Suu Kyi always have the option of recanting their position, retiring from the public arena, and in exchange be released from their imprisonment. Suu Kyi could not do that. She still dreams of a day when the military dictatorship in her country relents and democracy reigns anew. For her, these seven years always included the paradoxical commandment:

Relent and give up the struggle for democracy for your people and silence your voice for the voiceless all over the world and you will be set free from your time of trial and arrest.

Continue to struggle for democracy *anyway*.

Since the flooding in Pakistan this summer, Ava has been concerned for the children of that country – concerned after seeing of photos of cows wading in high water and wondering how the children will have milk to drink – like the milk her mother tells her to drink so that *she* will grow stronger. In the next month or so, our Sunday School will start to explore how to participate in a Heifer Project – perhaps with the goal of providing even one cow to the people of that ravaged nation – so that a few children will have the milk to drink Ava so desperately wants them to have. Can you hear the paradoxical commandment?

Providing one cow somewhere in Pakistan when over a million people are in desperate need is not going to make a “hill of beans” difference.

Provide a cow anyway.

And finally how about a paradoxical commandment when we, the faithful, try to determine whether words about a new heaven and a new earth, about peace on earth, reconciliation among peoples, or the joy all of us want to embrace in the upcoming seasons of Thanksgiving and Christmas – whether those are mere words about some unattainable dream or are instead grounded in even a modicum or some reality:

Words about a new heaven and a new earth, about God's kingdom unfolding anytime soon is just a bunch of idle talk, there is nothing to be gained by even thinking about it!

Work for justice, peace, reconciliation, a new heaven and a new earth *anyway*.

Dietrich Bohoeffler did. Ghandi, Nelson Mandela, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks did. Aung San Suu Kyi did. Ava does.

Oh, and by the way, so did Jesus of Nazareth.

Amen.