

Sermon: Nature's Gift of Rest and Play-Winter Solstice

For: All Faiths Unitarian Congregation

By: CL Minister Alberita Johnson Dec. 17, 2023

Many hunker down for the long winter nights, while simultaneously celebrating the symbolic death and rebirth of the sun and the turning of the seasons. Today as we celebrate with our Children and Youth, let us explore this symbolism.

Who here has played hide and seek? I am sure we all have. Did you know sometimes our greatest gifts are hidden and I mean hidden within, it is up to us and I mean not just you, but those connected to you to help you realize those gifts into being. It was a time we all experienced complete darkness, received nourishment and safety from within. And many of us seek to return to a space like that.

Some call it the cave, like a Man Cave, others may call it a she-shed. But why do we seek these places to go, and or hide? Perhaps it is the place of meditation, a place of stillness, a place of peace, warmth and security. I like to call it returning to the womb where darkness was the light.

Today we look to the Winter Solstice which is 4 days from now, 12/21/2023, a celebratory tradition that is set in antiquity. It is a pagan tradition that is believed to have been honored and celebrated since the Neolithic period, according to History.com the home of the History Channel. Which states that during the last part of the Stone Age, beginning about 10,200 BC monuments have been found in Ireland and Scotland that are aligned with the sunrise on Winter Solstice.

It may sound unbelievable for something that has been marked with various events and traditions for over 10,000 years to be new to some folks. Well if you have not heard about it, today is the day to learn something new.

First let me say there are two solstices annually, the one we will discuss today is the Winter Solstice. The time of the longest night and shortest day of the year. The reverse is true in the Southern Hemisphere, where the shortest day of the year occurs in June.) And after the winter solstice, days start to become longer and nights shorter as spring approaches.

The celebration you see is to honor the return of the light.

Which is a gift in and of itself, indicating a shift from the dark short days of the cold winter months to the longer days of light as the earth turns to spring and warmth of the summer months.

You see in winter, it appears that even nature herself takes a respite, trees shed their leaves, grass turns brown, the skies become overcast, the rain freezes and becomes snow and ice and the ground or earth mother does not yield her fruits and seeds. And

several species of animals and birds go into hibernation. All of these occurrences do not indicate the end, instead it is a period of respite, a gift in a way of rest, a time to slow down, to reflect on your book of life, to turn your life pages slowly. And yes, some of us seek to remove or avoid the winter cold months.

In fact many of us here today are transplants from other states, myself from the northeast, while others here are what we call snowbirds, those who find their way here to stay during the cold winter months and experience the warm winters we have here in southwest Florida.

And the gift of the warmer weather here brings not just physical comfort but also the gift of reuniting with our friends, family and neighbors who are snowbirds. For me to see them again is also a gift. Of course if you are a snowbird you may not be aware of your presence as a gift but it is. We get to see you again to behold your being once again, to touch you and hang out with you. Reminds me of a song by Peaches and Herb that goes something like this...

Reunited, and it feels so good
 Reunited, 'cause we understood
 There's one perfect fit
 And, sugar, this one is it
 We both are so excited
 'Cause we're reunited, hey, hey.

There is glow in the eyes, smiling faces and sweet embraces are a gift, a gift from the heart. It is our blessing to have our snowbirds return year after year.

Today as we celebrate the return of the sun and longer days and shorter nights, let us accept it like a gift from the universe of which we are all a part.

Our children and youth program director, along with the children, are offering us a gift this morning, a gift from their heart to your heart. We may not have many with us this morning, but we are grateful for them, they are our gift. And we are theirs, we provide a safe, fun and inclusive space for them while sharing the respect and dignity afforded to them as little Unitarian Universalists, they too have inherent worth and dignity regardless of their age, race, class, or sex even orientation which is one of our guiding principles as UU's.

This morning our C&Y shared the first stanza of the Little Drummer Boy, who has been invited to come see the new born boy king. One might think this invitation is the best gift ever, for a little person, a little boy...going to see a new born king. Think of it as a young boy going to see a baby boy who is born a king. Talk about excitement.

This little fella is aware that he is invited and he would like to give honor where honor is due. Now I do not know about you all, but I have never gone to visit a king, and I as the little drummer boy realizes it would be in order to bring a gift, but who really knows what gifts to bring a king.

He is clear that he does not have much, but would like to give. He feels he does not have anything to give. Oh my friends but he has, he has a gift from the heart. He did not purchase it, or get it from someone, or find it. Instead he possesses a rhythm, a beat that he can offer. It comes from within him, not from without.

Can you hear it, Pa rum pum, pum, pum.

What gifts do you have from your heart, are you creative like Annley, a singer like Joan, and Carlos. Do you have a story, a poem that you wrote or a favorite that has touched your heart. Perhaps a warm embrace, a phone call or card that was blank inside but is now filled with kind words of cheer. Do you knit, crochet, or sew, can you pick up someone who needs a ride.

The little drummer boy expresses his poverty, he does not hide his circumstance, but even as a youth he searches himself, his heart and finds a gift that is fit to give a King.

This morning as I close, do you have a little king, queen, queer person that can benefit from a gift from your heart? A gift that expresses your love and appreciation of someone or something.

The little drummer boy received an invitation to come see, come experience, what many Christians throughout the world believe is the Christ child, the Messiah some call him the Light of the World. What better time of year to celebrate the birth, than this time of year.

The pagans of yesteryear, celebrated and honored the return of the sun annually. And did you know the Christians and the Pagans have an unwritten covenant, the Christians celebrate Jesus as the Light of the world, while the Pagans celebrate the sun, the light of the same world. During the same time of year every year, the two run side by side as a gift to us. One is by belief, the other is by acceptance. Let us this morning find acceptance in our heart and as a gift to one another. Let us receive the gift of the return of the sun and respect those who receive not only the gift of the s u n, but also those who receive the gift of the s o n. It takes nothing from you, but instead is a gift from your heart. And we know that giving is reciprocal.

So play your drums, sing your songs, enjoy each other and share your love.