

HDUU: A High Resolution Year
Reverend Kent Hemmen Saleska
UU Church of Minnetonka
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FIRST READING

From *HowStuffWorks.com*

In digital imaging, a *pixel* (or “picture element”) is a single point of an image. A pixel is the smallest possible individual dot, or point of light, that makes up an image on a screen. Depending on the intensity of pixels (or dots per inch), the more pixels that comprise an image, the clearer it will become. Pixels are normally arranged in a two-dimensional grid, and are often represented using dots or squares. On the two-dimensional grid, when pixels are placed side-by-side they create one line of a digital image across a television screen.

Image resolution describes the detail an image holds. Image resolution can be measured in various ways. Basically, *resolution* quantifies how close lines can be to each other and still be visibly individual, or “resolved.” Higher resolution means more image detail.

SECOND READING

***It Matters*, by Robert R. Walsh**

I knew a man who had printed on his stationary this proverb: “Nothing is settled. Everything matters.” It established a certain ambience for reading his letters, as if to say: what you are about to read is to be taken seriously, but is not final. I remember him and his proverb sometimes, especially when it seems impossible to change the world or myself in any significant way. Times like the beginnings of new years.

“Sorry Jim,” I say. “It’s not true that nothing is settled. In the past year choices have been made, losses have been suffered, there have been growth and decay, there have been commitments and betrayals. None of that can be undone...”

“One day this year I was present just when someone needed me; another day I was busy doing something else when I was needed. One day I said something to a friend that injured our relationship; another day I said something that enabled a person to see life in a new way. The best and the worst of those days is now written. All my tears, of joy or sorrow, cannot erase it.”

If I stay with my meditation long enough, the reply comes. “Robbie,” says Jim, “You have misunderstood the proverb. It is true that you cannot escape the consequences of your actions or the chances of the world. But what is not settled is how the story turns out. What is not settled is what the meaning of your life will be.”

The meaning of your life is not contained within one act, or one day, or one year. As long as you are alive the story of your life is still being told, and the meaning is still open. As long as there is life in the world, the story of the world is still being told. What is done is done, but *nothing is settled*.

And if nothing is settled, then *everything matters*. Every choice, every act in the new year matters. Every word, every deed is making the meaning of your life and telling the story of the world. Everything matters in the year coming, and, more importantly, everything matters today.

SERMON***HDUU: A High Resolution Year*****Reverend Kent Hemmen Saleska**

The holidays are over and I hope you made it through with minimum exhaustion and maximum joy! As for our family, we made it through OK. As it happened, over the holidays our old cathode-ray tube television set finally gave out. So between Christmas and New Year's we began researching and shopping for a flat-screen TV.

I confess, this was the first television I ever bought. I do not remember having a television in our house when I was young. When I was about nine or ten, my brother was about 12 or 13, and as a cub scout one year he sold enough tickets for some scout jamboree that he won a 13-inch black and white portable television. His little black-and-white TV was our family television from that point until I went off to college. In college the dorm had a TV, and over the years people I lived with had TV sets, and when I met Heidi, she already had a television set – one that we've used for the past eight years of our relationship. But finally the TV died. And for the first time in my life I went shopping for a new television.

I don't know how many of you have done this recently, but there are a lot of choices out there, and a lot of gadgetry and techno-babble to go along with it. I'm glad Heidi was there to run interference with the sales guy while I took care of the kids. I'm not a complete luddite or techno-idiot, but it's really not my forte. One thing I do love, though, are movies. I approach movies as an art form, and when I teach my film and theology class each winter we always spend the first part of the class discussion on the images in each movie. So in the electronics store, my ears picked up a little when the talk got around to the digital image on the screen, the new High Definition qualities and the accompanying High Resolution screens. Since it was the week between Christmas and New Year's, I also couldn't help but ponder the parallels and the play on words of this high resolution for a New Year.

Last Sunday and this today I am delivering a kind of a two-part series. Last Sunday I referred to the two-faced Roman god, Janus, who has one face that looks backward and another that looks forward. The month of January gets its name from Janus because it straddles an ancient marker of time that many cultures celebrate between the old year and the New Year. Last week, on the first Sunday of the year, we looked back over last year, primarily at the events and actions we accomplished in this congregation. This week I use as inspiration the face of Janus that looks forward, to explore and be on the lookout for what is coming ahead.

Each year many people make a New Year's resolution. This is an ancient practice in many cultures at the turning of the year. As the New Year approaches, we make a commitment to ourselves or to others that as we look forward, we will start over anew and change or transform some aspect of our lives.

So in addition to learning which sets were the most environmentally friendly in their construction and function, Heidi and I learned how much more clear and well-defined the picture is on high definition, high resolution TV sets than it was on the old cathode-ray tube television sets. I see parallels here in our congregation. We have a lot to look forward to in the coming year. The more focused, the more "resolute" we are, the more we will have a clear picture of who we are, who we want to be, and what our mission is in the world.

It seems there are at least three big things that will come our way this year: leadership development, relocation, and our engagement with social justice.

Regarding the first one, over the past two and a half years since I was called to be your minister, I have been working with you very intentionally on leadership development. It seems

to be something people are hungry for, and something they want more of. Leadership development lifts us up beyond simply gathering together as a social club and moves us toward the life of action we say we believe. Leadership development gives us the tools we need to be visionary and proactive, rather than merely reacting in fear to the loudest voices. Leadership development also helps empower us with imagination as we gain new ideas for engagement with each other and with the world outside these church walls.

Some of our primary foundational work together has been in the area of leadership development between and among our three primary leadership groups in the congregation, the Board, the Church Council and the Committee on Ministry. As I mentioned last Sunday, these three leadership groups – 22 people in all – are reading one book called *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: How to be Calm and Courageous No Matter What*. We are going through a time in our congregational life that gives rise to great anxiety, especially as we talk about a change in our church governance structure, our capital campaign, and most prominently, our relocation efforts. In response, and as a proactive effort as they've read and discussed this book, your leaders have grown in their awareness of anxious situations, what causes them, and how lower the levels of anxiety.

As I sit with these three separate groups – eight people on the Board, eight people on the Church Council, and six people on the Committee on Ministry – I observe how they all move together in the same broad conversation with very similar language. I admire the way they move with forethought and intention through each of many issues and decisions. I am looking forward to our day-long leadership development retreat on January 30 when all of these 22 congregational leaders, and even some of our church staff, will be able to meet together to discuss and plan the next steps of our governance direction and practice.

With the laying of this leadership foundation, I am very excited that General Assembly, the annual business meeting and primary leadership development event of our denomination, will be held in Minneapolis this year. I am excited because after all our foundational work, we will now be able to go to the convention center in downtown Minneapolis in June, and bask in the aura of 5,000 other Unitarian Universalists from around the nation as we participate in the plenary business meetings of our association, attend workshops on governance, worship, social justice, and many other things relating to congregational life.

I also invite you to come to our worship service on February 7 to hear David Lauth speak more about this. David is a member of First Universalist Church in Uptown and is in charge of all the General Assembly volunteers. He is traveling throughout our district to talk about what GA means to us, and to ask for volunteers. He will also bring with him the big brass chalice that is used each year at General Assembly – and it will be right here in our church!

The second big issue we face this year is our work toward relocation. When I was in search for a settled ministry position three years ago, the information you included in the packet about your congregation made it clear that you wanted a minister who would work with you in your efforts to relocate. I am here, in part, to work with you on this shoulder-to-shoulder, not because it was originally my vision, but because you said it was your vision and you wanted a minister who would join you on that journey.

You might not know that this is now the third attempt this congregation has made to relocate. This congregation was founded in 1960 and began holding services at the Burwell School in Minnetonka. A few years later, they bought land in Minnetonka in order to build a new church on it. Accordingly, we changed our name from Amity Fellowship to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Minnetonka, so we would be named after our location. In 1965 we

bought this building as temporary housing until our new church was built. As I understand it, this building we are in was not originally meant to be our permanent home. I'm not sure why, but a decision was made a few years later to sell the land in Minnetonka to pay off the mortgage on this building.

In the early 1990s, a second effort was made to relocate, including a great deal of time and energy that went into searching for new land or a new building. I don't know all the details, but I heard stories that the minister at the time was not supportive of a move, and the whole effort fell through.

In its current form, the Board of this congregation established a relocation task force in 2005 to once again work on relocating. After identifying a piece of land, starting a capital campaign, and making a congregational vote to purchase the land once we make it through the rezoning hurdles of the City of Wayzata, we encountered a setback in December 2008 when the City denied our rezoning request. We as a congregation are now in the midst of deciding whether or not to pursue legal action against the city for violating a federal law that prevents municipalities from using zoning laws to discriminate against religious groups.

This is big stuff. Important stuff. But this is what this congregation has been working toward for five years – or even for our entire 50-year existence, depending on how you count it! As we consider the metaphor of high definition and high resolution, we would do well to contemplate how clear our vision and how sharp our focus as a congregation will be given the various outcomes of our vote. What outcome will give us the highest resolution and the clearest focus?

Robert Walsh reminds us that, “As long as there is life in the world, the story of the world is still being told. What is done is done, but *nothing is settled*. And if nothing is settled, then *everything matters*. Every choice, every act in the new year matters. Every word, every deed is making the meaning of your life and telling the story of the world. Everything matters in the year coming, and, more importantly, everything matters today.”

Our vote on the direction of this congregation will take place in a few weeks. Your presence matters. Your voice matters. Your vote matters.

It is with this notion that everything matters, that every deed is making the meaning of our lives, that brings me to the third big area of the coming year: social justice. We did a lot last year with the Social Justice Ministry, including giving more money to Interfaith Outreach. Through our church auction, youth and clergy sleep out fundraising, and as a percentage of our income from our holiday play, our congregation also gave over \$5000 to Interfaith Outreach this year. We also gained some members, read a book called *The Prophetic Imperative*, and planned and hosted a Social Justice Empowerment workshop last September. In that workshop we developed three areas of focus for our social justice work this year: health care, the environment, and issues regarding people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender. We developed task forces for each of these areas, but they've been lying dormant for a little while now. We're still not quite used to working on social justice this way, as an entire congregation. We still have a lot more to do in this area.

Part of what we need to do is develop specific projects in collaboration with groups like Interfaith Outreach or OutFront Minnesota. It is good and necessary to give money to groups that need it, and it is good and necessary to work on laws that change society for the better, but if we don't engage physically, showing up in person like we do once a year with Habitat for Humanity, engaging in direct service, then our social justice efforts are largely academic and impersonal.

This is when I recall the pixel, that mote of high definition, high resolution images. According to one website I found, “a pixel is the smallest possible individual dot, or point of light, that makes up an image on a screen. Depending on the intensity of pixels (or dots per inch), the more pixels that comprise an image, the clearer it will become.” But to get clear image of something on a digital screen its not just a matter of having a whole bunch of pixels. The pixels have to be in order. They have to be side-by-side – shoulder-to-shoulder as it were – to create one line of a digital image across a television screen. The only way we can see the whole image is if those lines stack closely together on top of each other. The closer the lines are together, the higher their resolution, and the higher the resolution, the more detail we get of each image.

As we face this work of leadership and relocation and justice in the life of our congregation this year, it may be helpful to consider the pixel. What if we saw each one of us as one dot of light? That one dot might be just fine, but we’re not able to see the whole picture, unless we have a whole bunch of other dots of light all around us. And it is not that we each do our own thing, or believe what we want to believe, but that we come together, and stand side-by-side. The closer we are together, the greater our resolution becomes, and the sharper is our vision.

One man who had as clear and resolute an image of our liberal faith as any I know was the Reverend Forrest Church. Last Sunday I spoke about our great loss with his death at age 61 last summer. He had been the minister for 30 years at All Souls church in Manhattan, and in that time, in addition to his ministry, he wrote 15 books and edited another 10. His last book, a book published posthumously just last November, is called *The Cathedral of the World: A Universalist Theology*. That book arrived in my mailbox on Friday and I just started reading it. In the introduction to that book, Forrest Church writes:

“Universalism speaks with particular eloquence to the challenge of our times. Today our neighbors live not only across the street, but across the world as well. During an age when we share a global economy and communications system in addition to nuclear and environmental threats, universalism addresses our era’s most dangerous dysfunction: theological parochialism. Every denomination, including my own Unitarian Universalist Association, can fall prey to such nearsightedness. To fulfill its promise, modern universalism must witness against fundamentalists on the left as well as those on the right. By definition, “universalism” is not the property of any discrete religious body, including those that include it in their names” (xi).

Forrest Church’s words are directed at us, too. We need to see ourselves as more than a social club trapped in our own theological and social parochialism. As we look forward to the coming year, we need to join together, work side-by-side with common vision and resolution in order to witness against fundamentalists of both the left and right, both inside our congregation and outside. This will be both our challenge and our promise.