

SEASON OF LIGHT INTERFAITH SERVICE
“Finding the Holy Within Us”[©]
Mattatuck Unitarian Universalist Society
The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd, Minister
Date: December 23, 2008, 8 p.m.

PIANO PRELUDE

Marj Hanson

WELCOME & CALL TO GATHER

Welcome to Mattatuck Unitarian Universalist Society. I am the Rev. Jeanne Lloyd and it is my great privilege to serve this Unitarian Universalist congregation that stands for reason, faith and tolerance; love, respect and compassion for one another and the world.

Now let us begin our service.

In the words of John Hammon, “Let us enter into the fellowship of those who celebrate life with its warmth and its beauty, its pain and its healing. Come to the temple of delight for a season of simple pleasure! Come . . . behold the bright mystical star; . . . [hear] echoes of voices ethereal far away. Take counsel here of legendary lore, the wisdom of poetry and myth. Join together one and all in the spirit [the season] to stir into hope the vision of trust and justice o’er all the world; that peace and goodwill may bless and keep us in every generation.

~ John K. Hammon¹

***HYMN #226** *“People, Look East”*

Our chalice is the symbol of our faith, representing for us, the light of reason and eternal love. I invite you to join me in the unison reading.

***LIGHTING OF THE CHALICE**

Unison Reading

Into the bright circle of light and life, [the essential elements of this season] . . . we have come to warm our hearts and minds. May . . . the beauty, mystery, and promise of [the season] . . . fall like silver rain upon the broken dreams, the hates and fears of all. Once again, may we pause, look up, and in the far-off distances hear that old, old, music, the music of hope, brotherhood, sisterhood, [personhood], and blessed peace! ~

Alfred S. Cole

***HYMN #245** *“Joy to the World!”*

¹ Seaburg, Carl, Editor. Celebrating Christmas, An Anthology. Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association, Authors Choice Press, IUniverse, Inc., 2004, 41.

***HAND OF FRIENDSHIP**

(You are encouraged to meet and greet your neighbors.)

A STORY

Denise Pedane, Director of Religious Education

CHORAL ANTHEM & OFFERING²

"A Holiday Wish"

Jay Althouse

The holiday season is that time when we try to let people know just how much they mean to us. If you long for a place that stands for reason, faith and tolerance; love, respect and compassion then please make an offering to sustain this community of hope. In particular, this evening's donation supports the Minister's discretionary funds, and is the only source used to help people who come to me in distress. Please give generously.

HOMILY

"Finding the Holy within Us"

Rev. Jeanne Lloyd

These are holy days. For me what the word holy means in my Unitarian Universalist lexicon, is "that which provides for the possibility of movement toward spiritual and personal transformation." Thus, these holy religious days, are days where we are purposefully drawn to stories of light and love that move us toward transformation within and with others.

These words from Stephen Nissenbaum, raised an orthodox Jew, who wrote the book, "The Battle for Christmas." "Most cultures (outside the tropics) have long marked with rituals involving light and greenery those dark weeks of December when the daylight wanes, all culminating in the winter solstice – the return of sun and light and life itself."³ At first these were moments of ritual, marking one of the seasonal transition points in the Pagan tradition. But, "Chanukah, [also represents] the 'feasts of lights,' [as observed in the Jewish tradition]. And, . . . the Yule log, . . . candles, . . . holly, . . . mistletoe, [and] even the Christmas tree [(] pagan traditions all,[])," now mark commonly held rituals associated with Christmas. For me, at a period of time when the land is laying dormant, the days are darker (though getting lighter by a precious few minutes each day) this is or should be a restful period for the soul to engage itself and others. It has the potential to be a period of hope building, a period where, because of the darkness of the year, or in our heart, we begin turning towards the light.

In the Unitarian Universalist faith, we often say that G*d is Love. For a long time, I thought that they meant that that guy in the sky was a loving god. But, as I listened

² Please give generously. This offering is the sole source for the Minister's Discretionary Fund.

³ Nissenbaum, Stephen. "The Battle for Christmas," (First Vintage Books Edition, Random House, New York: 1997), 4.

more carefully, and came to know G*d as the energy from which all things grow and are transformed, and that that energy exists within us, between us, and surrounds us, I began to see the real meaning of the phrase "G*d is Love." What it is really saying is that g*d (with a small "G" - however you define it) is the transforming energy of LOVE (with a capital L!).

If this time of year is indeed a time to be turning toward the light, it is then also a time to be turning toward Love, that energy that sustains and helps us grow within and toward one another.

Now I know that the word "love" is troublesome for a great many people. Things that are hard to define always are (so, too, it is with Unitarian Universalism ;-). If you look up the word "love" in the dictionary, you'll find this explanation among others:

LOVE: A deep, tender, ineffable feeling of affection and care toward a person, such as that arising from kinship, recognition of attractive qualities, or a sense of underlying oneness.⁴

And what does the word "ineffable" mean? Well, in this context, it is defined in the dictionary as that which is indescribably sacred.⁵

PAUSE

Thus, our different ways of celebrating the season seem always to come back to a turning, a turning toward light (however imperceptibly small) and a turning of ourselves toward our highest aspirations of caring for ourselves and for others. December becomes a transforming month where the opportunity is named and offered to try on a different set of clothes, a different attitude, a different way of being; one that deliberately seeks to find ways to live as though all we were ever meant to do, was to love ourselves and each another.

Solstice Reflections, Rebecca Devine

***Hymn #118** *"This Little Light of Mine"*

Hanukkah Reflections, Mike Ingber

***Hymn #221** *"Light One Candle" (v. 1-2)*

Christmas Reflections, Donna Pereira

***Hymn #235** *"Deck the Hall with Boughs of Holly" (v. 1-2)*

⁴ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/love>

⁵ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/ineffable>

Reprise, Rev. Jeanne Lloyd

Within each of these stories is the story of light and love. The best times, the most holy transforming times, are those where we become truly present to ourselves and to others. It is where we give the gift of ourselves to another without expectation or pressure.

Ya know, its really no surprise to me that New Year's resolutions come right after this season of hearts trying to transform themselves. The season offers us hope that we can change, that we can care for ourselves and others better than we normally do. The clock ticks and the New Year comes in sight, and we say to ourselves let's make it permanent! Often we choose objective things to achieve in the New Year. Weight to lose. Exercise to do. Money to save. Big changes to make, like changing jobs or schools . . .

Those are all well and fine, and, very big. But, I think we are missing the point when we make those kinds of resolutions. We have these few weeks calling us to deepen our awareness of the change of the season, our own spiritual needs, and the needs of others.

What if we were to try that attitude all year round? What if we could start first with care for ourselves, giving ourselves precious quiet time each morning to calm ourselves, meditate, write, or read, with no distractions. Giving ourselves quiet time to reflect and enjoy the energy and beauty of winter. Watching for signs for spring. Would that be enough for January? What if we took the time needed to give the gift of our thoughts, presence and caring to our loved ones? What if we learned how to regularly create "fun times" with our families. Would that be enough for February? And, if we succeeded with that, what if we then offered that kind of ineffable indescribable love to friends? Would that be enough for March? And, what if, we took the time to notice the needs of a distant acquaintance or stranger, and surprised them with a gift of our presence and witness to them, completely unexpected and without expectations? What if we did that several times throughout the year? What if . . . ?

The promise of this kind of love, given to ourselves and the other, prompted by the celebration of these religious holy days, but offered throughout the year, is how we were meant to be with one another. It lays the foundation for the possibly of an authentic "peace on earth." It means literally, to give "our good will to all."

PAUSE

It is, in this surprising and transforming practice of caring for ourselves and another, *as though they were ourselves*, that we find the holy. I call it holy because it is a

transformative practice deserving of our respect and reverence. I call you holy, because the practice of self-care and caring for one another, resides within you. You are deserving of our respect and reverence, for it is by your hands and heart that you will bless the world.

May it be so.

PRAYER & CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

It is well known that in the psalmist tradition, a prayer is a hymn. In a moment you will be singing a hymn that calls us into silence, into contemplation and care. It calls us to that moment when love so poorly defined, is so warmly felt, that very moment when holding one's babe in one's arms for the first time. In this moment of bright love and beauty, we know in our soul the indescribable meaning and strength and power of love.

Holy is the pureness of the infant child. Holy are our efforts to acknowledge the simple needs for love that we have from one another. Holy is the practice of providing, without thought for return, the pureness and innocence of unexpected gifts of love to family, friends, and strangers.

We pray for safety for our children and loved ones. We cannot help but pray that they will be spared from this world's pain and trouble. And, yet, more, we pray that they know and live life and love to its fullest, and draw strength from the caring and support of others, who will likewise need their love.

We quake at a vision of a love so pure. We bow down with gratitude knowing that by our love for another we live the indescribable sacred into being. By the light of our eyes gazing on one another, the pureness of our souls radiate to others. May the grace and hospitality we extend to another, without expectation, bring forth to this earth, in this time, in our lives, the meaning of Love lived eternally in our hearts. May we come to hold in reverence the transcendent nature of the holy that dwells within us.

May it be so and Amen.

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: *"Prayer to Friends"* by Carolyn McDade (see insert)

CLOSING WORDS #615 (SLT)

"The Work of Christmas" by Howard Thurman

When the song of angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,

When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
[The holy work] begins:
 To find the lost,
 To heal the broken,
 To feed the hungry
 To release the prisoner
 To rebuild the nations
 To bring peace among [our] brothers [and sisters]
 To make music (to make music) in the heart.

CANDLE LIGHTING & CANDLE BLESSING

(Please gather your belongings and move into a circle surrounding the pews and await candle lighting instructions.)

May each of us carry into the world through our own lives and deeds the light [that represents the Love] of this [congregation] – [it is] a flame [that symbolizes] . . . the endless love of and faith in humanity.

Let the flame[, this love] from this [congregation] light our hearts and our lives. Light of warmth, light of truth, light of love, light our path this night, light our way now and onward forever more. ~ Robert Edward Green⁶

RECESSIONAL

***Hymn #251 "Silent Night"**

(At the end of the candle blessing, Rev. Jeanne will lead the congregation outside as we sing "Silent Night," see insert. Once outside, the congregation may wend their way home for the holidays.)

CONGREGATION RECESSES SINGING SILENT NIGHT

DEEP PEACE AND HAPPY HOLY DAYS TO YOU & YOURS, OUR COMMUNITIES AND THE WORLD

**Please rise in body or spirit.*

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| Worship: | The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd, Minister |
| Choir: | Directed by Marj Hanson, Choir Director |
| Story Reader: | Denise Pedane, Director of Religious Education |
| Candle Lighters: | Tracy Johnson, MUUS Pres. & Chuck Johnson |
| Stage Lights: | Everard Cole |
| Greeters: | Trudy Martin and Marilyn Martin |
| Santa's Helpers: | Rod and Marianne Ashby |

⁶ *ibid.*, 281.