

Rev. Elizabeth Mead Tabor
UU Fellowship of the Eastern Slopes
March 15, 2020

The Sacred Circle (virtual)

OPENING WORDS

In Tamworth, we sit in a circle, looking across at each others' faces Sunday mornings. There's always room for more people. This is what we call beloved community. From the earliest days communities have gathered in circles. Sacred circles that honor, and remember, and celebrate. As our hymn goes, "Gather in peace, gather in thanks, gather in sympathy now and then, gather in hope, compassion and strength, gather to celebrate once again."

As in the middle ages when disease once ran rampant, people of faith kept the flame burning, small groups of cloistered men and women out in the country. So do millions today across the world. We are not alone. And so today, bewildered, shaken down, amazed by world events, we gather in a new circle. Aren't we blessed?

In a moment we will each light a chalice, real or in our imagination. Imagine thousands of UUs kindling the flame with us right now – the flame of love that transcends differences and connects all people, all of us "in it" together.

We light our chalices this morning in the spirit of our 7th principle, that we affirm and respect the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. Let us kindle the flame.

READING "Starlings in Winter" by Mary Oliver

Chunky and noisy,
but with stars in their black feathers,
they spring from the telephone wire
and instantly

they are acrobats
in the freezing wind.
And now, in the theater of air,
they swing over buildings,

dipping and rising;
they float like one stippled star
that opens,
becomes for a moment fragmented,

then closes again;
and you watch
and you try
but you simply can't imagine

how they do it
 with no articulated instruction, no pause,
 only the silent confirmation
 that they are this notable thing,

this wheel of many parts, that can rise and spin
 over and over again,
 full of gorgeous life.

Ah, world, what lessons you prepare for us,
 even in the leafless winter,
 even in the ashy city.
 I am thinking now
 of grief, and of getting past it;

I feel my boots
 trying to leave the ground,
 I feel my heart
 pumping hard. I want

to think again of dangerous and noble things.
 I want to be light and frolicsome.
 I want to be improbable beautiful and afraid of nothing,
 as though I had wings.

Shared Affirmation

Love is the spirit of this Fellowship,
 The quest for truth is its sacrament,
 And service is its prayer.
 This is our great covenant:
 To dwell together in peace, to seek truth in love,
 And to help one another.

A Guided Meditation - Alice Posner

Words of Reflection and Prayer Let us join our hearts in hope and in prayer.

We give thanks for the world outside our window
 For sunshine and trees, for bird song and fresh air.
 We give thanks for life. For breath.
 We are grateful for yesterday and today and tomorrow.

This morning our hearts reach to loved ones near and far.
 As closings and cancellations make our world smaller,
 as we wonder what news to trust,
 what symptoms really are symptoms, and what will happen next.

May we remember each other.
 Those who are actively ill,
 those struggling for breath,
 those for whom the end is near.

We remember doctors, nurses, caregivers and all those working hard to combat the disease
 And we remember those who are recovering.
 In the words of Mister Fred Rogers, we remember the helpers.

This virus is no one's fault
 It takes our best selves to meet it.
 Let us resist the temptation to "panic" and to "demonize or scapegoat" others.
 Let us be the helpers.
 Let us hope and pray for strength and courage and faith
 May we have the wherewithal to meet it with intelligence and discipline
 And most of all with compassion.

Candles that Connect Us - Margaret Rieser

We think with great love and concern about other people who are dealing with this crisis. We are social animals, even the introverts among us. People who are isolated, or vulnerable, or separated from their loved ones are in our thoughts these days. We are going to connect to those people this morning by lighting candles in their honor, streaming Love directly to them.

Reading "Pandemic" by UU Rev. Lynn Ungar

What if you thought of it ^[SEP]as the Jews consider the Sabbath—the most sacred of times?^[SEP]
 Cease from travel.
 Cease from buying and selling. Give up, just for now,
 on trying to make the world different than it is.
 Sing. Pray. Touch only those
 to whom you commit your life.
 Center down.

And when your body has become still, reach out with your heart.
 Know that we are connected
 in ways that are terrifying and beautiful. (You could hardly deny it now.)
 Know that our lives
 are in one another's hands.
 (Surely, that has come clear.)
 Do not reach out your hands.
 Reach out your heart.
 Reach out your words.
 Reach out all the tendrils
 of compassion that move, invisibly,
 where we cannot touch.

Promise this world your love--
 for better or for worse,
 in sickness and in health,
 so long as we all shall live.

Lifting Up Beauty

Longtime UUFES friend JoAnne Rainville wrote yesterday: "I was born and brought up on the seacoast. [These days] remind me of sailing into a fog bank. We can't see the rocks cropping up ahead of us and the shoreline has disappeared, but the fog horn continues to guide us and the occasional "Ahoy" we hear from a fellow sailor reminds us that we are not in this alone. Don't forget there are activities we can do with one another; a winter walk in the fresh air and experiencing the sunlight is good for our souls." Thank you, JoAnne.

We come to an invitation now to share what has done our souls good this week. What beauty have you seen? What story of hope might you share? What has inspired you this week?

Closing Words

We close with wisdom about "social distancing" from Rabbi Yosef Kanefsky:

- "Every hand that we don't shake must become a phone call that we place."
- "Every embrace that we avoid must become a verbal expression of warmth and concern."
- "Every inch and every foot that we physically place between ourselves and another must become a thought as to how we might be of help to that other, should the need arise."

No matter the distance between us, the heart connects. May the circle be unbroken. Amen.

Benediction

May you and yours be healthy in body and heart and spirit. May you leave this circle knowing you are good and knowing you are loved. Take your love from this place. Share it with the world. Stay safe until we meet again.