

**Full text of the Sunday Service  
December 20, 2020 at 10:00 a.m.**

**PRELUDE MUSIC** WBUUC Choir directed by Thaxter Cunio  
Come into this place of peace - Thaxter Cunio and William F. Schulz

Come into this place of peace, and let its silence heal your spirit  
Come into this place of memory and let its history warm your soul  
Come into this place of power and let its vision change your heart.

**GIVING VOICE TO THE SPIRIT** Carol Caouette

Children, Go Where I Send Thee - traditional African American

Children go where I send thee - How will I send thee?  
I'm gonna send thee one by one  
One for the little bitty baby was born, born, born in Bethlehem.  
Children go where I send thee - How will I send thee?  
I'm gonna send thee two by two  
Two for Paul and Silas  
One for the little bitty baby was born, born, born in Bethlehem.  
Children go where I send thee - How will I send thee?  
I'm gonna send thee three by three  
Three for the Hebrew children. Two for Paul and Silas.  
One for the little bitty baby was born, born, born in Bethlehem.  
Children go where I send thee - How will I send thee?  
I'm gonna send thee four by four  
Four for the four who stood at the door Three for the Hebrew children  
Two for Paul and Silas  
One for the little bitty baby was born, born, born in Bethlehem.  
Five for the Gospel preachers  
Six for the jars of Cana  
Seven for the seven who came from Heaven  
Eight for the eight who sealed their fate  
Nine for the nine got left behind  
Ten for the ten commandments  
Eleven for the eleven who went to heaven  
Twelve for the twelve apostles

Deck the Halls - traditional

Deck the halls with boughs of holly, Fa la la la la, la la la la.  
'Tis the season to be jolly, Fa la la la la, la la la la.  
Don we now our gay apparel, Fa la la, la la la, la la la.

Troll the ancient Yule tide carol, Fa la la la la, la la la la.

See the blazing Yule before us, Fa la la la la, la la la la.  
Strike the harp and join the chorus. Fa la la la la, la la la la.  
Follow me in merry measure, Fa la la la la, la la la la.  
While I tell of Yule tide treasure, Fa la la la la, la la la la.

Fast away the old year passes, Fa la la la la, la la la la.  
Hail the new, ye lads and lasses, Fa la la la la, la la la la.  
Sing we joyous, all together, Fa la la la la, la la la la.  
Heedless of the wind and weather, Fa la la la la, la la la la.

Green

When winter's gray is on the sky  
Rust upon the leaves that lie  
Red on the last few berries clinging  
Brown on the branch where the bitter wind's singing  
Even when white obscures the scene  
Still, in winter, there is green

Waving defiant pine tree boughs  
Cedar needles, stubborn and proud  
Hiding inside the seeds of summer  
And deep in the root where it sleeps undercover  
Patiently waiting there unseen  
In the winter, there is green

Death may raise its voice today  
O but life will have its say  
Speaking in lovers and in children  
In poets pens and philosopher's visions  
Life is a planet's daring dream  
Earth's devotion, spoken in green

So keep it in your winter store  
Hang its garland 'round the door  
Grant to your heart its hopeful promise  
Fashion a wreath for its blessing upon us  
Winter brings browns and grays indeed  
But when it comes, remember green

**WELCOME** Lisa Borg

Good morning, and welcome everyone, to White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church. I am Lisa Borg, serving on your Board of Directors.

We are a congregation in the free faith tradition, a community of youth, adults and children, dedicated to pluralism in the spiritual search and ethics grounded in action.

Service participants today include Carol Couette, Nico Van Ostrand, Rev. Sara Goodman, Amy Peterson Derrick, and Victoria Safford, supported by Anna Gehres and Erin Scott. Music today is from Carol Caouette and the Choir, directed by Thaxter Cunio, with a special surprise near the end.

On the Winter Solstice (tomorrow night) and Christmas Eve (on Thursday) we hope you'll join us for special holiday services, featuring the voices of many members and friends, as well as your staff team. In the ENews tomorrow, you'll find a link to orders of service with all the song lyrics and participant names, and also COLORING PAGES, based on our beloved "12 Days of Christmas" placards! You can also pick up paper copies outside the church front doors. Please note: the Solstice service and early service Christmas Eve will be on YouTube only; the later Christmas Eve Service will be on Zoom and Facebook, just like Sunday morning.

Today, after the service at 11:15, please join us for Cyber Social Hour. It's a fun way to meet others, see old friends, and share a little conversation in small facilitated groups. We'll put the Zoom link and easy instructions in the chat box. If you're visiting or new today, you're warmly invited to attend a brief orientation, right after the service. The link is in the chat.

Welcome to our church. Together, we grow our souls and serve the world in love.

**CALL TO WORSHIP** Rev. Sara Goodman

*Singing bowl*

Whitest sparkling snow, come blanket us.

Blackest solstice night, embrace us.

Ice awaken us.

Fires, comfort us.

Home, surround us.

Candles, guide us.

Children, rouse us, laughing singing, shouting!

Dearest friends, hold us closer.

Distant stars, shine down brighter.

Deep winter days, deep winter nights, hold us safely now and guard us,

Thinnest sun and thickest dark.

For we are, each one of us, a tiny seed in frozen ground,

each one a secret, sacred miracle,  
a holy, hidden possibility waiting to be born.

Cecelia Dodge and Michael Martini will light the chalice.

**LIGHTING THE CHALICE** Cecelia Dodge and Michael Martini - no text available

**OPENING WORDS** from James Vila Blake VICTORIA,  
Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our great covenant:  
to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, and to help one another  
Our Opening hymn is Bring a Torch, Jeanette Isabella

**HYMN** Bring a Torch, Jeanette isabella  
Bring a torch, Jeanette Isabella, bring a torch and quickly run.  
Christ is born, good folk of the village; Christ is born and Mary's calling.  
Ah! Ah! Beautiful is the mother. Ah! Ah! Beautiful is her child.

Come and see within the stable, come and see the holy one;  
Come and see the lovely Jesus, brown his brown his cheeks are rosy.  
Hush! Hush! Quietly now he slumbers. Hush! Hush! Quietly now he sleeps.

Un flambeau, Jeanette Isabella, un flambeau, courons au berceau!  
C'est Jésus, bonnes gens du hameau, le Christ est né, Marie appelle.  
Ah! Ah! Ah que la mère est belle. Ah! Ah! Ah! que l'enfant est beau.

**STORY** Nico Van Ostrand

This is based on a true story, something that actually happened to me - or rather, it's a re-imagining of what actually happened, which I'm sharing today in hopes that you will re-imagine it as you listen, and in that way we will create something entirely new together right now with just one true event told and heard.

This summer, I made a couple of new friends. They're awesome, kind people who do everything they can to make the world a better place. Maybe you have friends like them too. They inspire me to be my best, and we're always creating and learning new things together.

One day, my friends and I came upon a huge, pale blob. It was just sitting there, taking up a whole bunch of space. I'm not sure why, but this blob made me feel sad. I felt small and helpless, and I just wanted to leave and pretend I had never seen this pale blob.

But since my friends are the kind of people who like to right the wrongs they come across, we couldn't just leave this the way it was. So my friends and I asked some of our neighbors --  
"Where did this blob come from? What is it doing here? Does it make you feel anxious too?"

The answer was almost always “Well, it’s always been there but it’s too big for anyone to do anything about. So we all just go about our day and pretend it’s not there.”

“Does pretending it’s not there help?” we would ask.

And they’d respond, “Not really, I guess. But I can’t do anything about it.”

None of us really liked the idea that “that’s the way it’s always been” was somehow justification for everyone in the neighborhood having to feel bad all the time. We decided that pretending the blob didn’t exist wasn’t the solution. We wanted to do something so our neighbors wouldn’t have to feel so worried all the time. But how could we show them that the blob wasn’t too big for someone to do something about?

We came up with a plan, as we often do, that was much more a starting point than an answer. We knew it would help, but the three of us couldn’t quite figure out a total solution to this whole blob problem.

So we put our starting-point plan into action. We called a meeting and gathered together elders and children and healers and weavers and responders. We asked them to tell their stories.

There was an artist at the meeting too, and as the healer and the weaver and the responder and all the others -- including my friends and me -- shared our stories, the artist quietly got to work.

She took the healer’s story about helping everyone feel better, no matter how much or how little money they had, and painted a gentle blue rectangle, weighted and comforting.

As the weaver spoke of empowering people by showing them their best selves, the artist painted a bright yellow ball, glittering next to the rectangle.

When the responder shared about shivering in the cold, scared but determined to defend the land from a great snake the artist added a splash of green, sudden and strong.

The other stories that evening were orange and purple and star shaped and triangular and huge and small and I got swept up in the wonderful imagining.

And I wasn’t the only one -- all around me my neighbors and friends were smiling and leaning on each other and you could practically touch the feelings of connection and love in that moment.

As the last words of the last story left the lips of the last teller, the artist swirled the last stroke of her brush and we all took a breath in silence -- broken then by an elder who quietly said, “I don’t feel so hopeless anymore.”

That great blob that had brought so much grief and sadness to the neighborhood was no longer. It was physically still there but the artist had used it as a canvas, infusing its pale surface with vibrant color and brilliant shapes.

And now, everyone who comes upon that blob is reminded of care and community, of warmth and strength and determination, of the people they are connected to.

The people of that neighborhood were right though. That pale blob was too big for anyone to do anything about. It took a whole community -- three friends, a healer, a weaver, a responder, an artist, and all the others -- and only then was it possible to transform.

**MEDITATION** Rev. Sara Goodman

Join me in the spirit of meditation - find a comfortable place for your body. Take a deep breath.

Spirit of Life, Spirit of Love, Spirit of Compassion - hold us today in the dark of winter, with cold winter winds, and brown winter trees, a winter of unknowns. Remind us that although we may feel alone in the dark, we are connected - we are connected to the seasons as they turn, we are connected to the sun - the sky - the moon, and most of all we are connected to each other.

Spirit of Life, hold us as we face the coming celebratory time of year with courage to face our isolation head on. Hold us as we wish we were holding our loved ones. As we wish to hold all who are suffering, those with big losses, those with little losses, those with mental illness and addiction, those of us just holding it together. Hold us all in love.

Spirit of Love, bring into our hearts the memories of favorite holiday celebrations, bring into our hearts the feeling of being held by our beloved families - given or chosen - in the dark of winter's past and future.

Spirit of Compassion, fill us with a deep understanding of the struggles of this world, so that we may be moved to shift ourselves and push the world toward justice, together.

Spirit of all- all that is, help us as we hold the beloveds of those who speak their name - aloud or in our hearts.

Beloveds, let us breathe together for a time.--- Blessed be - and Amen

**OFFERING INTRO** Lisa Borg

Today's offering goes to support the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. We know that some of you were unable last week to view the video about their work, so here it is again, with thanks to long-time supporter, Dick Ottman. If you did contribute to the UUSC already, please make your gift today to support the programs of our congregation. Information for both options is in the chat box. Thank you!

**OFFERING VIDEO** Dick Ottman video

My wife, Judy, and I have been supporting the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee or the UUSC for over 40 years. The UUSC started during World War II when a Unitarian minister and his wife risked their lives, and went to Nazi controlled Europe to rescue people being persecuted. I am not going to ask you to risk your life. Instead, I am asking you to write a check to WBUUC with UUSC in the memo line. You can also text your donation. Donations of \$150 or more are matched by a Foundation. Donations to the UUSC are part of the Guest at Your Table program.

Our family gives to the UUSC because

1. They follow the 7 principles of our faith.
  2. They believe strongly in human rights for all people, and in empowering women.
  3. They believe in self-determination. UUSC is not a charity, but a respectful partner to people working in their own countries and communities to build a just and self-sustaining livelihood.
- More information is at [uus.org](http://uus.org) and on our church's website. My wife and I were married 52 years ago. Judy is now in Memory Care, which is why I am doing the talking.

**OFFERTORY**          O Tannenbaum - Carol Caouette (instrumental)

**FIRST READING**    Rev. Sara Goodman

The Solstice Wreath by Sandra Michaelson Brown, adapted

The grim news has come to my attention  
that something in the world has come unfixed —  
owls no longer haunt the forest,  
appearing out of the dreamtime as we pass,

indeed whole souls have gone missing,  
as if being has itself gone dim.  
A vital light is missing from the world,  
by which I mean:  
that ephemeral gold that spins the seen and unseen worlds together.

In my life I don't expect to see  
a springtime swelling of the shriveled nut so many spirits have become.  
What's to be done?

This is the winter solstice of an age,  
although the season's worst is yet to come.  
What's delicate and true has come undone:  
is the only fitting answer  
a pure and focused rage?

Today I wove a wreath of bone and fir and filbert strands,  
twined in sacred holly,

incense cedar from an ancient tree.

I wove,  
affixed a star,  
and spoke a spell:

“Let this circle stand as the gate of winter,  
sure passage to the days of lengthening light.”  
And then I whispered names in the fragrant bough,  
lacing love like a scarlet ribbon through the fronds.

Long I wove, and dreamed back friends and kin,  
each great soul calling back the sun.  
I thought at last, “My life here is not done.”  
And some bright star  
rekindled from within.

Jess Banks, a former member of our congregation who moved with her family to New Zealand, has kindly agreed to share with us a solstice reading she wrote for us many years ago.

**SECOND READING** Jessica Banks video (excerpt)

Darkness

Every good, new thing comes out of darkness: the womb, the earth, the depths of our dreams and imagination. Darkness harbors things that could not survive the harsh, bare light of day, things that just aren't ready for the relentless energy of sun and wind and other people's expectations.

Darkness is soft and warm. It presses like blankets, soft wings, and loving arms. It's not as lonely as the light can be; other souls can be as close or as far as we need them to be, when we don't have the evidence light delivers to our eyes.

It's not that darkness can't be scary. Often, the scariest thing in the dark is the closeness of ourselves, with nothing to distract ourselves from our thoughts and memories and regrets. And we're still ingrained with that deep, primal urge to light the fires against the night where wild animals and enemies lurk.

But I say: Don't be so quick to light the first spark on Midwinter or Christmas Eve. Dwell in the darkness for a little while. More than any other animal in the deep winter, we have faith that the light will return, so we can afford to give the darkness its time, too.

The winter night is beautiful.

**SONG** Solstice Song written by Marilyn Rogers

In the darkest night of solstice time, when the chill of winter creeps within



Our beings long for friendly light, our hearts hold hope of spring.  
Sunlight, moonlight, starlight, clear light,  
fill our minds with purest light this dark and wintry night.  
Sunlight, moonlight, star light, love light,  
Fill our hearts with radiant light this dark and wintry night.

As our earth in circling orbit moves turning moon's glow into sun-filled day  
May our pole-star be the light of Truth to guide us on our way.  
Sunlight, moonlight, starlight, clear light,  
fill our minds with purest light this dark and wintry night.  
Sunlight, moonlight, star light, love light,  
Fill our hearts with radiant light this dark and wintry night.

**SERMON**     Unconquered Sun     Victoria Safford

I am so grateful this morning to Jess Banks for sharing with us her winter solstice words, from all the way around the world, New Zealand. Jess, thank you for your image of pitching the sun back to us, as if it were a ball and this whole life we share were a game of catch under the same blue sky. We miss you here. We're sending love.

For many years we've shared Jess's words on the winter solstice night when we've gathered in the past, as we will again, to welcome winter bravely, brazenly, lustily, noisily, with a bonfire and shouting and drumming, calling out the four directions to make a sacred circle. Before we head outside, there are songs and stories in the sanctuary here, and at some point we put out all the lights, just breathing in the close and holy darkness. For just a few moments, no music, no words, no lights, no glowing screens, and then that gentle admonition:

I say: Don't be so quick to light the first spark on Midwinter or Christmas Eve. Dwell here for a little while. Every good, new thing comes out of darkness: the womb, the earth, the depths of our dreams and imagination. Darkness harbors things that could not survive the harsh, bare light of day, things that just aren't ready for the relentless energy of sun and wind and other people's expectations.

The winter night is beautiful.

It's in that moment, in the spacious quiet, that we invite people to speak, asking: what are you afraid of now? As winter comes on, as it will, as it must, what's heavy on your heart? How is it with your spirit? And also, as the old year dies and the new comes ringing in, what's hopeful for you now, what embers of light are you holding in your hands? And it was beautiful then – as it will be again - to hear people's voices rising out of the safety of that darkness, from under the soft blankets of the dark: children's voices, older voices, speaking hard, and hopeful, holy things.

I learned last week about a ritual created by a colleague, David Kohlmeier, out in Massachusetts, using a "reverse Advent wreath." Instead of lighting one more candle on each of the four Sundays in Advent and thereby increasing the light, you begin each week with the four

candles already lit, and every week extinguish one more, in honor of the darkness, to welcome it, embrace it, knowing that just as with the light, it won't stay with us forever. The litany is something like this:

On the first Sunday, we honor the gifts of rest and healing. In darkness, in sleep, our bodies rest, our brains restore. In these days of anxious stress and worry, we give thanks for healing power of the dark. (Extinguish one candle)

On the second Sunday, we give thanks for the joy of those things we only find in the nighttime: fireflies, owls, crickets, the stars. May we be blessed by the gift of black joy. (Extinguish one candle)

On the third Sunday, we remember those things that exist only in darkness, in the depths of the ocean, in blackest caves (the bats, which like us, are dying by disease). We imagine life in the darkest folds of the universe, where we could not survive and imagine that in these places, just as in the sunshine, the spirit is at work. May we know humility and gratitude. (Extinguish one candle)

On the fourth Sunday, we give thanks for the darkness of unknowing, for mystery and wonder. There's so much we don't understand, and that's not just scary, but exciting. For the darkness of the womb, for places in space where stars are born, for questions that come from the depth of our being, we give thanks. (Extinguish one candle)

And it's within that container, not empty, but full, that the center candle, the "Christ candle," is lit on Christmas Eve, sacred light in proportion to the holy dark.

It's so tempting in December to rush right past these short and breathless days, the long and endless nights. It's a very western mindset, really, and certainly American, to want only sunshine, only happiness, more light all the time, unambiguous, un-ambivalent, but I think we're made, like the earth we're made of, for balance, for sun as well as shadow, harvest time and fallow time, awakening and hibernation, understanding and unknowing, the bright blessed day, as Louis Armstrong sang, and the dark sacred night. We are built for all of it, the wonderful world entire, and not always merry and bright. "Joy and woe," said the mystic poet William Blake, in words set to music in our hymnal, "Joy and awe are woven fine, clothing for the soul divine; under every grief and pine, runs a joy with silken twine [all inter-braided, like the solstice wreath that Rev. Sara read about]. It is right; it should be so, and when this we rightly know, safely through the world we go." Safely – because when we hold it that way, balancing, we will not be shattered when shadows fall, or sadness. Like a tree that's planted by the water, we shall not be moved. We are built for all of it; to be made more whole by all of it.

As this year lurches to its close, this harrowing year, I'm wondering now about this time we're in – which is an historic time: we are living in, living through, and shaping a moment, an era, a marker, that will be remembered, that is in its way not a blip on the screen, a momentary disruption of normalcy that once was and soon will be restored again. No, this time is something

else, I think, a watershed time, with something, some things, mighty things, to teach us, not only about loss, but including loss; not only about fear and vulnerability and this sickly sense of being unmoored, but about that also. We're learning about that. And I wonder what this time is teaching us about love, and hope (durable, industrial-grade hope, not anything breakable and cheap). What is this time teaching us about love and hope and faith: in ourselves, in each other, in whatever transcendent eternity holds us in its hand, and about faith in a future we cannot yet see (but when actually can we ever?) – faith in the future we are mapping as we go, even in the dark? What are we learning in this time, about what we believe in, and who we are and what we're built for, what we're called to be? What can we see in this dark?

And to be clear – I don't mean silver linings. I don't mean what can we find that's good about the pandemic because nothing is good about the pandemic, not with people dying, who are not statistics, but beloved ones, each one with a face, and a name, and hands that held, and should be holding now, other people's hands. Nothing is good about the pandemic, not with people dying, not with people dead, not with people losing livelihood: jobs, health, security, sanity, sobriety, the promise of a livable future. I'm not about silver linings. I wonder what we're learning. And I'll just say, when I hear people say, "You know this thing really hasn't affected me much. I'm safe at home, I have all kinds of time to read and rest and Zoom with my friends," when I hear that I do know that underneath it, there's compassion, for the vast majority of people for whom the pandemic staycation is not a thing at all. I do hear compassion underneath; I hear the fluttering heartbeat, heart murmur, heartache of concern for the whole human family, and for the planet, the comprehensive full-body awareness that we are all connected, that there's no way to be unscathed, untouched, undamaged in these times. When people tell me, as they do, a lot, "This seems strange to say, but I've not really been troubled," I hear trouble underneath (at least I hope I do) - and gratitude, bordering on guilt almost, or at least unease, at how unevenly the shadow of this plague falls on different houses, falls on different bodies, as it passes among all of us.

At solstice-time, December, we see in the dark, we discern in the darkening days of waiting, silence, mystery- the wisdom and questions buried inside us, among us, that maybe we couldn't see or receive in the glaring light of day. Things come to us when we quiet, when we settle, when distractions melt away. I remember one time in the morning several Decembers ago I lifted the shade in my office here and there were 21 deer in the woods and by the Alcove, on both sides of the stream. They were lying down and standing up, and all were covered with new snow, their shoulders, their backs, between their ears – a perfect nativity scene. I said "Whoa! Where did you all come from?" They stayed very still as their spokes-deer approached my window and said, "You know what? We've been here all along. We live here. You just never noticed in all the summer foliage. You just never noticed because you're mostly looking at your computer."

What does this darkening time, the time of the plague, have to teach us?

The other day, on Friday, a post office truck pulled into our driveway at 6:30 in the morning, with a package of lightbulbs I'd ordered – nothing I needed right away, nothing I needed at all, really

– but that woman was up and at work already, maybe driving all night, driven by incredible pressure now on dark, icy roads, to make absolutely sure that all of us get every single thing we want, anything we desire, within days, within hours – postal workers, FedEx drivers, people packing boxes in unsafe conditions at breakneck speed 24/7 all over the world. Covid is teaching us, I think, I hope, that none of this economy is sustainable, or right, not for the bodies or spirits of humans and not for other living things. What if we did not go back to normal? What if instead of speeding up, up, up, everything slowed down? We may be learning something now, about pacing, about scale, about right relation, and relearning ancient lessons about justice and mercy and rampant desire.

One writer says maybe there's a relationship between speed and solidarity. Because for those of us privileged enough to self-isolate, the virus has forced a radical and sudden slowdown, a paring down of life to its essentials in a bid to stop the virus's spread. But that slowness has other, unintended effects as well. It turns out that when the deafening roar of capitalism-as-usual quiets, even a little, our capacity to notice things that were hidden in plain view may grow. This is from Naomi Klein. She goes on: For some, that awareness has expanded to encompass the cruelty of warehousing human beings: in prisons, immigrant detention center camps and for-profit old age homes, as well as in cavernous meat-packing plants and sprawling fulfillment centers. It is in these places, already so sick, that the virus has spread like wildfire. In forcing us all to confront the porousness of our own bodies in relationship to the vast web of other bodies that sustain us and the people we love- caregivers, farmers, supermarket clerks, street cleaners and more, the coronavirus, has exploded the cherished, market-manufactured myth of the individual as a self-made island.

Her piece appeared in the journal, *The Intercept*, to introduce a short film called "The Years of Repair." It's a postcard from the near future, set maybe ten years out, maybe a little more, remembering back to this pandemic time, the exact beginning of global transformation, describing everything that changed – that could change – because people all over the world saw in this moment the implications of returning to normal. The first words you hear, from the narrator telling the story, our story, are "Looking back, it's hard to believe that we rebuilt our community from the ground up, with our own hands," and then it describes what happened and how (what could happen) – food, farming, education, public housing, industry all transformed to human scale, cooperative, sustainable models; the reinvention of criminal justice and mass incarceration, the redistribution of wealth resources, reparation for genocide and slavery, restoration of land to indigenous populations, climate justice prioritized, labor reimaged. It is a futuristic, but not in any way impossible vision, moving from what could be back to what actually is, rather than telling the story as we normally would, the other way around. "The Years of Repair" was created by artist Molly Crabapple and writers Avi Lewis and Opal Tometti (one of the founders of Black Lives Matter), and it's beautiful – all storyboards and art, and part of its insistence is that without a clear and hopeful vision of the future, without making the space and taking the time to imagine it, design it, it won't happen. The writers wrestled with how optimism lately feels almost irresponsible, like fantasy, like indulgence, and then said no. They claimed hope as power, claimed hope as a radical act, claimed imagination not as frivolous, but urgent. Revolutionary. Which is how change always happens.

What if 2020 marked the start of “the years of repair?” What is this time of pandemic teaching us?

Way back in May, before the murder of George Floyd and before the international uprisings demanding systemic change at every level, way back in early May, one of you wrote to me.

I have been one of those people who sits in the pews listening to the discussions of race and White Privilege with a bit of a jaundiced eye. I have been sympathetic, but not enthusiastic to efforts to unseat the traditional white power structure. I have been comfortable in my suburban bubble. The COVID-19 pandemic is exposing for me the shameful way that black and brown Americans are treated as people with less value and less humanity than the white citizens. The differential impact of this impersonal virus on communities of color in our country is appalling. To think that the people who work hardest in our health and home care businesses are dismissed as ones who’ve made unwise choices that negatively impact their health infuriates me now. Living in a place that has polluted air and riding public transportation to work are not “choices” in any meaningful sense. It’s doing what you have to do to get by. I have allowed my privilege to influence my thinking. As we move forward, I am committed to working toward meaningful change. I am not sure what that looks like as I sit here this morning, but I just wanted to tell someone that this cannot stand.

This email came out of the blue, not in response to any particular event, from someone who, like most all of us, I think, at different times in our lives, was suddenly seeing, and viscerally feeling, knowing in their bones the truth that has been rampant all along, the very essence of what has been wrong all along. What was extraordinary was that the person wrote it down and sent it to me, this ... confession. They testified and signed their name. There are things that we can learn in this pandemic, not new things, old things – but we really have to want to, and it’s hard. I was so grateful for that email.

We are learning, in this time of isolation, about love, radical, revolutionary love, costly love. We are learning about care, maybe, how none of us is safe till all of us are safe, in body and in soul. I’m learning, as an introvert, how hard it is to be alone, how desperately I miss you all, how there is no way, no healthy, human way to be a person by yourself, much less a minister- and I know you’re all learning these things too, or maybe you knew all along. We are meant to be together, heart to heart and hand in hand, inexplicably intertwined in beloved community with all of our relations.

Lucille Clifton, the brilliant African American poet, has a poem I think of every year at solstice time, at Advent, although it’s not a winter poem. It is about seeing in the dark. It’s called “the light that came to lucille Clifton.”

the light that came to lucille clifton  
came in a shift of knowing  
when even her fondest sureties  
faded away. it was [then]

she understood that she had not understood  
and was not mistress even  
of her own off eye, ... and  
she could see the peril of an  
unexamined life.  
she closed her eyes, afraid to look for her  
authenticity  
but the light insists on itself in the world;  
a voice from the nondead past started talking,  
she closed her ears and it spelled out in her hand  
"you might as well answer the door, my child,  
the truth is furiously knocking."

The light came in a shift of knowing, when even her fondest sureties faded away. and maybe this will happen now, for you, for me, for all of us, as it does in some ways each December. We go inside, kindle little lights against the dark, but at some point let it come, let it teach us, hold us, tell us truths we just can't see in the noise and glare of busy lives, our so-called normal lives.

In the quiet dark, which is also restorative dark,  
may we open the door to truths that are knocking,  
and welcome the light that floods in.  
In our loneliness now, and our fear,  
in the midst of losses which remind us what we love the most,  
may gratitude be our first word of the day and our last,  
and may we trust that from that prayer,  
compassion will follow and courage.  
May the blessed darkness hold us safe,  
and may light be born in us anew  
to warm us, cheer us, guide our feet  
and shine a blessed on this world.

AMEN  
(silence)

And now for something completely different. In the early 1970's Dick Perlich, a treasured member of the congregation and a distinguished artist, made beautiful posters to illustrate The Twelve Days of Christmas. They have appeared in holiday services here every year, ever since, usually held high by children as we sing all the verses. I want to ask you to sing out now, and know that what you're hearing in the background is actually you yourselves – this is an audio clip from last year, December 19, 2019, of all of you singing The Twelve Days of Christmas. The recording is a little rough, and our execution of the poster holding may be a little

out of synch – but that’s actually how it always is when we do this song, so we’re keeping with tradition.

Let’s sing The Twelve Days of Christmas!

**SONG**            The Twelve Days of Christmas

On the first day of Christmas, my true love sent to me  
a partridge in a pear tree.

two turtle doves

three French hens

four calling birds

five golden rings

six geese a-laying

seven swans a-swimming

eight maids a-milking

nine drummers drumming

ten pipers piping

eleven ladies dancing

twelve fiddlers fiddling

**CLOSING WORDS**    Victoria

Ann Conrad Lammers

Never in the frantic dance of June  
were we so mindful of the loving sun  
as now, in the cold needlepoint of day  
that pulls the year behind.

This is the darkest time, when the wheel  
pauses far from home. Who foretold  
a shining birth? The womb of time  
is empty after all.

But ever, in the cold balance of the year,  
in stillness after hope has gone, something  
tugs the web of life, invisible as heartbeat,  
ordinary as oak.

Trusting the slow swell to birth  
we touch the hand that reaches. Now  
a rising starts, a new music  
bound to earth and sky

Dear friends, may the unconquered

sun be born again to you,  
in spaces where surprise makes known things new.

### **FAREWELL**

Friends, thank you for joining us. Watch for the Enews tomorrow for news about holiday services and be sure to download or print the beautiful packet of coloring pages and Orders of Service for Christmas Eve, or pick up paper copies outside the church front doors.

There's an orientation for visitors and newcomers right after the service, hosted by ministry staff. The link is in the chat; all are welcome!

At 11:15 join us for Cyber Social Hour. It's actually just half an hour of easy conversation in small groups with friends old and new.

We're sending love to you today from all of our locations.  
Farewell, and stay well, everyone!

**POSTLUDE**    Where is the Light?