

Love JETPIG: a reflection on our values
Unitarian Universalist Church of Vancouver
June 15, 2025

Story for All Ages written by Jacob Tennesen

Rev. K: This morning's Time for All Ages is... Oh! Hello, Jetpig!

JP: Hello!

Rev. K: Jetpig, I wonder if you can help me. I have a problem.

JP: You sure do! You don't have a jetpack! How do you even fly?

Rev. K: No, it's not that. I don't need to fly right now. I have a problem with the whole world.

JP: The whole world needs a jetpack?

Rev. K: No, it's just... there's a way I'd like the world to be, but when I look around, I see things that are still wrong with it.

JP: Then change it! When I'm down here and I want to be up there, I just give the jet a little fuel and shwoomp!

Rev. K: Change the whole world? I'd need some help.

JP: Then ask for help! See all those people out there? They'd help, just tell them what needs to change.

Rev. K: But that's the thing! I don't know how to say it! I have this picture in my head of how I want the world to be, but I don't have the words for it.

JP: Hmmm, explain this picture for me.

Rev. K: Well, for one thing I want the same rules to apply to everyone. You don't get to ignore the rules just because of how you look, or how much money or power you have.

JP: That's called justice! Justice is a big word, but you can use this letter "J" to help you remember it.

Rev. K: J for Justice. Ok, thanks, Jetpig. But that's not all. I also want everyone's ideas to be listened to.

JP: The word you're looking for is pluralism. Not just the same old ideas from the same small group of people. Everyone's ideas.

Rev. K: Yes, exactly. Uh, Something-ism!

JP: Pluralism! With a "P"!

Rev. K: And I want people to share what they have with others in need. Not be selfish.

Of course! If I have an extra jetpack, I give it to a friend. Loaded up with plenty of fuel. That's generosity. With a "G".

Justice, pluralism, generosity. That spells JPG. But I'm not done yet. I want everyone to be able to get what they need. Even if we all need different things.

You want "E" for Equity! When I go to Portland I just fly over, but even though I never take the bridge I'm glad it's there so you can go too. That's equity.

Thanks, Jetpig. Equity. I like that we help each other. In fact everyone in the world should be helping each other, since we all need each other.

Yes, we do! "I" know a word for that: Interdependence!

These are great words. They're really going to help me explain my vision for the world, so we can change it for the better. Actually, that's another one. The importance of change. Is there a word...?

Transformation means change! With a "T"!

Hey, that spells Jetpig! That's you!

Shwoomp!

Wait, you're the pig, and that's the jet on your back, but what's the fuel?

The fuel? That's Love! Love is at the center of it all.

This is perfect. With these words I can explain how I want the world to be, and ask for help. Do you have a suggestion for how to put it all together?

Hey people! The world needs your help. Let's all try to live out these values: justice, equity, transformation, pluralism, interdependence, and generosity. If we put love at the center, we can take off soaring!

Nineties Club – Lyle Smith

Lyle Smith was born in Hartford, CT while his parents, an agriculturalist and a teacher, were on furlough from central west Congo, where they were missionaries for 35 years. The third of four children, Lyle spent much of his childhood in Africa. His mother's brother was a surgeon at a medical mission located on a different river. Lyle remembers making the week-long journey by paddle wheel steamer twice a year to visit his cousins.

We're inducting Lyle into the 90s club, but he almost didn't make it past the age of one. Ask him about that story. It's a good one.

Lyle left Africa for good at 14 to attend high school in Ohio. He did not return again until he and his wife Diana traveled to Kenya and Tanzania just last year (the highlight of the trip was seeing a lioness nursing her cubs!)

After graduating, he continued his education at Hiram College (BA in math and physics), Case Western Reserve (MS in math) and Stanford (PhD in computer science). His doctoral work involved 12 boxes of punch cards, 2000 cards in each, each of which had 6 columns.

Computers were not Lyle's only passion. He loved running (five marathons, including races in New York, Chicago, and Moscow, Russia), golf and skiing. It was at the ski club that he met his third wife, Diana. She was many years his junior.

A thread that has run throughout Lyle's life was a passion for service and social justice. The list of organizations and causes that he has supported—and sometimes founded—is long.

At UUCV he has been a mentor in the Coming of Age Program; and served on many committees. He organized and pitched in on too many social and fundraising events to count, with the slogan "Put the FUN in FUNdraising!" With Lyle's leadership, our congregation became one of the first to become a Red Ribbon Congregation (for activism and fundraising around HIV/AIDS), and his leadership was instrumental in the effort to earn the initial Welcoming Congregation designation for UUCV.

Lyle believes that the response to social justice issues is activism, not handwringing. When Lyle was 60 and lamenting that he was never going to win a marathon, Diana told him, "The only way you'll ever win a race is if you are in charge of it yourself" Thus was born "Lyle's Myles", an annual community walk/run event that benefitted Martha's Pantry, a food pantry serving people with HIV/AIDS. The primary rule of Lyle's Myles: Lyle always wins. It ran for 26 years.

With two sons completing successful careers, a wealth of children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and Diana's companionship of over 40 years, Lyle considers himself a lucky man—except for having to use a golf cart to get around the course these days when he plays. Lyle's wisdom gleaned in 90 years: "Tell the truth" and "You just need to keep on going."

His photo is already on display in the foyer. We have brought the gifts which have become traditional for this ritual - flowers and cookies! Lyle, we are honored to have you among us, grateful for your presence and pleased to know you. We know that you have weathered all manner of challenge and difficulty in getting to this point, and have taken a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction over the years. You have paid the dues and meet the rigorous qualifications. We welcome you to the 90 club!

Love those JETPIG values!© by Rev. Kathryn A. Bert

What's so funny about peace, love, and understanding? I think my favorite sign yesterday at the No Kings! Protest was held up by a young person, maybe a teenager, and it said "it's okay to be nice to people." I mean, that it's gotten so bad that this is what has to be put on a protest sign?

It was a long day yesterday, for many of us. And a tragic day, for those in Minnesota – as we learned early in the day of the shooting of Democratic state Sen. John Hoffman and his wife who were wounded and then the killing of Democratic state Rep. Melissa Hortman and her husband, Mark. We were hearing that they were urging folks in Minneapolis/St. Paul to not go to the rallies in the wake of the violence, but an estimated 25,000 showed up anyway.

I don't know what the numbers were in Vancouver, but it was certainly more than I imagined. We lined miles of Mill Plain, and I understand the Waterfront was equally packed. The rallies were in support of democracy and in opposition to military fanfare and expensive party being put on for Trump's birthday as he seeks more power and an authoritarian overthrow of our country. Many of us went from a No Kings! Rally to the Juneteenth Celebration downtown, with amazing music and booths organized around 7 freedoms – the freedom to express ourselves creatively, access healthcare, pursue higher education, participate in civil life, honor our heritage, grow economically, and to embark on a fresh start. It was actually one big party from the farmer's market through Juneteenth Celebration in Esther Short to the

Pride Block party in front of the Dandelion Teahouse & Apothecary hosted by the Queer Community Network.

I was a little concerned when I heard that the Pride and Juneteenth organizers had asked the No Kings! Rallies to take place away from their events, and then another No Kings Rally! scheduled the waterfront – I worried that the human tendency for scarcity thinking and territorialism might ruin the events for all, but it was quite the opposite – people you saw at one event, were present at the others, and of course, some had to choose, and that seemed fine in the end. We have a large enough population for all the events that took place. I had to leave pretty early to write this sermon, but I imagine the party lingered on into the evening for some. It was heartening to be with so many people who seemed to share our values – people who value diversity and equity, pluralism and justice, interdependence, who want to transform the world into a more generous and loving place. I love those jetpig values, and I love being able to recite them so easily with the acronym.

We used them as our themes this year in worship, and for our chalice circles. It's good to return to our values, to remember who it is we are and what we stand for. Those values can help us make decisions about how to act in the world. I promised in the description of this morning's service to share the themes we'll be using next year in worship, chalice circles and Religious Education. And that's not really where this sermon took me, so I'll just share them quickly and promise to address them, well, beginning in September. But the themes are - and we're using a program called Soul Matters – with the themes next year of: Building Belonging, Cultivating Compassion, Nurturing Gratitude, Choosing Hope, Practicing Resistance, Embodying Resilience, Paying Attention, Embracing Possibility, Awakening Curiosity, Flourishing Together.

But that's the thing! I have this picture in my head of how I want the world to be, but I don't have the words for it. I love that story Jacob wrote for us this morning. I do often have an idea that I haven't got the words to express. Knowing those words, articulating them is a first step in creating the world we seek.

Palabras generadoras. Generative words. I learned it first in Spanish from working in Central America, from liberation theology. Though the term comes from Portuguese and Paulo Freire – but these are the words we use to name our world, a first step in understanding it, which is the first step in helping form it – developing that critical consciousness that allows us to not just be objects of our world, but subjects who help transform it. It's that shift from being victims of the world, pawns in an authoritarian's game, to owning our place in the world and our power to effect change. The process is no different for farmers in a distant land learning to read and write for the first time, than it is for people with "education" and relative material comfort but who accept the world as it is and don't question their role – especially – in the suffering created by the status quo. Naming our generative words – words that can help transform our consciousness, help us see a new way to be – this can be a powerful collective exercise.

Naming the Truth, is how Aisha Ansano put it – she knew what essay her 8th grade teacher was asking her to write, but she told the truth anyway.

Your leadership has pulled together a team to work on the words of our vision statement. Many of you may recall that we have been working with a congregational consultant, Rachel Maxwell, in the last year. We worked first on generosity, which led us to the awareness that we didn't have a single common vision. We have lots of visions and enough in common that we manage to function as a single institution and we've actually been pretty generous with supporting this institution. Her point is that if we had a clearer understanding of a common vision, a way we wish the world to be, we could be even more effective. So, your leadership appointed a team of wordsmiths – Walida Horton, Lynn Ungar, Eric

LaBrant, and Jennifer Pratt-Walter. Their task is to solicit feedback from the congregation, from those at the workshop in March and those who didn't attend the workshop, and to craft a vision statement that we can adopt in the fall. This morning is your first opportunity to provide feedback.

They have a first draft of a statement for you to consider. It reads: *Building a world that champions diversity, united in the pursuit of justice and grounded in the transforming power of love.* They've put this statement on little pieces of paper, and you are invited to circle two words that speak to you, cross out any word that you feel doesn't belong, and suggest up to three words by writing on the back words you wish were in the statement. Jennifer has a basket this morning where you can put these. I think you can also look for a bulletin board display at some point. We've got the summer to provide our feedback. I don't have a firm end date yet from the team, but I think they'll be accepting input through August. More information will be forthcoming in a newsletter article and announcements from the team. But we can at least start this morning.

Just the first phrase of their draft gives me chills – building a world that champions diversity. Wouldn't it be amazing if we lived in a world that heralded and championed and celebrated diversity? I think it might look like downtown Vancouver yesterday, from Esther Short Park through 7th street and Main. People dressed in plain clothes, colorful traditional garments of their ancestors, and playful costumes. People with black braids and grey pony tails and purple hair and fairy hair and no hair, wandering from booth to booth, learning about each other and their histories, and joining forces for the common good and answering the call of love.

Love is what powers our jetpack, our actions in the world. Love is at the center. If not, what is the point? What's so funny about peace, love, and understanding? asks Nicholas Lowe. It's only funny because our world is so far from peaceful, loving and understanding – but this is our world too, and when we claim our place in that world, when we claim our power, as millions did yesterday in this country, we can make it our own.