

Unitarian Society of Hartford
Already and Not Yet: Some Lessons for Advent
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Prayer

Please come with me now into the space between words,
into the peace of following the breath, that pilot light of the spirit. Breathing in
we receive, breathing out we release. Receiving, releasing.
Release worry and fear. Receive peace.
Release determination to go it alone. Receive communion of souls.
Many and one.

Let Christmas come. Welcome the guest.
Who is the guest? Who is coming? Not Christ, not here.
What splendor, what dayspring, what wisdom is coming here?
What Emmanuel? God with us.

What time is the arrival of the already but not yet?
How welcome what comes, and what has been, and what never was?

How make our house fair, trim the hearth, set the table
for such timelessness?
What fruit bearing virgin wombs are here to hold
that unbearable lightness of being?
What common manger among us might hold the bread of life?

Christmas is coming. Incarnate, in a manger, the jewel in the lotus,
the sacred in the ordinary, in you, in you.
It is you who come bearing majesty
and miracle and mystery. Hail Theotokos. Blessed art thou.

Come in, come here. Come home. Come back. Come one come all.
The greatest show on earth is under this big top.

Amen

A Reading from a play by Ntozake Shaange, entitled:
**For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is
Enuf:**

I waz missin something, something so important, something promised--
a layin on of hands, fingers near my forehead,
strong, cool, movin, makin me whole.
I sat up one nite, wake in a boarding house screamin,
Cryin, the ghost of another woman who waz missin what I waz missin.

I wanted to jump outta my bones & be done with myself . . .
when the only tree I cd see took me up in her branches
held me in the breeze, made me dawn dew that chill at daybreak,
the sun wrapped me up swingin rose light everywhere
the sky laid over me like a million men
I waz cold / I waz burnin up / a child & endlessly weaving garments
for the moon wit my tears.
I found god in myself & i loved her / I loved her fiercely

Homily

Why do I love Advent?

I did not grow up with ceremonies and commemorations.
Flowing robes and seasonably color coded vestments were popery
in the simple worship setting I was weaned on.
Ours was an auditorium not a sanctuary, and a lobby, not a narthex.

No tiffany stained glass - Sea of Galilee scenes in our windows,
but huge panels of abstract gold and purple swirls.
And the 300 voices singing most Sunday mornings did not need
a pipe organ to raise the roof.

As a youth, I visited a Methodist church once.

At some point a child lit a candle from an advent wreath;
And glory filled my soul as they sang a song I did not know:
“As it was in the beginning, tis now, and ever shall be,
world without end. amen, amen.”

Why do I love Advent? The ‘coming’ is not part of my current faith either. I read this by a colleague recently:

“Advent, as a religious season is a low priority for most UU’s.
During these holidays, we are sensitive to the cycling seasons and solstice. We love the light theme, the birth theme, the gift theme. We know divali and St Lucia and posada, but Advent isn’t so cool. We are NOT waiting, anticipating the coming of the Christ child here.”

Why do I love Advent?

I love a brain groove soothing ritual, repeated,
spiraling some profundity into the psyche.

This simple act, lighting candles,
Combined with language explaining the tradition and its import
to millions of people across time,
reminds me that waiting is part of the natural cycle of things,
and reassures me that it will end.

**That our day or month or year or life time on the bridge between
the already and the not yet is normative, and will end.**

We stand today between Thanksgiving and Christmas,
reminded that we are always between... wanting and having,
between innocence and experience, between guessing and knowing,
between love and loss.

We are always on a bridge waiting.

We wait today for another war to end, for wars within ourselves to end.

We wait for others to come... come to their senses, grow up,
do the right thing.

We wait for ourselves to come... to our senses, get our Wits about us,
do the right thing.

Advent suggests that we might as well enjoy the view from the bridge.
That we take a moment and imagine that this liminal space

where we now stand, in some way, holds our destination.

That the place where and when we can't take another step,
Is the place where it comes running toward us-
Resolution, completion, peace, the far shore catapults toward us,
And we know Emmanuel, God with us, wrapped in grace filled drag
as Santa Claus, or a blond blue eyed Arab shepherd boy prince.

Whatever liminal spot we inhabit on the bridge between the times
Can be for that moment the end time, the completion.

We all are missing something, something promised, some laying on of hands in
blessing, anointing, empowerment, comfort.
And we all are held by a tree's branches, covered by the sky,
warmed and lit by sun and moon.

There is that lastingness of sorrow here on the bridge, and...
There are tender hands laid on us in recognition, appreciation.
Hands cupped and bringing a way to give the love in our hearts,
Bringing a job that is a vocation, bringing the acceptance of our families,
Bringing a child of our own, bringing whatever we've been promised.

God comes. We find god in ourselves, and love her fiercely.
She comes in branches, sun, and sky, but best of all is when
She comes in human face. Maybe Jesus...maybe Wilson.

This is Wilson-- one of my sustaining images of the holy,
the god in myself who I love fiercely.

In the film Castaway, a Fed Ex plane crashes in the ocean, and Tom Hanks
washes up on a desert island. Every few days more boxes float to shore
from the wreckage of the plane,
and Hanks gets all kinds of useless things ...like a pair of ice skates.

One day he tears into a box which has floated up, to find a volley ball.
In a fit of exasperation, Hanks, whose hand is bleeding
for some reason I can't recall, picks up the ball and hurls it
across the beach.

Later in a more reflective mood, he picks up the ball and stares
at the bloody handprint.

Then he spits on his finger and wipes the blood off the ball
in a spot or two and creates a face...
from his own blood, spit, anger, insight...a face, which becomes
Hanks' only companion for several years on this island.

Wilson, as he is named, watches over Hanks as he eats and sleeps
and yearns for his lost fiancé and even as he tries to commit suicide.
After years of monologue conversation with Wilson,
Hanks determines to escape the island.

He builds a raft, attaches Wilson to the front,
and after a grueling battle, breaks through the off shore waves
to the harrowing open sea where he will wait..... to die or be rescued.

Then Hanks discovers that Wilson has disappeared in the waves.
I will never forget his grief struck screams: "Wilson, Wilson!"
--expressing his conviction that this one last loss
of beloved friend and champion will be the end of him.

Grief experts say that the loss of a beloved ideal, like ones religious faith, ranks
equal to the grief at losing a child.

It's a grief we often sublimate and express as anger, rejection,
vicious skepticism about the worth of that which we have lost. Grief.

Wilson—a great god image. He comes, floating up unrequested,
in some outlandish and inappropriate garb.
We stamp him with our own imprimatur, an image of god we make
with our own blood, need, and creativity.
Looking at him, talking to him, we find, in ourselves, all we need,
to do what we have to do.
And when his work is done, he floats away, and if we're lucky
another god image comes.

My friends. Life is hard.
Why should we not treat ourselves with the same kindness
we show children? We allow them Santa Claus.
Why should you and I stoically refuse symbols and stories that could
Make the winter wait more bearable, more beautiful.

I invite you to join me this season, just this very brief month,

As we share the bridge across forever, and let us
set aside skepticism no matter how hard earned, set aside
the education, experience, and sophistication that deprives us of

warm Santa garb, that resists soft glow of altar candle,
that won't look to the Star in the sky,
won't listen to angels singing peace on earth.
Just this very brief month let us see differently.
Let Christmas come, let Christmas come.

Benediction

Unlock the door of your heart - Enter the gentleness within.
Open the window of your soul - Breathe in the season of miracles.
No matter how far you've traveled, It's time to come home now,
Where Christmas abounds in love. Welcome, everything!
Welcome, alike what has been, and what never was.
Welcome what was, what never was, and.....
Welcome what we hope may be,
to your shelter underneath the holly,
to your places round the Christmas fire,
where what is sits open-hearted!