

Thought for Contemplation:

To go in the dark with a light is to know the light.
To know the dark, go dark. Go without sight,
and find that the dark, too, blooms and sings,
and is traveled by dark feet and dark wings.

Wendell Berry

**Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church
Worship
The Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson, Interim Minister
December 9, 2018**

INGATHERING CHIMES

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHALICE LIGHTING. Miles Goodwin, reader and lighter

We light our chalice to be reminded

There is enough love in this world

To heal broken hearts

There is enough care in this world

To comfort the hurting

There is enough possibility in this world

To make each day a wonder.

Anita Farber-Robertson

LIGHTING the CHANUKAH MENORAH

CALL TO WORSHIP by Mark DeWolfe

I'd like to ask you now to reach inside yourself and touch that special place in your heart where love blooms and grows. Know that it is love which brought you here...and love which keeps you alive. Know that you are not alone, that the love which blooms inside you is shared by the sisters and brothers who surround you, who, like you, have known not only loss, not only fear, but also the joy of saying "Yes" to the beauty of life....

HYMN *Dark of Winter* # 55

CHILDREN'S TIME Bob Moseley
9amSong (seated) Go Now in Peace #413

(Children are invited to go now for a brief introduction to their program.)

MUSIC FOR REFLECTION. Sam Sherry and Dale Churchill, duet

JOYS AND SORROWS
MEDITATION AND PRAYER

READING: *You, Darkness* by Rainer Maria Rilke

You, darkness, that I come from
I love you more than all the fires
that fence in the world,
for the fire makes a circle of light for everyone
and then no one outside learns of you.

But the darkness pulls in everything-
shapes and fires, animals and myself,
how easily it gathers them! -
powers and people-
and it is possible a great presence is moving near me.

I have faith in nights.

OFFERING

READING: *selected from East Coker III* by T.S. Eliot

I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come
upon you
Which shall be the darkness of God. As, in a
theatre,
The lights are extinguished, for the scene to be
changed
With a hollow rumble of wings, with a
movement of darkness on darkness,

And we know that the hills and the trees, the
distant panorama
And the bold imposing facade are all being
rolled away-

...

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing;
wait without love,
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there
is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in
the waiting.
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for
thought:
So the darkness shall be the light, and the
stillness the dancing.
Whisper of running streams, and winter
lightning.
The wild thyme unseen and the wild strawberry,
The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy
Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony
Of death and birth.

MUSICAL INTERLUDE (9am)

ANTHEM (11am)

SERMON:

You, Darkness

The Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson

“You, darkness, that I come from”¹

I love that the poet reminds us that darkness is the place of beginnings. It is so easy to fear the dark as a place of endings, or possible endings...but the only thing we really know, is that darkness is the place of beginnings. It is where life starts.

We often think of the ancients as being fearful of the dark, but they too knew it is the place of creation, gestation, generation. The psalmist sings to the Creator:

even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.
For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
(Psalm 139, 12-14a)

The Psalmist is in awe and wonder at his own creation- a creation that unfolded secretly in the darkness of his mother’s womb. Amazing. In contemporary translations the word we often see translated as fear is now translated as reverence. That’s very different.

I praise you because I am reverently and wonderfully made. (Ps139:14a)

It gives me shivers. *I am reverently and wonderfully made.* In case you have been led to believe that the Bible is a place that shuns the body

¹ Rainer Maria Rilke

or disrespects it, I invite you to reconsider. The human body is understood as an expression of God's creativity, care and love, as are the bodies of the other creatures with whom we share this most miraculous earth. In Genesis, God saw that it was good.

"I am reverently and wonderfully made." That is a message I would wish for each of you to take in as the most profound and important spiritual truth. Creation is a wonder, and you, a part of creation, are wonderfully made. Can you allow that in? Can you believe it?

And you were made in the dark, just as the seed of the flower and the fields of grain, were all made in the dark...a dark place of nurture and unfolding, where life happens.

Have you ever started your gardens early, indoors in the early spring? Planted seeds in those moist little peat pots, or in cold frames? They didn't need light, did they? They didn't really want it, did they? No, they craved the dark, the seeds. They craved the silent, quiet place where unobserved they started to grow and stretch and unfold into their true selves...selves that while wonderfully made, needed that cloistered time to germinate and manifest- to live.

In less than two weeks we will be celebrating the solstice, rejoicing in the turning of the planets and the returning of the light. And it will be joyous. But let us not rush into it too soon. Let us not dive headlong into light, missing the vital the time to heal, rest, and gradually unfold, the time

to discover our truer, deeper selves that comes with the waiting and the dark.

“I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you”²

What a gift to yourself that might be.

To be still. To give yourself permission to be and not do. To be still, still, and let the dark come upon you. Enfold you. Hold you, careful and precious. Only breathing into the wonder, only accepting the mystery.

I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you
Which shall be the darkness of God. As, in a theatre,
The lights are extinguished, for the scene to be changed
With a hollow rumble of wings, with a movement of
darkness on darkness,
And we know that the hills and the trees, the distant
panorama
And the bold imposing facade are all being rolled away-³

It does not matter in what kind of God you believe, or do not believe, for you to fully enter this natural and magical time of darkness. All are welcome into the dark. It favors no persons or beliefs. Its velvet arms

² T.S. Eliot, from East Coker III, the Four Quartets

³ Ibid

invite you to let the dark simply come upon you, invite you to accept it, to welcome it in return.

As you let go, (for that is what you need to do), as you, for the moment let go of control, or the illusion of control, the universe is allowed to reveal itself to you in ways surprising, or not, but soul nurturing.

The lights are extinguished, for the scene to be changed
With a hollow rumble of wings, with a movement of
darkness on darkness,
And we know that the hills and the trees, the distant
panorama
And the bold imposing facade are all being rolled away-

At this time of year, when glitter and tinsel masquerade as life, and advertisements market to us what priorities they purport would enhance our lives, would we not benefit from a moment or two or three when:

... we know that the hills and the trees, the distant panorama
And the bold imposing facade are all being rolled away-⁴

When the bold imposing façade is rolled away, the artificial is revealed for the empty facade that it is. When the distant panorama of hills and trees toward which we'd been striving is revealed to be only a façade rolled out and back as convenient, something happens, and the pressure is off, the pressure to perform, the pressure to achieve, to

⁴ Ibid

impress, to make some goal that is purported to be able to finally certify that you are worthy and worthwhile. It's a fake. There is no such goal. You are already worthy and worthwhile. It came with your birth certificate. Inherently worthy. Roll that foolish façade away. Exposed for the illusion it always was. You don't need that. Be here, fully yourself. Reverently and wonderfully made.

But the poet wants more for us than that. Yes. He wants us to recognize the importance of slowing down, stopping even, being quiet. *Be still my soul.* I am grateful. In these days of frenetic busyness, those simple pleas are huge. But, sensing he is on to a good thing, he pushes us further. Once stilled, my soul, be receptive. He says it in a way that is calculated to shock, make us a little uneasy- defensive even.

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love,
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.⁵

What a challenge has he thrown out- at least to me. Maybe it is easier for you. To be so still, so present to the waiting, so deeply receptive to what offering might appear. To be so receptive is to wait

⁵ Ibid

completely open ...it means to wait without hope, without love, without thought. Ouch! That is beyond my comfort zone, and truthfully not easily within my skill set.

Maybe that is the kind of waiting Luke attributes to Mary in his Gospel, when Mary says “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38) I imagine Mary thinking, “This is all so strange. I don’t get what is going on...but I grasp that it is important, and I will wait and let it unfold.” Which she does.

I understand it somewhat. When I was pregnant with my son, I would turn to my husband periodically and say “I wonder who it will be.” We could choose a name. We could choose a crib and a newborn baby outfit. We could choose the color of his room and his blanket. But we had no control over who or how he would show up. All we could do, all I could do, was wait, while he, in secret, in the darkness within me, silently grew and became himself. And I would love him, and accept him, care for him and change myself because of him, regardless of who it was who showed up the day he was born. An unconditional acceptance.

That, I think that is what we are called to, as we move into the deepest of darkness, the longest of nights.

the darkness pulls in everything-
shapes and fires, animals and myself,
how easily it gathers them! -
powers and people-

and it is possible a great presence is moving near me.

I have faith in nights.⁶

The poets, Rilke, and Eliot, and the secret poet in each of us, can find that holy place that resides in the dark, open, accepting, including-welcoming even. The holy place that can roll away the facades and turn everything around;

“So, the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.”⁷

Come, then. Come. Let us discover the joy of entering the darkness, with all of its magic and its unimagined possibilities. Come, let us discover the light that is darkness and the dancing in stillness.

Come.

Amen, and blessed be.

CLOSING HYMN *May Your Life Be Like a Song* # 1059

BENEDICTION

CLOSING MUSIC (please remain seated for the closing music)

⁶ Rainer Maria Rilke, *You, Darkness*

⁷ T.S. Eliot, *Ibid*