

Believe!

A Message for Sunday Morning Worship
United Congregational Church of Westerly, UCC, Pawcatuck, CT
August 28, 2016
Text: Hebrews 11:1

Believe! That was the theme of this year's National Youth Event of the United Church of Christ held this past July in Orlando, Florida. Yes, the national staff of the UCC in all its wisdom decided to hold National Youth Event, something which happens once every four years, in Disney World. This was a first for even the daring UCC and from everything I heard it was a rousing success. We did have a contingency of our own youth and families who attended and they are going to tell you just a little about their experiences. But I wanted to set the stage for them, just a bit, since their experiences there and their hopes and dream for the church – our church and our whole denomination – are the embodiment of the ways in which the church is changing to remain vibrant, vital and relevant to the world in which we live.

The church is changing because the church must change. We have no choice. The forms and structures which have served us well for the last 60+ years, like anything else, need to be refreshed, renewed and revitalized to be ready to face the new challenges and realities of life in the 21st century. Global warming and its effects on landscapes the world over, terrorist threats everywhere, wars of senseless brutality, resurgent epidemics

caused by everything from mosquitos to contaminated water – this is the world we are handing to our children, a world far different from the one our parents gave to us. But the seeds for all of these problems were planted decades, even centuries ago. So, the question for all of us of every age today is how do we figure out what to do to make this a better world, the world we want to give to our children with joy and pride? How do we reclaim the beautiful, glorious Creation God gifted to humankind? How do we start making things better, instead of worse?

Make no mistake about it, dear friends, that is the task of the church and always has been. From the earliest stories of the Old Testament right through to the wonderful parables and stories about Jesus we love so much – all of scripture recounts the stories of people trying to make the world a better place, a place grounded in God's hopes, God's visions, God's desires for the Creation God has loved passionately since before time even existed. The church must be a place to confront the big questions of life and to come together to find guidance and wisdom for how to move forward to solve these big problems together. The church must be in the business of hope that a better world is possible and faith that this is what God wants for all of us, for each of us. The church must be the place where we find the nurture, support and encouragement to face all that is to be faced and to do all that must be done to make the world whole again. And dear friends,

we must believe that this is possible. This is why *Believe!* was the theme of National Youth Event which our kids and families attended. First, we're going to watch a short highlights video of NYE and then we'll end with our kids telling us a little about their experiences....

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