

“Embracing Possibility: Hope with Structure”

Dianne M. Daniels; UUCN, April 19, 2026

Disciplined Imagination Rooted in Justice

How do we define possibility? How do we define hope?

Hope is the feeling of wanting something to happen and believing it **could**, and it is often associated with positive expectations for the future. It includes a desire for good outcomes and confidence in achieving them.

There is a kind of hope that feels easy.

It sounds good.

It comforts us.

It reassures us that somehow, some way, everything will work out.

It is the kind of hope we reach for when we are tired, when we are overwhelmed, when we need something—anything—to steady us.

And there is nothing wrong with that kind of hope. But it is not enough.

Because there is another kind of hope: deeper, stronger, more faithful.

A hope that does not ignore reality—but engages it.

A hope that does not wait passively—but participates.

A hope that is not wishful thinking—but disciplined imagination.

So today I want to offer this claim for your consideration and evaluation: ***Possibility is not naïve optimism.***

And in this moment, that includes how we imagine our relationship with the Earth itself.

Because the future we are shaping is not only social—it is ecological. The question of possibility is also the question of sustainability. It is disciplined imagination rooted in justice.

Because optimism says, “Things will get better.”
But hope asks, “*How will we help make them better?*”

And that difference is where faith begins.

WHAT

Let us begin by clarifying what we mean by hope.
Because we often confuse hope with optimism.

Optimism is a tendency.
It is a way of looking at the world and expecting positive outcomes.

And optimism has its place. It can strengthen resilience, improve our outlook, and help us recover from setbacks.

But optimism alone is not enough for a life of faith.
Because optimism can sometimes become avoidance.

It can become a way of skipping over what is difficult.
It can become a way of saying, “Everything will be fine,” without asking what “fine” actually means, what “fine” requires, or who must act to make it so.

Hope is different.
Hope requires honesty.

“Only if you tell yourself the truth about a trying situation can you proceed ahead and experience hope.”

Hope tells the truth, looks clearly at injustice, acknowledges suffering, and names what is broken. It asks us to face not only human injustice, but the strain placed on the living systems that sustain us.

And then—hope does something remarkable.
It refuses to stop there.

Hope as Power and Practice

Hope is not passive.
Hope is powerful.
Hope plants a seed.

It says: something else is possible—even if I cannot yet see it.
And that matters more than we often realize.
Because when hope is absent, people stop trying.

Here’s a direct question from the resources I used to compile this sermon:

“Why would someone even try when they believe there is no hope?”

That is not theoretical. That is real.

Hopelessness leads to paralysis.
And paralysis keeps systems exactly as they are.

So hope is not just emotional.
It is ethical.
It is spiritual.
It is necessary.

Hope and Imagination

And once hope takes root, imagination follows, because hope and imagination belong together.

Hope says: something is possible.
Imagination asks: what might that look like?

“Hope cultivates your imagination... You stretch yourself by considering resolutions you hadn’t considered before.”

That is not fantasy.
That is **disciplined imagination**.

Disciplined imagination does not drift—it directs.

It asks: What would justice look like here?
What would repair look like?
What would healing look like—not in theory, but in practice?

And then it takes the next step.

It connects vision to action.

Hope Through a UU Lens

Now, let us ground this in our Unitarian Universalist values.
Because in our tradition, hope is never isolated from justice.
It is rooted in it.

We are a people who affirm:

Justice – Love made public, unashamed, for the world to see, as we treat individuals fairly and each perfectly imperfect human being receives what they deserve.

Transformation – Change is possible, and we welcome the change that helps us move from what was to what can be, including a complete change in appearance or character.

Pluralism – Difference strengthens understanding, especially when we take the time to look beyond the surface and engage with different perspectives.

Interdependence – Our lives are connected; we are dependent and mutually reliant upon one another for support and functioning, and we can and should create mutual relationships.

And that interdependence extends beyond human relationships. It includes the air, the water, the soil, and all living beings. As we approach Earth Day this upcoming week, we are reminded that justice is not complete unless it includes the well-being of the planet itself.

And **Love** – At the center of all we do, that strong emotion involving affection, attachment, or concern for someone or something, encompassing a range of feelings from deep interpersonal affection to simple pleasure; it includes feelings of kinship, close friendship, personal attachment, and a concern for the good or welfare of others.

Hope, then, is not just something we feel.
It is something we practice together.

Hope asks:

What kind of world do we believe is possible—and how will we participate in bringing it into being?

Discernment and the Structure of Change

But here is where discipline matters.
Because not every possibility is grounded.

Not every action is wise.
Not every idea leads to transformation.

That is why discernment matters.
Discernment gives hope structure.

It asks: What is mine to do?
What aligns with my values? What sustains not only our lives, but the conditions that make life possible?

What contributes to real change?

And we know that transformation itself has structure.

- Awareness.
- Examination.
- Intention.
- Action.
- Improvement.
- Integration.

This is not accidental. This is how real change happens.

Hope without structure leads to frustration.
But hope with structure leads to transformation.

Community as the Ground of Possibility

And none of this happens alone.
Community is not optional.
It is essential.

Community happens when a group of people live in the same area or share common interests, characteristics, or goals. Individuals come together to interact and support one another, unifying the body.

“When hands join, there is a way to turn things around.”

That is interdependence.
That is pluralism in action.

Because when we bring different experiences, perspectives, and gifts together, possibilities – the chance that something might happen or exist, something may occur or be true - expand.

SO WHAT

So what does all this mean for us?

It means that hope is not something we wait for.
It is something we cultivate.

And without that cultivation, two things tend to happen.

First: We Lose Hope Entirely

When hope disappears, effort disappears.
People withdraw.
People disengage.
People stop believing that anything can change.

And when that happens, injustice continues unchallenged.

Second: We Settle for Passive Optimism

But there is another danger.

Passive optimism.

The belief that things will improve without our participation.

That someone else will fix it.

That time alone will solve it.

That change will come without cost.

But time does not create justice. People do. Communities do. Faithful action does.

Hope as Responsibility

Hope calls us into responsibility.

Not overwhelming responsibility.

Not “fix everything” responsibility.

But faithful participation.

“Hope cultivates a personal sense of responsibility and ownership.”

Hope shifts us from: “Someone should do something...” to:

“What is mine to do?”

And that is a powerful shift.

The Arc of Our Shared Journey

And this is where everything we have done together comes into focus. Because this moment is not isolated.

It is the culmination of a journey.

Attention trained us.
We learned to notice.

Tension strengthened us.
We learned to stay present in difficulty.

Courage mobilized us.
We stepped into action.

Sustainability steadied us.
We learned not to burn out.

And now—Now we imagine.

Now we ask: What becomes possible when all of that comes together?

Hope in Small, Real Moments

Hope is not only found in big change.
It is found in small moments.

“My hope is renewed with every small blessing.”

That matters. Because small moments accumulate.

A conversation.
A shift in awareness.
A decision to act differently.
A moment of courage.

These are not insignificant. They are how transformation begins.

Sometimes those moments are as simple as choosing care over convenience.

Small acts of environmental responsibility are also acts of hope.

Hope Requires Courage

And hope requires courage.

Because hope risks disappointment.

It risks trying again.

It risks believing when the outcome is uncertain.

But hope and courage strengthen each other.

When we act, hope grows.

When hope grows, we act.

And that cycle is how change happens.

NOW WHAT

So what do we do with all of this? How do we live into possibility as disciplined imagination?

Let me offer four invitations:

1. Practice Honest Hope

Tell the truth.

Name what is broken.

Name what is hard.

Name what needs to change.

But also name what is possible.

Hope lives at the intersection of honesty and courage.

2. Engage Your Imagination

Ask:

What could be different?

What could be more just?

More loving?

More whole?

And then ask: What is one step toward that?

Because imagination without action is fantasy.

But imagination with action—is transformation.

3. Act in Community

Do not do this alone.

Build relationships.

Share responsibility.

Trust the collective.

Because possibility grows where people connect.

4. Stay Rooted in Your Values

Let your life reflect:

Justice

Love

Pluralism

Transformation

Generosity

Equity

Interdependence

Let your actions align with what you believe is possible.

CLOSING

Hope is not certainty.

Hope is commitment.

And this week, as Earth Day calls us to reflection, we are invited to widen our circle of care—to include not only one another, but the fragile and resilient world we share.

Commitment to possibility, justice, transformation, to one another.

Hope does not require us to know the outcome.

It requires us to participate.

To imagine.

To act.

To continue.

Because every act of justice, every moment of courage, every small blessing—is part of something larger.

And that story is still unfolding.

So no—possibility is not naïve.

It is disciplined, grounded, practiced, and it is real.

And that is our calling:

Not just to believe in a better world—but to help bring it into being.

Amen. Ase. Blessed Be.