

**Chalice Lighting**

- the Gagne Family

My name is Becka Gagne, and this is my family, Oceanna and Rowan and Jeff. This morning, at Sara's request, we gladly light this chalice, a symbol of our faith, and we name our thanks for the return of the summer sun, and for its *light* that grows our garden, and for the energy it has given & nurtured in us to have just managed to move into the new house that we've been building for last five years.

For the light, we are grateful!

Oceanna, my daughter, will now read words written by Unitarian Universalist minister, Becky Edminston. After she reads each phrase, you are invited to respond aloud together by saying, WE ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

WE ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

When we share another person's pain, or offer a comforting ear to a friend in need,

*We are the light of the world.*

When we give bread to the hungry, or support ways to house the homeless,

*We are the light of the world.*

When we fight temptations to wrong-doings within ourselves, and we treat our neighbors with respect,

*We are the light of the world.*

When we try to overcome differences with understanding, and solve conflict with peaceful means,

*We are the light of the world.*

When we look for the good in other people, in ourselves,

*We are the light of the world.*

When we do not stay quiet in the face of prejudice, but speak our minds firmly and gently,

*We are the light of the world.*

When we fight despair within ourselves and side with hope,

*We are the light of the world.*

When we use our powers justly and in service of love for humanity,

*We are the light of the world.*

We are the light of the world.

**Reading**

There are two readings this morning; the first is by a local poet now deceased, Judi Beach. Judi lived in Sedgwick and was much beloved by her friends and fellow writers.

## No Matter How Dark

There is always the possibility  
of light. The deepest forest spills it  
leaf to leaf like rain, falling.

At the far end of the tunnel,  
light dilates as you drive closer  
and darkness falls behind.

No matter how dark, the light  
finds a way in. The night of no moon  
is sequined with stars.

Even in *this* blackness,  
this treading in ink,  
this ebony residence,  
this vulnerability to the opiate of despair  
has light, though your eyes  
have not yet adjusted to it, looking  
as they do, to the well-lighted past.

There is always a time of blindness  
moving from bright into black.

Remember, the sun  
is making its way to you, and remember  
how far light must travel. Somewhere  
the sun is rising and somewhere  
it is high in the sky. In *your* house  
this night, this fortnight or year,  
the sun will find the loose clapboard,  
the east-face of your sorrow.  
*Your* world is turning toward the light.

The second reading is a brief passage written by the 13<sup>th</sup> century Sufi poet, Hafiz.

Even  
after  
all this time,  
the Sun never says  
to the earth,  
“You owe me.”

Look  
what happens  
with a love like that.

It lights the whole world.

## Sermon

On Monday, and then again *Friday* morning of this past week, while sitting at the kitchen table in our home, cups of coffee in hand, my husband, Dan & I had a conversation very much like one we'd had at *exactly* this time last year. The conversation went something like this: “Okay Dan, tell me again, what does the Summer Solstice mean? What exactly is happening with the earth and the sun that we end up having the longest day of the year?”

I have to say, I'm grateful that Dan is a patient and kind man. His first response was to draw this diagram on the back of a piece of scrap paper; a hand written & illustrated explanation of the orbit of the earth around the sun, complete with notes in the margins about how this impacts the summer season in our northern hemisphere. My plan is to keep it in my folder for quick reference when I prepare next year's service & sermon.

Four days later, when I asked a similar question out loud, still trying to wrap my mind around the physical origins of the light, and the solstice, and what it all means in our lives, Dan resorted to creating a 3-D model of what happens this time of year. Holding this small purple, plastic ball in his hand, this particular seem pointed toward an imaginary North Star on the ceiling, Dan circled this ball—a representation of the earth—around our kitchen table, on the center of which was an orange, doubling as the sun. As he did this, and he explained it all over again with the assistance of visual aids, I finally got it again, I remembered what I suspect I first learned in my 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade science class; that at this very moment in time, the northern hemisphere of our beloved planet Earth is tilted toward the sun while rotating on its axis; and that this, of course, means we are bathed here in more light—in 15 ½ hours of light on the actual day of the Solstice; and that the sun, when we see it in the sky, does, in fact, appear to stand still, the roots of the word Solstice meaning just that, sun standing still.

I suspect I may be alone among you in my need for such rudimentary aides to illustrate and make clear the workings of the sun in this season—spatial relations has never been my forte and I can live with that—but I know, I'm not alone in sensing and feeling the power of light and sun in our lives, precisely at this time of year.

In a piece he wrote entitled *Sun Worship*, the Rev. Rob McCall, who serves as minister at the Blue Hill Congregational Church, makes this point, too, of our love and dependence on sun and light when he writes the following: “It is easy to see why sun-worship is still the world's oldest religion. When the sun rises to its highest point in the sky and shines fully on us, we are truly re-created, we become new beings.

The deep down cold is driven from our bones...and we feel at home once again in a [more] friendly world, far removed from the cold, gray, grudging sun of mid-winter...”

He goes on, “[This time of year,] even the daisies turn their bright faces to follow the sun as it moves across the sky, so devout is their worship and profound their affection for the Source of all Life and all Light. Small creatures, like the numerous kinds of bees, begin their lively motions at dawn and keep busy until dusk when they retire again, plump-full and satisfied with their days work upon the glowing flowers...

[Do you] See [these days] how every possible shape, color and fragrance of the cosmos is embodied in the flowers, leaves and branches of plants[?] [Do you] See how every possible motion, motive, sense and sound from the whole realm of Nature is...elegantly expressed by the insects, birds and wild creatures[?]”

“We walk,” he concludes, “in a wholly other world these days, a world of mercy and healing. A holy host of blooming, buzzing, beaming beings bless[es] us with the kind ministrations of their actual, mortal love for life. [In this way,] we are redeemed to the depths of our ragged souls. We come all apart. We are knitted back together. We are made whole again...and it is great.

Now, where did I put [that] bug-dope?”

(McCall, Great Speckled Bird: Confessions of a Village Preacher, pg. 30)

For centuries, people the whole world over have celebrated the sun, and the longest day, with revelry and fires, with rituals and fun, ancient invocations spoken to swell the fruits and ripen the grain in this season. The Celts were known to hang lamps, and decorate their houses with roses & other flowers in these days, rituals still practiced by some.

Churches were regularly decorated with fennel and birch, bonfires and twilight processions and pageants celebrated by dancers, all of this, a part and parcel of humanity's need throughout the ages, to celebrate the power of light and the sun's warmth, as we dared to whisper and chant grateful prayers aloud, together, that the crops be good and plentiful again, knowing our very lives depend on it.

The Summer Solstice or Midsummer's Day as it's called by some, is a time to pause, to name our appreciation of the warmth & power of light, to savor and store its energy in ourselves, our very beings, to remember to be here, now, knowing all the while that darkness and cold will begin to return, all of this, the yin and yang, the give and take, a part of the natural cycles of life and living, of the wheel forever turning, of birth and growth and death and re-birth.

Albert Camus' words come again to my mind in this season: “In the depth of winter, I finally learned that within me, there lay an invincible summer.”

Whatever struggle we face, we might imagine him saying, whatever difficulty or great sadness we are made to endure, whatever profound sorrow or confusion colors our days, we must still try and remember and feel in our being that there is a light at work inside of us; a light that readily lives and breathes in the natural world in this season; a light strong & bright enough to root itself in even the darkest of places, in our hearts and minds, in our souls or spirits as we understand them; a light that

does not abandon or forsake us, especially in our times of greatest need.

This primordial, divine light, referred to by some as love - it calms and steadies us, it helps us to believe and feel that any tender, tentative shoots of hope & promise that we need in our lives can and will take hold inside of us again; that a willingness and restored kind of faith is possible once more; that all is not lost; that we do remain connected, companioned through it all, held and helped by this love and light greater than ourselves, by this sense of unity found in all living things, that weaves us ever and always together.

*Remember*, writes the poet, Judi Beach,  
*Remember, the sun is making its way to you,*  
*and remember how far light must travel.*  
*Somewhere the sun is rising, and somewhere,*  
*it is high in the sky. In your house, this night,*  
*this fortnight or year, the sun will find the*  
*loose clapboard, the east-face of your sorrow.*  
*[Remember,] Your world, is turning toward the light.*

I was in New Orleans, on a Service Trip with two of our youth and seven others from the Belfast & Bangor churches, when I first heard the responsive reading about light that Oceanna read for us earlier, as part of the words for this morning's chalice lighting. At that time, I was sitting with our group, on the cement floor of the library in the First Unitarian Church of NO, the place where we stayed for seven nights, with 50 or so others, while we volunteered each day to assist with continuing Hurricane Recovery efforts.

While we were there, we painted a house together, and planted gardens, and we sorted a truck load or two of non-perishable food items into more manageably sized boxes at one of the biggest, non-profit, Food Distribution Center that services food banks & other helping organizations throughout all of southern Louisiana.

That night, as was our custom each night after working all day, we gathered for worship; always a simple service created & led by a small team of three youth who took turns doing this during the week.

On the night I'm speaking of, Caleigh Grogean, a youth from Bangor, read aloud the lines we heard, and together, the rest of us responded in turn, we are the light of the world,

That evening, tired as we all were from working all day, it was as if the words we said and heard, took on a new meaning; as if our actions together made real again the promise of believing and feeling like we were a part of restoring a sense of light in the world; light, not in terms of the warmth and heat of the sun in this season, but a related light; light in terms of the energy we felt in ourselves; energy that we embodied and made real in the world, by choosing to be a part of doing good and meaning-filled

work and service; a light we might each feel, by choosing to do right things; by taking certain risks in order to live our lives, guided by the values we espouse; by doing this, knowing & believing again that it's our responsibility, as faithful people, to nurture an awareness in ourselves and each other that we are all related; that we are all responsible for the well-being of each other and all others, especially those who are suffering; those whose lives are diminished or destroyed by circumstances often beyond their control; circumstances that jeopardize their well-being, their sense of security & safety in this world.

Today, with you, I remember, too, in this season of the sun, that Bishop Gene Robinson is someone who knows what it means, what's really asked or required of us if we are truly to be and nurture the light of the world. Bishop Robinson, is the first openly gay, Episcopal priest who was consecrated as Bishop in that denomination in NH in June of 2003.

On a Wednesday evening, two weeks or so ago, Bishop Robinson was here in Ellsworth at the Grand to introduce a new documentary film about his life, and to field question from the audience; this was a well-attended event sponsored by folks working hard on the ground in our state to do all they can to insure that the Marriage Equality initiative that will be on our ballot this fall, will pass.

It was especially during the Q & A period of this event, that I felt like I was in the presence of a holy man; not holy in terms of being with someone who was perfect, or other worldly, somehow beyond the reach & understanding of most of us, but rather holy in terms of being in the presence of a man who lives his life with a deep & abiding sense of dignity; guided again and again in all that he says and does by his faithful & disciplined commitment to act, and speak, and put himself out there; to be an ambassador of love and justice and hope during difficult and trying times.

That night, Bishop Robinson told us he's received death threats—that he even necessarily wore a bullet proof vest to the celebration of his consecration as bishop. These past nine years, he said he's been regularly censured by bishops within the leadership ranks of the larger communion of Anglican Churches; that he's been banned from attended denominational gatherings, and demeaned and dismissed by colleagues who believe his life-style, his marriage now to his life partner, Mark, that all of this, is an abomination in the sight of God and the church.

When he was asked how he dealt with all of this, and maybe especially with supposedly well-meaning colleagues who wanted to, but just couldn't get on board with supporting him or any other gay bishops, or the notion of allowing for same-sex marriages in their church, a measure which actually passed in June of 2009, Bishop Robinson responded by telling us a story to illustrate where he tries to come from.

He told us he knows there are two Episcopal Bishops, both serving African countries that have said hateful and hurtful things about him; things to the effect that when he became Bishop, the Devil was let into their Church, and that gays are and will always be, less worthy than dogs. Bishop Robinson's response to these statements has not been to strike back at these men with the same vitriol & hate, but

instead to say in as many public places as he can, hoping word will get back to them, that he believes that they will all meet again one day in heaven, the very suggestion of which he's sure makes them crazy.

“Whatever anyone else says about me, whatever lies and hatred they spread about who I am, and how I live my life, I know,” he said to us, “that I am called to see and treat them, and every other person, as a child of God; that mine is the prayerful & disciplined work of nurturing such a capacity for love & forgiveness in myself and in our congregations and the world.”

It was Mother Theresa, who said that

*There is a light in this world, a healing spirit more powerful than any darkness we may encounter. Sometimes, we lose sight of this . . . when there is suffering and too much pain. But then suddenly, the spirit [emerges] again through the lives of ordinary people who hear a call and answer in extraordinary ways.*

*There is a light in this world...*

In this community, ours is the sacred and life saving work of nurturing this light in ourselves and each other; of recognizing and celebrating it in the beautiful world around us, and in the faithful work and ministries of others who dare to respond to injustices of every size and shape by building a sense of the beloved community, here and now, among a diverse, hungry and determined people.

*There is a light in this world...*

We are, and become a part of it, when we help each other; when we manage to find our way back to living with a sense of gratitude, guided by our commitments to speak and act on behalf of love and justice, to be the ordinary people we are, who hear Love's call, and who embark in doing the extraordinary things we can.

*Even after all this time, the Sufi poet Hafiz reminds us, the sun never says “You owe me!” to the earth, and look what happens with a love like that... It lights the whole sky.*

Amen & blessed be.