

Prelude

Sounding the Chime

Opening Words

written by Sylvia L. Howe; adapted by E. Arlen Goff

We bid you welcome on this New Year's Eve.

Like Janus we gather with part of us looking backward
and part of us looking forward.

We gather on the edge of the new year
saddened by our losses,
cherishing our joys,
aware of our failures,
mindful of days gone by.

We gather on the cusp of this new year
eager to begin anew,
hopeful for what lies ahead,
promising to make changes,
anticipating tomorrows and tomorrows.

We invite you to join our celebration of life,
knowing that life includes good and bad,
endings and beginnings.

We bid you welcome!

Source: 1997 UUMA Worship Materials Collection

⌘ Lighting the Chalice

We light this flame in memory of years past that have brought us to this hour and to the
countless lives, known and unknown, that have made our lives possible.

We light this flame of life in affirmation of the strength that is ours to live this day, and the
potential we have to create a better tomorrow.

We light this flame of faith that our minds may be enlightened, our love deepened, our path
together illumined by understanding and peace.

Welcome and Announcements

June Bryant, President

⌘ Opening Hymn #143

"Not in vain the distance beacons ..."

Not in vain the distance beacons.
 Forward, forward, let us range.
 Let the great world spin forever
 down the ringing grooves of change;
 through the shadow of the globe
 we sweep ahead to heights sublime,
 we, the heirs of all the ages,
 in the foremost files of time.

Oh, we see the crescent promise
 of that spirit has not set;
 ancient founts of inspiration
 well through all our fancies yet;
 and we doubt not through the ages
 one increasing purpose runs,
 and the thoughts of all are widened
 with the process of the suns.

Yea, we dip into the future,
 far as human eye can see,
 see the vision of the world, and
 all the wonder that can be,
 hear the war drum throb no longer,
 see the battle flags all furled, in
 the parliament of freedom,
 federation of the world.

– Alfred Lord Tennyson

Passages and Milestones

WE ARE CONNECTED TO EACH OTHER. WHAT AFFECTS ONE OF US AFFECTS ALL OF US. BY NAMING THOSE SIGNIFICANT EVENTS IN OUR LIVES, OR IN THE LIVES OF OUR FAMILY, WE AFFIRM THE TIES THAT BIND US ONE TO THE OTHER, THE MANY TO THE WHOLE. IF YOU WISH TO SHARE A PASSAGE OR MILESTONE WITH OUR GATHERED COMMUNITY, PLEASE COME FORWARD AT THIS TIME AND THE WORSHIP LEADER WILL LIGHT A CANDLE AS YOU SHARE.

I light this last candle to symbolize those passages and milestones which remain unspoken in our hearts. May it serve as a reminder that as we encounter others in the coming week, as we look into the faces of the people we meet, that their lives will contain the same admixture of pain and pleasure which we ourselves possess. So may we be for them agents of healing and instruments of peace.

AT THIS POINT IN OUR SERVICE, OUR CHILDREN WILL BE ESCORTED TO THEIR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CLASSES DOWNSTAIRS, AS WE SING THEM OUT WITH THE FOLLOWING WORDS:

Go now in peace, go now in peace.
May the spirit of love surround you
Everywhere, everywhere, you may go.

Responsive Reading #544

"New Year's Day" (Kathleen McTigue)

The first of January is another day dawning, the sun rising as the sun always rises, the earth moving in its rhythms,

With or without our calendars to name a certain day as the day of new beginning, separating the old from the new.

So it is: everything is the same, bound into its history as we ourselves are bound.

Yet also we stand at a threshold, the new year something truly new, still unformed, leaving a stunning power in our hands;

What shall we do with this great gift of Time, this year?

Let us begin by remembering that whatever justice, whatever peace and wholeness might bloom in our world this year,

We are the hearts and minds, the hands and feet, the embodiment of all the best visions of our people.

The new year can be new ground for the seeds of our dreams.

Let us take the step forward together, onto new ground,

Planting our dreams well, faithfully, and in joy.

Meditative Hymn #55

"Dark of winter, soft and still ..."

Dark of winter, soft and still,
your quiet calm surrounds me.
Let my thoughts go where they will;
ease my mind profoundly.
And then my soul will sing a song,
a blessed song of love eternal.
Gentle darkness, soft and still,
bring your quiet to me.

Darkness, soothe my weary eyes,
that I may see more clearly.
When my heart with sorrow cries,

comfort and caress me.
And then my soul may hear a voice,
a still, small voice of love eternal.
Darkness, when my fears arise,
let your peace flow through me.

– Shelly Jackson Denham

Meditation

written by Linda Hoddy

Enter with me that still place within, the center, where we find not only our inmost selves, but also our connection to the farthest reaches of the universe.

Here we confront our aspirations and our failings.

Though we seek always for our lives to be full of goodness, we sometimes lack courage to right the injustices that confront us.

Though we seek always to be generous, sometimes our fears cause us to be greedy.

Though we seek always to walk the moral high ground, sometimes we judge others too quickly and too harshly.

Though we seek always to understand the larger mysteries, sometimes doubt causes us to lose faith in our purpose.

Here, in this space made sacred by our shared lives and our shared yearnings, may we find new courage, new generosity of spirit, forgiveness given and received, and rededication to the higher purposes of our lives.

Source: 1997 UUMA Worship Materials Collection

Offertory

words by Victoria Weinstein

The purpose of the church is to encourage all who gather there to grow more generous in spirit and in action. This is the great end of all the world's faith traditions: to bring the human being closer to the divine by acts of creation and compassion. We now take an offering that allows us to exercise that all-important generosity of spirit, an offering that will support this self-supporting church and its many ministries. The gifts of the congregation will be most gratefully received.

Homily

The Rev. E. Arlen Goff

"A New Year ... A New Beginning"

For as long as humans have marked the seasons, there has been the sense of endings and beginnings. For as long as societies have fashioned calendars to note the passing of days, the

time of endings and beginnings has been seen as a time for introspection and meditation, a time for confessing and forgiving, a time for affirmation and encouragement, a time for dreams, possibilities and promises, a time for reflection and renewal. And so it is that we gather here today.

It is fitting that we assemble in this holy place on this occasion. For in some ways, this place collects all our highest ambitions and deepest beliefs ... about ourselves, about others, about the world in which we live. We join together here each week in this place as a reminder and a return to our deepest, best selves ... what we value, what we hope for, what we dream for. Here we recover strength and fortitude for the living out of our faith in our everyday lives. Here we celebrate and here we mourn. Here we sing for joy and here we sit in silence. Here we listen for a sacred word and here we speak to one another words of comfort and of challenge. Here we encounter all that is holy and sacred both in ourselves and in each other. Here we meet god. It is fitting and proper that these holy walls hold our thoughts this New Year's Eve. It is fitting and proper that this spiritual home offers us sanctuary as we mark the passing of the old and the promise of the new.

As we gather here this day, it is my hope that High Street Church will continue in the coming year to provide for each of us a place of confession, a place of aspiration and a place of accountability.

I speak of CONFESSION not out of some morbid sense of inherent sinfulness. If you glance around the walls of this sanctuary, you will see no confessionals. Our minister doesn't wear priestly robes or act as an intermediary between a judgmental deity and our wicked, sin-ridden souls. We do not regularly engage in corporate recitations of prayers of confession on Sunday mornings, and we do not cleanse either children or adults with water to wash away the stain of Adam's (and Eve's) rebellion. No, confession as I speak of it this day is not related to sinfulness.

I speak of CONFESSION as a reminder that we are a covenant community of imperfect persons. Yes, we affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and yes, we look for the best in each other and expect the best of each other. But no measure of liberal faith or progressive perspective can blot out the fact that we will not always live up to our highest ideals. Yes, even liberals act wrongly and behave badly, and for that we need forgiveness.

Years ago, as a young Baptist lad, I would hear visiting evangelists talk of "church-shoppers", folks who moved their church membership from one congregation to the next until they would get mad about something and join up somewhere else, always looking for the "perfect" church. And over and over again, I heard evangelists speak these words, "Well, for God's sake, if you find the perfect church, don't join it. You'll just screw it up!"

Well, we at High Street have found the perfect church, and it is chock full of screw-ups and foul-ups ... folks just like us.

I speak of CONFESSION because we are fashioning here in this place a safe haven for imperfect souls who are crying out for forgiveness. I speak of CONFESSION because we seek to create here an atmosphere of safety where folks whose lives need healing can find wholeness. I speak of CONFESSION because High Street Church accepts folks just as they are, and calls them to be the best they can be ... and forgives when they cannot.

I speak of ASPIRATION because we have not yet reached perfection, and find ourselves at times slipping away from our highest ideals. I speak of ASPIRATION because confession without the possibility of forgiveness leads only to depression and despair. I speak of ASPIRATION because that which we hold to be sacred and holy calls us to HOPE ... for renewal within ourselves, and for the world in which we live. ASPIRATION and HOPE call us beyond where we are and where we have been, to the promised land of what we can be. ASPIRATION and HOPE reminds us that, in the struggle between the worst in us and the best in us, the best must prevail.

Father Matthew Fox has been for years the major voice for a "creation theology" in the Christian Church. Because his focus was on "original blessing" rather than "original sin" and he refused to knuckle under to the demands of his Roman Catholic order, he was banned from speaking by the Vatican for a year. He finally left the Roman Catholic Church, and is now an Episcopalian priest.

Father Matthew states that the essential religious question is this: "Is the universe a friendly place, or not?" Because of his belief in "original blessing", he answers overwhelmingly in the affirmative. Because of his expansive belief in a God who blesses, Matthew Fox's vision is one of hope for humans and the world in which they live.

This past summer, our Sunday Morning Adult RE class had to opportunity to read and discuss a volume of poetry and essays edited by Paul Rogat Loeb entitled *The Impossible Will Take A Little While – A Citizen's Guide to Hope in a Time of Fear*. Week after week we reveled in story after story of HOPE cancelling out despair, of men and women and children doing what they could with what they had to make their corner of the world a better place. For some of them, the change did not occur during their lifetimes. But like Martin Luther King, Jr., they were able to struggle their way to the mountaintop and peer over into the promised land. And their vision gave them strength, and the promise gave them courage, and they fought on.

I speak of ASPIRATION and HOPE because we live in a world where children go hungry and people sicken and die and nations war against nations and the earth is despoiled of its riches. I speak of ASPIRATION and HOPE because there is so much for our hands to do and so many for our hearts to love, and the world needs stout and hardy souls filled with HOPE to heal its soul and bind its wounds. I speak of ASPIRATION and HOPE because High Street Church has committed itself as individual persons and as a people to a high and lofty mission: "As people of faith, we seek to better ourselves, our community and our world through integrity, justice and HOPE!"

Let no one be discouraged by the belief there is nothing one man or one woman can do against the enormous array of the world's ills, against misery and ignorance,

injustice and violence. ... Few will have the greatness to bend history itself, but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of our generation.

- Robert F. Kennedy

People say, what is the sense of our small effort? They cannot see that we must lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time. A pebble cast into a pond causes ripples that spread in all directions. Each one of our thoughts, words and deeds is like that. No one has the right to sit down and feel hopeless. There's too much work to do.

- Dorothy Day

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

- Margaret Mead

Lastly, I speak of ACCOUNTABILITY because hopes, aspirations and dreams are insufficient in and of themselves. I speak of ACCOUNTABILITY because our dreams need wings and our hope needs hands, and our aspirations call us to action.

High Street Church must be a place of personal and corporate ACCOUNTABILITY, where in the spirit of love we challenge each other to live up to our highest ideals. It is not enough to say what we will do if we never get around to doing it. It is not enough to DREAM if we wake from our dreaming to carry on life as we always do. It is not enough to HOPE if we allow ourselves to become mired in the inertia of despair, and fall by the wayside preoccupied with our liabilities rather than being emboldened by our assets.

ACCOUNTABILITY calls us to the hard work of being open and honest with each other. It means creating an atmosphere where membership in this COVENANT community means something more than "writing our name in the book" and placing a few dollars in the plate. I speak of ACCOUNTABILITY because we need each other terribly, for we cannot do the hard task of world-changing alone. I speak of ACCOUNTABILITY because as individuals we cannot always be trusted to follow through with our promises, no matter how high our ideals and how treasured our values. At times, we need gentle reminders of that greatness which lies deep within us, of that sacred and holy character which shines forth from our eyes and utters forth from our lips in our best moments. I speak of ACCOUNTABILITY because our liberal faith calls for us to move beyond CONFESSION to RENEWAL, and beyond ASPIRATION to ACTION. Only then, can our believing truly be wed to our doing.

So when the supernova comes to get us, we don't want to be disappointed in ourselves. We should hope to be able to say proudly to the supernova, that angel of death, "Hello supernova, we have been expecting you, we know all about you, because in our schools we teach science and not creationism, and so we have been expecting you, everywhere everyone has been expecting you, except Texas. And we would like to say, supernova, in the moment before we are returned by your protean fire to our previous inchoate state, clouds of incandescent atomic vapor, we'd like to declare that

we have tried our best and worked hard to make a good and just and free and peaceful world, a world that is better for our having been here, at least we believe it is.”

– Tony Kushner

In the end of days, when all is said and done, may there at least be the faintest glimmer of memory that in this place, on this spot, there existed a BELOVED COMMUNITY whose dreams for a better world found expression in their everyday lives, and who here found the strength and courage “to create a better tomorrow”.

So may it ever be. Blessed be. Amen.

⌘ Closing Hymn #324

“Where my free spirit onward leads ...”

Where my free spirit onward leads,
well, there shall be my way;
by my own light illumined
I’ve journey night and day;
my age, a time-worn cloak I wear
as once I wore my youth;
I celebrate life’s mystery;
I celebrate death’s truth.

My family is not confined
to mother, mate and child;
but it includes all creatures
be they tame or be they wild;
my family upon this earth
includes all living things
on land or in the ocean deep,
or borne aloft on wings.

The ever-spinning universe,
well, there shall be my home;
I sing and spin within it
as through this life I roam;
eternity is hard to ken
and harder still is this;
a human life when truly seen
is briefer than a kiss.

– Alicia S. Carpenter

⌘ Extinguishing the Chalice

Knowing how quickly the flame of truth might be extinguished, how easily the chalice of fellowship broken, let us be vigilant in our faith, keep peace in our hearts, and make care for one another the watchword of our lives together. So our light shines out ... everywhere ... into the world.

#Closing Words

written by Kendyl Gibbons

There is, finally, only one thing required of us: that is, to take life whole, the sunlight and shadows together; to live the life that is given us with courage and humor and truth.

We have such a little moment out of the vastness of time for all our wondering and loving. Therefore let there be no half-heartedness; rather, let the soul be ardent in its pain, in its yearning, in its praise.

Then shall peace enfold our days, and glory shall not fade from our lives.

Source: 1997 UUMA Worship Materials Collection

The service is ended. Now the true work of the church begins. Go in peace.

#Postlude