**“Dark and Light: the Turning of the Year”**

**The Unitarian Church of Lincoln**

**December 13, 2015**

Now in the winter twilight, chant and flame;

Facing a common center, strength we claim.

(“Solstice Chant” by Nancy Starr)

***Gathering of the Community***

**Ringing of Bell**

**Welcome and Announcements**

**Prelude:**

***Stating Intent***

**Chalice Lighting:** by G. Woods

read by LauraLee Woodruff

**Opening words:** by G. Woods

**Hymn:** #55 “”Dark of Winter”

***Time for all ages***

**Story:** “Sun Man”

**Children’s Song:** #361 “Enter, Rejoice, and Come in”

***Deepening***

**Reading:** by Susan Wulfkuehler Sanford

**Musical Interlude:**

**Sermon: “**Dark and Light: the Turning of the Year**”**

**Offering and Offertory:**

***Returning to Community: the work of the people***

**Sharing of Joys and Sorrows**

**Meditation**

***Integration and Release***

**Postlude:**

**Closing Hymn:** #56 “Bells in the High Tower”

**Closing Words:** “The Shortest Day” by Susan Cooper

***Stating Intent***

**Chalice Lighting:** by G. Woods

read by LauraLee Woodruff

Stop! Just for a moment.

Consider who we are and who we are called to be

by our chosen faith:

Seekers willing to move into darkness

To find light,

Blessers willing to carry light

to a dark and weary world.

We do not do this alone.

We do it in community.

So let us kindle our flame as a reminder.

**Opening words:** by G. Woods

In just over a week’s time, we experience the Winter Solstice, the longest night of the year. We gather the way our ancestors did at this dark time to honor the darkness and to call the light to return. They gathered in circles to keep vigil and await the return of the sun. Today we come to honor and celebrate the circle of the sun in its circle of the year, dark to light, light to dark.

In this culture we've lost touch with the gifts of darkness, doing everything we can to push it away. Yet all life begins in darkness, animal life in the darkness of an egg or in the womb of its mother, plant life in the darkness of the earth underground.

So let us now consider the gifts of dark and light.

**Hymn:** #55 “”Dark of Winter”

***Time for all ages***

**Story:** “Sun Man”

**Children’s Song:** #361 “Enter, Rejoice, and Come in”

***Deepening***

**Reading:** by Susan Wulfkuehler Sanford

This is the season of long, dark nights. Cosmologist Brian Swimme says that night is the time when the news of the universe can be more deeply attended to. In the peace of the night, something immense can stir in the depths of a listener’s heart. The dark, cold winter is a time when many creatures retreat and sleep long, dreaming deeply. It’s a time when seeds lie waiting in the Earth and plants send their roots down toward bedrock, seeking the basic nutrients they will need later. At this time of year the basic elements of new growth in us can be found deeply buried within. We invite you to go deeper into this gift of the darkness through silent reflection during the musical interlude.

**Musical Interlude:**

**Sermon: “**Dark and Light: the Turning of the Year**”**

Dark and Light, Light and Dark! I remember once hearing a radio psychologist speak of this time of year, saying, “Basically this time of year is difficult because most human beings are afraid of the dark.” I wish I could more properly attribute this quote, but I was riding in a car and did not trust myself to write it down and keep the car in safe driving order. I continue to honor this reality.

How did human beings of western culture become so polarized? How do light and dark really serve us? And what have we at our disposal to deal with those things that frighten us and/or wear our resources thin? This seems like a time of year to consider these issues more deeply – or not, in which case you could take a nice nap through the next twenty minutes. I can also suggest reading the hymnbook through if that is your cup of tea. I have no delusions about my “deathless prose.”

Back to the first question: How did human beings of western culture become so polarized? Of course there are may theories, some as basic as “We have two hands, two ears, two eyes, etc.” - but they work in tandum, not in opposition. They collaborate to render us more successful.

Then there is the theory that our polarization goes back to the basics of mathematics: 1/0, on/off, etc. Computer geeks love this one.

Curious, I discovered an historian, Gerda Lerner, who thoroughly explored the sociological and cultural roots of polarization and patriarchy back to the Aryans of the Russian Steppes. In her ground-breaking book, *The Creation of Patriarchy,* She follows the very early migration of these people from the steppes, down through Turkey and into the ancient near east (where everyone is still fighting over land and resources), long before the Babylonian empire existed in that part of the world.

Those Aryans brought with them the notion of male superiority and female inferiority, a creation story that became a model for the Genesis story of the Jews, belief that humans could “own” property – both human and land, and, probably most affecting, divisions into good and evil, black and white, a Prince of Darkness and a Prince of Light, angels and demons, and heaven and hell.

The Jews knew nothing of these notions until a large portion of them were carted off to Babylon in the Great Exile, but they were quick studies and came back to the faithful remnant who remained in what was left of Israel and Judeah with all of these ideas and a desire to replicate it to their liking. For this reason I maintain that the whole Hebrew scripture is an argument that the Jews should own the land of Israel, not the Phoenicians (read that Palestinians who built the cities first and maintained commerce through a large part of that world up through the Spanish peninsula). Odd how we remember what serves us best. Anyway, Gerda Lerner makes a compelling and well-documented case for this theory, if you care to check it out. So far it makes the most sense to me.

Second question: How do light and dark really serve us? Up until the creation of fires, oil lamps, and electric light, most human beings lived with the rhythms of the planet, responding to the cycles of the sun, resting more in the darker time of the year and being more active in the warmer, lighter time of the year. This served the development of agriculture and kept more people alive through not going into the dark unknown.

Therefore we often forget that we need rest and refreshment in these days when electricity allows us to be up all day and all night in even the darkest of climes. Recent studies have shown that not enough sleep creates fuzzy-thinking and makes us fat, simplistically stated, by not allowing our hormones to reset as they naturally would and should with enough rest.So we need the dark time physiologically, if nothing else – but wait, there’s more!

Taking time to rest, be silent, meditate in a less stimulating environment with fewer artificial lights also allows our creativity to blossom. I find this so every time I take a vacation. As Anne Morrow Lindbergh observes in *A Gift from the Sea,* it is only after a week of slowing down and spending time with the rhythms of nature that her poetry truly returns. I have found that to be so in my own experience of winter breaks and summer vacations. We need the times of rest, relaxation, and moving into quiet darkness.

What about the last question: “What have we at our disposal to deal with those things that frighten us and/or wear our resources thin? This is where I get all theological on you, or as I like to say, “ultimological,” exploring what is ultimate to our living wisely and well – so far as we may.

I will be addressing this in far more detail on January 3, but let me just say for now: Most of you probably already know the answer to this question for your self, if not for others. For some of you it is music, for others it is attending to nature in a plethora of ways, for others it is physical activity, others may need to listen deeply within through meditation and devotion to the best things in one’s life. These are but a few of the resources we have and use, many times without conscious thought. In every case, we are connecting more deeply with our own inner knowing and, dare I say it, a larger energy/consciousness that Jung calls the collective conscious, Alfred North Whitehead calls, the “divine lure toward greater intensity and harmony, *The Tao* chooses not to name, and many specific religions call g-d or good.

As darkness surrounds us during this turning of the year, we may fear it (as the psychologist said), or we may embrace it as a natural gift of the incredible planet we inhabit. If we choose to embrace this time of quiet, rest, and embrace the opportunity to re-connect with our own Source, we may yet find the inspiration, the wisdom, and the energy to save a little portion of our war-torn and hurting world.

Which leads me to final brief thought, a coda to this movement through time: Paradoxically, many of us come to understand through practice with the dark and light, that the Taoists and certain Native Americans are correct: that going into the dark, going deeply despite fear and trepidation, almost inevitably leads back to light, hence the yin/yang, that magnificent symbol of the dance of dark and light/light and dark.

I close with a poem excerpted from *The Late Hour* by Mark Strand:

**The Coming of Light**

Even this late it happens:

the coming of love, the coming of light.

You wake and the candles are lit as if by themselves,

stars gather, dreams pour into your pillows,

sending up warm bouquets of air.

Even this late the bones of the body shine

and tomorrow’s dust flares into breath.

My seasonal wish for you: May you find the time, the rest, the peace, that allow you to explore the dark in your own life, come to possess it, and honor its gifts for your wholeness, with respect, with responsibility, and with relish for the process.

So Be It! Blessed Be!

**Offering and Offertory:**

***Returning to Community: the work of the people***

**Sharing of Joys and Sorrows**

**Meditation**

***Integration and Release***

**Closing Hymn:** #56 “Bells in the High Tower”

**Postlude:**

**Closing Words:** “The Shortest Day” by Susan Cooper

So the shortest day came,

And the year died,

And everywhere

Down the centuries

Of the snow white world

Came people –

Singing –

Dancing –

To drive the dark away.

They lighted candles in the winter tree.

They hung their houses with evergreen.

They burned beseeching fires all night long

To keep the year alive.

And when the new day’s sunshine

Blazed awake, they shouted,

Reveling.

Through all across the ages

You can hear them,

Echoing behind us.

Listen!

All the long echoes

Sing the same delight

This shortest day

As promise wakens in the sleeping land.

They carol,

Feast,

give thanks,

And dearly love their friends

And hope for peace.

And so do we:

Here, now, this year

Welcome Yule!

WELCOME YULE!