



*The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Whidbey Island*

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Talk presented by Vicki Robin on Sunday, July 12, 2020

(posted with permission)

Aren't we lucky to live here. There's a pandemic raging around the world but we can go into the fresh air and green, breathe deep, enjoy the beauty of nature. Can I have an Amen?

Yes, we're grateful for our safety and beauty. But we are also stripped of our habitual ways of living. The pandemic has sent us to our rooms to think about our behavior. The Antiracist uprising has taken off the blinders to see our privilege and ask, is that right? The economic collapse has us thinking about where we shop, where we invest, who are the winners and losers of our financial strategies.

Normal is over. Next is not at all clear. What now? Where do we have the ability to act?

We may feel stalled, stuck and stopped. Fear might send us into Fight, flight, flee or fawn but we can step into the void with wait and create. Breathe. Relax. Accept. Assess the situation and see where we can apply ourselves to the world as it is, even if we can't control what it will be.

Today I suggest we look at local solutions to global upheaval as a place to act. That we tend and befriend our island and region. That we invest in local food, local finances and local fairness.

I've been working on "relocalization for over a decade" – realizing that climate change and resource extraction would eventually require us to meet our needs closer to home.

Let's think now about the global supply chains that got overwhelmed by the shut down – and what it revealed about our vulnerability here.

Recall the toilet paper panic as we started to hunker down. The flour scarcity as people started baking bread. Do you know there was a run on baby chicks? Hard to come by on the island. Or even mail order. And seeds, do you know there was such a run on seeds that companies stopped shipping to individuals? I couldn't get carrot seeds anywhere. Did you start to garden? Expand your garden? Sign up for a CSA or a fresh sheet?

We don't often relate food and medicine, but look at how our hospitals are also hooked into global supply chains. Do you know what medicines grow on the island?

Think about our economy. Retired people with passive income have fared better. Essential workers have had income, though they are more at risk. But our small businesses are wobbling. Landlords need rent to survive, but tenants need a break. Some businesses are losing their leases. Some businesses have done home and curbside delivery when possible. Some have disappeared. Many of us have turned to global supply chains for our needs, Amazon, Target, Walmart. The temptation is cheap and fast and convenient. The risk is that here on an island money drains out and mega corporations get stronger. And the same problem as food: Whether you love or hate Walmart, they could decide their Oak Harbor store isn't worth it – and shut down.

And then the murder of George Floyd and suddenly the long dark shadow of racism loomed. We've been shocked at how ignorant we white people are – of our history and our privilege. We are a largely white community. Racism seemed an elsewhere problem. People of color live among us, though, but with unease. We started reading history, watching videos, listening to podcasts.

So how do we bring all of this – food, finance and fairness - from head to heart and hands. How do we, here on a safe island, become aware of our fragility and our privilege and DO SOMETHING not just token but systemic.

We can commit ourselves to local food and just food, and do it now. We can set a conscious table, conscious of local businesses, conscious of local producers,

conscious of what's missing that we can help make happen, conscious of injustice in the supply chains that bring us easy, cheap, convenient food.

Can we commit to rewarding local producers with our dollars?

I did a 10 mile diet on Whidbey, I actually found almost everything I needed to be nourished here, but it was a lot of research and adaptation. But if 100 people tried to do what I did for a month, we would not have enough. So I also realized local food is not a local food system. Ours is disconnected. We needed it in grocery stores, we need a food hub, we needed commercial kitchens to convert berries into jam and tomatoes into sauces. We needed a mobile chicken slaughter facility. We need our fertile plains to grow grain for people, not hay for horses. We needed a grain mill. We needed cold storage. If we are to survive, we need a food system makeover.

Now it's changing, but too slowly. There's an online food hub that includes milk and cheese from Skagit. Goosefoot has partnered with the Port of South Whidbey to build a commercial kitchen at the fairgrounds. It also does an annual map of all the local farm stands and pickups so it's easier to find food. You can take classes. Go to the markets.

To explore our foodshed, you can take on the 10-Day Local Food Challenge we invented in 2015. For 10 days you eat food grown within 100 miles of your home, allowing 10 exotics, foods from afar you can't live without.

Imagine this congregation, and maybe the greening congregations, taking on to be food system change makers by finding, buying, eating, locally grown food, by investing in local farms and restaurants. What if you all did the 10 day local food challenge. What if you sought out how to encourage the production of local grains, and equipment to mill it and bakers to bake it. We are lucky to have Glendale shepherd for sheep milk and cheese. People raise goats for milk, and cows too, and imagine if we could support our producers so everyone who wants fresh milk here and have it. Then we'd have to get political. Change some laws and subsidies to allow for what are called farmgate sales.

This is economics and food. What about justice?

Think about who grows, picks, processes and packages the food coming from global supply chains. We call them “essential” but often they are black and brown people at the bottom of the economic ladder. What would food justice be on Whidbey Island? Buying from local producers. And know that we have several beautiful Black growers, including Dorcas who grows at Tilt and Greenbank Farm and sells her great food at the farmer’s market. You can look at everything in your grocery cart every time you shop and ask “whose hands have brought this food to me?” What are their lives like? What products have more justice in their production? We can say thank you to everyone in the supply chain by buying the just food. We can research the companies.

And when we go to restaurants, we can notice the wait staff, can appreciate the dishwashers, and tip very well to say thank you, and to advocate for a higher wage for restaurant workers.

Hand after hand after hand brings food to our tables. We can strengthen our local economy by supporting local businesses, and investing in businesses that increase our capacity to produce locally. You can increase production by buying from the food hub or farm stands or at markets. You can give up immediately any consideration about the cost of local versus industrial, and support your neighbors. You can attend to justice by investigating how workers and land are treated bringing food to your table. Every item in your cart is your vote for a just food system.

What a huge opportunity. How can we set the bar as high as possible to promote health of our people, the health of our land, the health of our local economy, the health of our local workers, especially the ones who depend on income from their daily labor, and the health of people – often black and brown – who are stuck in low income and unsafe jobs in the industrial food system.

Equitable just loving kind nurturing healing way of life. Wake up from this way of life that is going in the wrong direction.

Every mouthful, healthy, prosperous for the people and just. You did Big Foot.  
How about Just Food. What challenge can you take on together to create health on every level here in our community coming out of the opportunity Coronavirus gave us to rethink our way of life.