

Thought for Contemplation: *“Here’s to Epiphanies great and small where ever they occur. A blessing on all Wise Men and Women, East and West. Here’s to the stargazers and pilgrims everywhere, who are still foolish enough and brave enough to follow their stars, who travel by night, who bestow their uncommon gifts on us all.”* Patrick T. A. O’Neill

INGATHERING CHIMES

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Special announcement from the Transition Team

CHALICE LIGHTING Eban Malcolm, reader and Ethan Scott, lighter

Chalice of the new year

Open us to possibility

Chalice of the new heart

Open us to good intentions

Chalice of the new faith

Open us to the song of the universe

Calling us to love

Anita Farber-Robertson

CALL TO WORSHIP. -*Wild Geese* by Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees

for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.

You only have to let the soft animal of your body

love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you
mine.

Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain

are moving across the landscapes,

over the prairies and the deep trees,

the mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue

air,

are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

HYMN *We Three Kings of Orient Are* #259

CHILDREN'S TIME Mickel Gordon

Song (seated) *Go Now in Peace* #413

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

MUSIC FOR REFLECTION

JOYS AND SORROWS

MEDITATION AND PRAYER

READING: *Far, Far from Bethlehem* by Norma Farber read by Miriam Congdon (11:00)

I never went to Bethlehem.

I stayed right here. I plumped a goose,

Put up preserves, measured a hem,

Retrieved a piglet running loose.

I washed the laundry, hung it neat,

then took it down by dark of day,

And folded it and laid it, sweet

And fresh for further use, away.

I never got to Bethlehem.

Someone, I thought should (day and night)

Be here, someone should stay at home.

I think I probably was right.

For I have sung my child to dream

Far, far away from where there lies

a woman doing much the same.

And neither of our children cries.

OFFERING Share the Plate, Planned Parenthood

READING: from *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker

Tell the truth, have you ever found God in church? I never did. I just found a bunch of people hoping for him to show. Any God I ever felt in church, I brought in with me. And I think all the other folks did too. They come to church to *share* God, not find God...God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it. And sometimes it just manifests itself, even if you are not looking, or don't know what you are looking for."

ANTHEM

SERMON

Here's to Epiphanies
The Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson

*Here's to Epiphanies great and small where ever they occur. A blessing on all Wise Men and Women, East and West. Here's to the stargazers and pilgrims everywhere, who are still foolish enough and brave enough to follow their stars, who travel by night, who bestow their uncommon gifts on us all.*¹

And so, Patrick O'Neill flings out the call for the new year, the faithful response to the birth of hope we just celebrated, to the story of possibilities unfolding. He calls like a herald, for us to go traveling, to follow our stars and become pilgrims of the night, spotting the wondrous in unexpected places, bestowing blessings wherever we go.

It speaks to me. I am a lover of adventure. I am an incurably curious seeker. I am an inveterate optimist. When Patrick O'Neill says:

¹ Patrick T. A. O'Neill, in *Celebrating Christmas*, Carl Seaburg, ed.

*Here's to the stargazers and pilgrims everywhere, who are still foolish enough and brave enough to follow their stars, who travel by night, who bestow their uncommon gifts on us all.*²

I am pretty sure he is speaking to me. Maybe to you too. Maybe it is your time to step out, to look up. To be foolish or brave enough to move beyond what you know and follow your star wherever it goes. Maybe that is what the new year is for you. An invitation. An invitation to consider that there might be something out there for you to see, or do or know, and that this year might just be your time. Might be.

In any given year, there will always be some of us for whom this is the time. The time to risk, and maybe, make a difference.

*Here's to the stargazers and pilgrims everywhere, who are still foolish enough and brave enough to follow their stars, who travel by night, who bestow their uncommon gifts on us all.*³

My hat's off to you. It is an honorable undertaking, a little scary, but worthy. May you be blessed in your journey, even as you bless us.

Yet, I know, and you know too, that that is not for all of us- not the pick up and go, travel wherever it takes us, pilgrimage. Not for all of us, and certainly not for all of us right now. But that is not all of the call.

Listen again. It begins:

Here's to Epiphanies great and small where ever they occur.

Epiphanies great and small wherever they occur. You don't have to travel. You just need to be awake and aware.

² Op Cit

³ Op Cit

Like the woman far, far from Bethlehem:

I never went to Bethlehem.
I stayed right here. I plumped a goose,
Put up preserves, measured a hem,
Retrieved a piglet running loose.
I washed the laundry, hung it neat,
then took it down by dark of day,
And folded it and laid it, sweet
And fresh for further use, away.
I never got to Bethlehem.
Someone, I thought should (day and night)
Be here, someone should stay at home.
I think I probably was right.
For I have sung my child to dream
Far, far away from where there lies
a woman doing much the same.
And neither of our children cries.⁴

You do not have to travel to experience epiphanies. In her own home, with her own baby, the poet knows that something important is happening, something important is being revealed. It is being revealed to her, through her child, even as it is being revealed to Mary across the miles, across the centuries even, revealed in the presence of a child, needful, trusting, hopeful. She didn't need to be there, to know it, in Bethlehem.

Miriam-Webster says that an epiphany is:

1-A usually sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something.

⁴ Norma Farber, *Far, Far, from Bethlehem*

2-an intuitive grasp of reality through something usually simple and striking

No, the poet didn't need to travel to Bethlehem to know that the essential divine spark shone in her own little one, didn't need to travel to know that singing her child to sleep was a religious act, a spiritual act of bringing divine light already present, out into the open. An epiphany. There is something about presence, about mindfulness, about full attention that connects us to that which we notice, that releases the extraordinary that dwells within the ordinary so that we can see it, and know it, and love it truly.

Alice Walker says:

“Tell the truth, have you ever found God in church? I never did. I just found a bunch of people hoping for him to show. Any God I ever felt in church, I brought in with me. And I think all the other folks did too. They come to church to *share* God, not find God...God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it. And sometimes it just manifests itself, even if you are not looking, or don't know what you are looking for.”⁵

Epiphanies. They happen all over the place. Even in church. They happen in church when we really look at one another, when we really listen, to the words people say with their voices, or the hearts that they share with their looks of care, their expressions of sorrow, and their

⁵ Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*

touches of compassion. Epiphanies happen in church when we are present to one another, so present that we suddenly grasp the essential nature or meaning of something, something that matters to someone else. Epiphanies. They happen in church when we have journeyed inside and found the God, the divine light within, and brought it out, to share it. Epiphanies. They can happen anywhere, anywhere where you are willing to be present, not only to others, but to yourself.

You do not have to be good.

...

You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you
mine.

...

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue
air,
are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

That may be your epiphany, the one to which you must pay close attention. The knowing that you are part of it all, an essential part, of the universe, of life itself, and of us, here, this faith community, the community to which you give, and from which you receive, your place,

here. The divine light within you, that you brought in here, precious and life giving, is to be shared, not theoretically, but in a real place with living persons. Look around with seeing eyes, listen with hearing ears, touch with feeling hearts and hands the sisters and brothers who surround you. That is what it means to be a part. A part of church, a part of life, giving, receiving, announcing your place in the family of things, your place in the family and holding tenderly the place for us, for each of us, each of us here, and for all the others, all of the others whose epiphany is yet to come, who have not yet found the divine spark within or their place in the family of things.

May we then, each hold it firmly, insistently, and tenderly for them, those still waiting, hold that place for them, here, in the family of things. Let us hold it for them, for all those who need it, and also, for one another, a place for each, in the family of things.

May it be so. Amen and blessed be.

CLOSING HYMN *From You I Receive, to You I Give* #402

BENEDICTION

CLOSING MUSIC (please remain seated for the closing music)