

Making the Impossible Possible
Sunday, April 23, 2023
Tri-County Unitarian Universalists
Summerfield, FL
Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Lake County
Eustis, FL
Rev. Cynthia A. Snaveley

As I listened to Clemantine Wamariya in the video it struck me when she said she and her sister refused to be someone else's project and when Megyn Kelly said Wamariya teaches that imagination can help you defy the longest odds. It was Clemantine's sister who taught her those things.

Clemantine was six when she and sister who was fifteen were shooshed out the backdoor by their grandmother as the rapists and killers approached. They wandered through much of continental Africa, spent time in other people's homes and in refugee camps.

Clemantine writes of time in one camp, "I lost track of who I was. I'd become a negative, a receptacle of need. I was hungry, I was thirsty, I needed a bathroom, I needed a place to sleep. I was so confused. I just kept spinning. How did I get here, where I am a nobody? We walked all this way for this?"

"Everywhere you looked you saw people turned to stone. If you touched them, they'd crumble to dust. So they remained still and silent, trying not to shatter. You cannot tell the story: *I lost my children, husband, my whole family-I have no idea where on earth I am.*

"Staying alive was so much work. We had to wait five hours in line for maize and five hours again for beans. We had to fetch firewood. No one had matches, so just lighting a fire was a chore. You had to look for smoke and when you saw some you walked over there, with some kindling, to carry the flames back to your unit.

"You had to remember your unit number-not a given at age six.

"You had to try to hang on to your name, though nobody cared about your name. You had to try to stay a person. You had to try not to become invisible. If you let go and fell back into the chaos you were gone, just a number in a unit, which also was a number. If you died, no one knew. If you got lost, no one knew. If you gave up and disintegrated inside, no one knew.

"I started telling people, *I'm Clemantine, I'm Clemantine, I'm Clemantine! I don't want to be lost. I'm Clemantine!*"

But what gave Clemantine the fortitude in this impossible situation at age six to hold onto her identity, to not give up? A big part of the answer to that is Claire. Her big sister wasn't giving up, and Claire wasn't going to let her baby sister give up either.

Clemantine and Claire's story is more harrowing than most of our life stories are, but for almost all of us what gets us through the hard points in life is often, at least in part, that someone else was there for us.

About a year ago someone I knew from an interfaith group back in Maryland called me to tell me about her son's new venture. It is called Flikshop. They send your photos delivered as postcards to any person

in any prison. It is meant to keep families and loved ones connected with their incarcerated loved ones. It turns out Sylvia was the inspiration for her son's business.

On the "About Us" section of Flikshop's website their story is told. The page begins, "Each one of our Flikshop postcards are filled with words of love, emoji's, confessions of yearning, and some pain. They tell a story, and our founder Marcus Bullock knew that we needed to figure out a way to leverage this love to help end recidivism around the globe.

"When Marcus was 15 years old he was arrested and sentenced to spend 8 years in adult maximum security prisons for carjacking a man in a shopping mall parking lot. By the time he served the first 2 years he became very dark and depressed, so his mom made a promise to him in a prison visiting room.

"Marcus, I'm going to write you a letter or send you a picture every day for the remaining 6 years of your sentence.', says his mom, Ms. Bullock (Sylvia).

"Those letters saved my life!', claims Marcus. 'I was able to see the world through my mother's lens and gave me a clear vision to what my life would look like after prison.'

"Today, Flikshop works hard to keep every person in every cell connected to their family members and other community resources, prior to their release...just like Marcus' mom did while he was in prison."

Sylvia told me the pictures were often simple things, his bed at home, a fast food burger, little comforts that would be waiting for him when he came home.

Clemantine had her sister. Marcus had his Mom. And those connections made a huge difference.

Groups like AA and NA know how important that other person can be. A big part of those programs is having a sponsor as you begin your journey to taming an addiction.

I have never been in prison. I have never fled a genocide. But I have my own story of someone who helped me in a big step in my life. My mother said she did not have the temperament to be able to teach us children how to drive. That was going to be my father's job. I am the oldest and so the first. My father often took us along with him in the oil truck as he made deliveries to places he thought might be of interest to us like a dairy farm. He assumed I had watched him drive. I had not. I got in the car with my father, he told me to start the car and with my foot on the brake put it into gear. I said, "Which one is the brake?" At which point my father got out of the car and that was the end of lessons with Dad. I might not have learned to drive if my grandmother had not stepped in and taken over. She taught me to drive, a task both my mother and father had given up on as impossible.

Even in our storybooks the protagonists need someone. Cinderella needs her fairy godmother. Don Quixote needs Sancho Panza. Roald Dahl's Matilda has Miss Honey. They couldn't get to the ball or tilt at windmills or take revenge on Miss Trunchbull without them.

The twentieth century theologian, philosopher and physician Albert Schweitzer said, "At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us."

It is those other people, the teacher who took a special interest in our learning, the favorite aunt who was there in ways our parents couldn't be, the friend who held our hand through every breakup, the

coach who motivated us to do better not just on the field but also in life who make the impossible possible.

To return to the storybooks, "Piglet sidled up to Pooh from behind.

"Pooh!' he whispered.

"Yes, Piglet?'

"Nothing,' said Piglet, taking Pooh's paw. 'I just wanted to be sure of you.'"

We are all Piglet, and we all need a Pooh. Fortunately, most of us have at least one, and many of us have, have had and will have several.

What these people do for us can be important but even more important is simply that they are there. They are with us. The Catholic priest and writer, Henri Nouwen said, "When we honestly ask ourselves which persons in our lives mean the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is a friend who cares."

What we thought was impossible becomes possible when we are not alone.

I end with the lyrics from a black gospel song by David Frazier,

"I need you
You need me
We're all a part of God's body
Stand with me
Agree with me
We're all a part of God's body
It is (God's) will that every need be supplied
You are important to me
I need you to survive I pray for you
You pray for me
I love you
I need you to survive
I won't harm you
With words from my mouth
I love you
I need you to survive

It is (God's) will that every need be supplied
You are important to me
I need you to survive."

According to the Christian Apostle Paul it is we human beings who form God's body. When someone in that body needs us to survive, we can and we will. Even the impossible becomes possible with them by our side. May we offer thanks today for each and every one of those people who have enabled us to be where we are today. It is they who have made our impossibles possible.