

## **“This Side of the Rainbow”**

A Sermon by Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull  
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Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. I was a Rainbow Girl! It's a Masonic Order, and in my small home town in the Midwest, the Masons, the Eastern Stars, the Demolays, and the Rainbow Girls were a big deal. Who wouldn't have wanted to be a rainbow girl, unless of course you were a guy? Rainbows have an appeal just this side of magical.

As Jim reminded us earlier, we slow down – in fact, we stop in our tracks and or even pull off the road – when a rainbow catches our gaze, arching its palette of shimmering colors across the sky. It's a sign of possibility, a sign of hope that reaches the child in us. We all want to be children of the rainbow. We all long for that rainbow connection – “the lovers, the dreamers and me,” as the lyric goes in that memorable song of Paul Williams and Kenny Ascher and yes, Kermit the Frog!

Hope, possibility, faith in a fresh start well up inside us as we gaze heavenward. Suddenly we're a lover, a dreamer, a child.

Let's go back to that passage held up by Jim in the Gospel of Matthew and forge another kind of rainbow connection. Imagine that Jesus' followers who were squirming with anxiety about who would count most in the Kingdom of Heaven – let's call it “somewhere over the rainbow” – were colors.

A Native American legend suggests that this is exactly how the rainbow came to be. The colors of the world began to quarrel. Who was the most beautiful, the most productive, the most special? They didn't need the notion of a kingdom of heaven to cloud their colorful egos. No, what mattered was who counted most here and now. They were a tad more honest than the status seekers of Matthew, though just as puffed up.

Hear what GREEN boasted:

“Clearly I count the most. Green means life and hope. Look at the grass and the trees and the leaves. If it weren't for me, you would all be dead.”

Then BLUE butted in:

“Look up! Look out! Look at the sky and the oceans. Without water, life can't happen. Without the sky, you wouldn't know any peace. Without me, you would be nothing!”

YELLOW laughed under her breath:

“You take yourselves so seriously. I bring laughter and liveliness into the world. The sun shines; the moon glows; the stars twinkle. Sunflowers make even you two smile. And what color are they – yellow, all yellow!”

Time for ORANGE to toot his horn:

“I am about health and heartiness. What are carrots and pumpkins and mangoes and oranges full of? Vitamins! And how about sunrise and sunset? Where would they be without orange?”

RED all but curdled:

“I rule over all of you. I am the color of blood. I am the color of fire. I am the color of love and passion. And without me, the rose and the poppy and the poinsettia would pale!”

VIOLET, also known as PURPLE, stretched to her full height:

“Excuse me! I am the color of royalty. Royal robes are purple. Religious leaders wear purple! People listen to me; they obey me; sometimes they even worship me!”

Time for INDIGO to speak up:

“I don’t need to be a blowhard like each of you. You barely notice me, because I am the color of silence. I am deep and profound. I invite thought and reflection. I am the color of twilight and deep waters.”

All seven carried on like a bunch of hyper-individualistic Unitarians until they were struck silent by a flash of lightning and a clap of thunder. It rained and it rained and it rained. Each color shook in the downpour and ran for shelter into the arms of the others.

Then RAIN itself spoke:

“Silly colors, don’t you understand? Each of you is special. Each of you is beautiful. Each of you has a purpose that can’t be fulfilled by any other. Come with me.”

They did so, side by side – red and orange and yellow and green and blue and indigo and violet. And RAIN spoke again:

“From this time on, whenever I pour forth, you will join together and stretch across the sky as a reminder that we can live together in peace. Together, you will be a sign of hope.”

Not so unlike Jesus telling his anxious followers that unless each of them became like children, they wouldn’t make it into the kingdom of heaven at all. Unless those colors learned how to play together, forget peace, forget hope. But when they’re joined in an arc of playful beauty, anyone who takes notice will be reminded that hope is real and peace is possible.

The rainbow reminds us that we are not just Unitarians, not just gathered under the banner of oneness and individuality. We’re also Universalists. We matter as individuals when we gather in community, when we gather in the covenant of community. It is covenant that is central to the Genesis story of the rainbow. The rainbow was a sign of God’s covenant that it would never rain quite so hard again.

Given the floods and hurricanes that we’ve known in recent years, it’s enough to make you doubt the God’s honest truth of Genesis; but we don’t have to take this story literally to appreciate a sign of hope as a reminder that we are together in covenant with one another.

Now a rainbow, as many of you know, is an optical illusion. We see a rainbow when water droplets linger in our atmosphere and the sun shines from behind us. We see the most amazing rainbow when part of the sky is dark with clouds still heavy with raindrops and we’re at a point this side of that rainbow with clear sky and the sun behind us. A rainbow appears out of the relationship we happen to have with our earth and we’re reminded that we’re connected with it all.

So how is it that we imagine the gold to be “somewhere over the rainbow?” We become children of the rainbow on *this* side of the rainbow, on *this* side of that sign of covenant. Here is where we play out our trumped up egos and learn to play together in the spirit of a rainbow connection worthy of lovers and dreamers and the miracle of being alive and together on this freshest of mornings on this newest of days.

I love you, each and all. Amen.

**Sources:**

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