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Looking back, releasing and inviting.

Letting Go

Letting go meant something different to each of us in the spiritual exploration group at church. A grandmother was learning to let go of her opinions about how her son and his wife were raising their kids. Another person was fighting with siblings about the camp on the lake – to hold onto it or let it go. A teenager had come out to his parents, putting in motion a process for letting go of expectations they hadn't realized they had. My own kids were growing up fast, unfolding into their unique selves, which continually challenged me to let go of my assumptions about them and their lives.

Life gives us joy and beauty and wonder...and also unexpected turns in the road: disappointments, losses, moves, accidents, changes in our health, unexpected responsibilities, kids with minds of their own. With many turns in the road, we can find ourselves having to let go of the roadmap we've been following. Letting go of the roadmap is often how we *do* find ourselves – how we discover who we are, what we count on deep down, what matters to us.

Sometimes we know just what to do at a fork in the road, and we're able to embrace a new direction. Other times, we have to work hard to change gears – we can feel upset, unsettled, sometimes scared to let go of what we thought was our path, not knowing what will come next.

One thing is for sure. Wherever life takes us, there we will be, doing what we know to do with our trusty, familiar toolbox full of tools we've been fine-tuning all our lives – sometimes wonderfully strong and helpful tools and sometimes old rusty tools, not always best for the job.

This is a good time to take inventory of what tools have helped us in the past year and what haven't. What if we could let go of certain ways of thinking or change old patterns of behavior which don't serve us or others well? How would their going away change our way forward?

We don't have to get down on ourselves up for our shortcomings, but we can look back, clear-eyed, and notice the weight of what we carry around every day. Fears and worries. Regrets, doubt. Grudges that have that feel-good hook to them. And don't forget those hard, little nuggets of resentment. What would it be like to let them go?

Imagine shedding our judgments about people and starting over, fresh and curious, no longer certain of our opinions? And what about our certainty? How important *is* being right, anyway?

Speaking of judgment, we might look at our opinions of ourselves. Think of times in the last year, or in the last hour, when you were hard on yourself – when your self-talk was blaming or critical or sarcastic. Is it ever our first instinct to speak to ourselves with tenderness and love? To forgive ourselves?

Remember the Etch-a-Sketch? How you write or draw something on the screen, then shake the powder inside so it disappears? What would it be like to make our self-talk vanish and live with a

fresh, clean slate? No ax to grind, free of your baggage....In its place we could instead lift up *intention*.

Some of you know Emily Kirby, a UUFES friend who lives in Illinois most of the year. She suggested last summer that we add to our call for joys and sorrows the word “intention.” Creating an intention has power. The desire alone to pay attention to who and how we want to be in the world can change us. It’s like prayer. While you can’t measure the effectiveness of praying for someone’s peace of mind, holding them in the light does change the person who prays – slows our heart rate, opens us up somehow, brings us peace of mind.

Spiritual writer Ernest Holmes wrote in the 1930s and 40s about the effect of intention, what some people call the law of attraction: put out what you wish and attract that reality. “I live,” he wrote, “in the quiet joyous expectation of good.”

“The quiet joyous expectation of good” is an intention, as they say in TED talks, worth spreading.

So let us join the children in the ritual of letting go. You will need two pieces of paper, one sturdy and one flimsy. On the sturdy one, write an intention of what you would like to take up this year, what you want to invite into your days. Write down your heart’s desire. Tuck this into your wallet. Use it as a bookmark. Or perch it on a windowsill so you see it now and then, a reminder of your wish. Your hope. Your intention.

The flimsy paper is for what you want to release. Perhaps you want to let go of a way of thinking that no longer serves you. Or an energy that feels heavy. Write down what would you like to let go of. Let’s do that together.

When you’re ready, I invite you to come forward with what you’d like to disappear. With a long straight arm, let the flame catch it, then let it go.

[Ritual proceeds.]

May what you have released here cease to trouble you and be forever gone from your spirit. May the act of letting go free you to live into your heart’s desire.

So may it be.