

**Sunday, December 13, 2020**  
***“The Light That Lasts”***

**Prelude** - “Imagine” by John Lennon

**Welcome** – Rev. Betsy Tabor & UUFES youth

Our service is called “The Light That Lasts.” It’s been a big week for light. Buddhists celebrated the Buddha’s enlightenment Tuesday. Thursday was the first day of Hanukkah. On the Christian calendar, it’s the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent. And though we’ll have six minutes less daylight today than last Sunday, the sun did start setting a bit later on Thursday. Another source of light is the legacy of John Lennon who died 40 years ago Tuesday.

Welcome. Here we seek justice and truth and understanding.  
Here we celebrate life and contemplate mystery.  
Here we seek healing and wholeness. Welcome, all.

**Lighting of Chalices and Candles**

**Lighting of the Menorah**

**Shared Affirmation**

**Hymn** - “When We Are Gathered”

**A Time for All Ages** - Marion Posner

**Joys & Concerns** “How A Rose E’er Blooming”

**Music** - “Spirit of Life”

**Meditation and Prayer**

We give thanks  
for the sunrise - light again  
for the infinite palette of dawn  
now fiery pink and orange and yellow  
now a soft warm blush  
we are grateful for the new day

we give thanks friends and family we count on  
for the simple reminder that we are loved.  
we give thanks for community  
for the spirit of coming together for the common good  
for news that a loved one is better  
for the love that lives on after we’ve said goodbye

In these short dark days  
 we remember neighbors without homes, sleeping outside or in cars  
 we remember those who are hungry, dependent on food pantries  
 and people who are lonely and isolated

we pray for space in our days  
 to see their suffering  
 and suffering everywhere

May we pray for ease, for peace of mind, for healing  
 May we wish all people beauty and love and joy  
 May we remember others every day - many times a day -  
 In the name of all that is true and good and holy. Amen.

[Betsy - Respond to JOYS AND CONCERNS]

**Reading** - “The Buddha’s Last Instruction” by Mary Oliver (read by Hope Hutchinson)

**Homily** - *The Light That Lasts*

How does that poem leave you? Do you feel warm and full of light? Or maybe jolted by that last image, when the Buddha looks up and sees frightened faces. What did they fear – his leaving them? Or the moment of death itself? Then we return, come back again, to the opening line, his final teaching: “Make of yourself a light,” he says. Maybe we feel a serenity, bathed in the colors of dawn: “a white fan/streaked with pink and violet,/even green/.....the sun, dis-attached...in the blue air...[an] ocean of yellow waves.” Maybe we come away reassured – not to worry, the end is beautiful. In the sacred poetry Chaikhana Blog, a comment builds on the idea of the end of life as light-filled. The Buddha’s stories, his ego, his struggles now gone as he transitions from physical body to his “full lightbody.”

We’re left with that light. Not a light that switches on then goes off, but a light that always shines. Like the sun. Reaches some part of us all the time. I think of Henry David Thoreau’s question: “With all your science can you tell me how it is, and whence it is, that light comes into the soul?” You may or may not have a word or words for that light. That may or may not matter to you.

We live warmed by sunlight. Always there, shining on the Buddha in Nepal, on the Maccabees in Jerusalem, on a young family in Bethlehem, on John Lennon and on you and me. Constant, a daily gift, profound beyond measure.

The sun is 900,000 miles in diameter. So big you could line up 109 Earths across its diameter. It is 93 million miles away from here, and it takes 8 mins 20 secs for its light to reach us. It is close by, compared to galaxies so far away that their star’s light takes 4 days to reach us.

Setting up fruits and balls and flashlights help us make sense of these distances, because these numbers can make your head hurt! We can also lean into awe.

I remember a wintry overnight in Boston a few years ago, with teenagers from my internship church and hundred or so other youth from neighboring churches. We were there to appreciate up close what it means to live on the streets, be housing-insecure, what some call “homeless.” That first night, our group’s host, in his 40s, walked us around, pointing out good places he’d found to sleep: corners, spots near heating grates, church steps. In the Public Garden, we saw a woman softly moving from one park bench to another, “tucking people in” and saying a gentle goodnight. We met her the next morning when she returned from the street somewhere.

We visitors spent the night on the floor of St. Joseph’s, a cathedral on Tremont Street, with a cavernous sanctuary. On the floor between the old wooden pews, we unrolled our sleeping bags, crawled in and the lights went out. We lay there in the pitch dark. Someone offered a prayer of mercy and love. And then a candle was lit. Just one small candle. We watched as the whole room filled with light. It reached onto every face, every corner. A metaphor for love or faith or hope...and beautiful.

And a direct connection to the story of the Temple in Jerusalem. In its great space, though damaged in battle, we can imagine the weary, the loyal, the thankful trimming the wick and lowering the flame down to a flicker to conserve the precious olive oil. We can imagine it illuminating their faces and the joy, finally, of being back in their spiritual home. They too had missed gathering in their sanctuary.

How extraordinary that these stories have traveled through generations for two thousand years running, the details long forgotten but the essence still shining bright. A nobleman in Nepal, believers in Jerusalem, a baby in Bethlehem have come to symbolize the belief that light can and will be found, even amidst darkness. It brightens our view - lights the path ahead – inspires and warms us.

This week we celebrated another source of light – the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of John Lennon’s death. I always think of him on my birthday. I was living in New York at the time, just out of business school and working for NBC. Lennon was shot three days before, but on the birthday itself – a big one, my 30<sup>th</sup> – our whole generation flooded Central Park. I went down alone, devastated, as everyone was, and remember being carried along in a river of people - the park sidewalks crowded, music that made us cry playing from speakers in the trees. All strangers yet with a felt closeness – intensely personal and at the same time shared.

John Lennon’s light touched the world. And while anyone can read or view details of his story, most of all, we know how his songs landed and continue to land in us. Some of us came of age listening to the Beatles. We knew who their girlfriends and wives and children were. As if they’d been our friends. Former UNH professor Joshua Meyrowitz wrote this week that people have “media friends” today, people who become important figures in our lives.

He reminds us of the “prophet” in Lennon:

John Lennon was fearless [he says] in speaking about peace and justice and asking us to imagine a better world. You still can feel and hear both his presence and his painful

absence at every antiwar rally, environmental action, and police brutality protest over the last forty years. Indeed, his songs are often part of the soundtracks for progressive political action.

...I understand [he goes on] the absurdity of many aspects of the relationships with media friends, yet I have also felt...these things. Although decades have passed since Lennon was murdered, my emotions remain raw. Yes, I never really knew him. Yes, he was not even aware of my existence. Yet I found my political voice with his help, and he has inspired millions around the world not to be silent in the face of militarism and injustice. The simple truth is, I still feel him marching beside me now—and I still miss him.<sup>1</sup>

Let us be grateful for stories of light, old and new. Light that travels through the ages. That shines steady and warms us....inspires us. Let us be grateful for the Light that lasts.

### **The Morning Offering – “Sevivon Sov Sov”**

#### **Community Response BETSY**

John Lennon sings in “Instant Karma” that “we all shine on, like the moon and the stars and the sun.” So let us consider what Light shines on for you? Think back hundreds of years, more than that if you like. What light from long ago shines for you? Maybe a person comes to mind or an idea. A composer - a teacher - an artist - a writer ....What sources of Light shine bright for you this morning? What do you know about life or people no longer on this earthly plan that moves you?

#### **Hymn - “Light of Ages”**

Our closing hymn was written by Samuel Longfellow (brother of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow). In 1864, he co-edited the Unitarian hymnal, *Hymns of the Spirit*. And he wrote the hymn called “God of Ages,” the first Christian hymn to recognize non-Christian religions. It has since been re-named “Light of Ages.” Changing the word God to the word Light makes room for more people and broadens the hymn’s message that that “revelation is not sealed,” which is to say that our understandings keep expanding. The hymn also lifts up the importance of reason and prophetic figures, whose role through the years has been to shake up people and say, “Hey people, we can do better!” So, while words like sin and condemnation may bring up some discomfort, think about the context and the convergence, this very week, of world religions drawn by Light in all its wonder.

### **Extinguishing of Chalices and Candles**

#### **Benediction**

“Well we all shine on  
Like the moon and the stars and the sun

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<sup>1</sup> Joshua Meyrowitz, "John Lennon Still Lives Among Us" <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2020/12/06/john-lennon-still-lives-among-us>

Well we all shine on...on and on and on and on....”

Make of yourself a light and shine on!

**Postlude** - “I Am the Light of This World” by Rev. Gary Davis. Davis was a blind street preacher and musician in Harlem NYC during the 1930s to the 1970s. His singing and astounding finger-picking guitar influenced a generation of white blues guitarists, who continue to perform and teach his legacy of music.

## **COFFEE HOUR**

This service can be viewed until April 13, 2021 at:

[https://uuma.zoom.us/rec/share/n-074evC92vQNvjk20S\\_uFbJNmP2Mh-WK2vKeFecC-uM1PNBI7A\\_c4AnhU5\\_4MN.z1xb9PAXq6HIE\\_up](https://uuma.zoom.us/rec/share/n-074evC92vQNvjk20S_uFbJNmP2Mh-WK2vKeFecC-uM1PNBI7A_c4AnhU5_4MN.z1xb9PAXq6HIE_up)

Passcode: 30K\$AfBz

(Note: For copyright reasons, the prelude and postlude were not recorded.)