



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York

“It Is Better to Light a Candle: Luminescence and Imbolc”

Delivered 12 February 2023

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“there’s still someone you are longing to see
someone who startles you with simple pleasure
just because they exist
even now

we can anticipate harvest
be shocked by the thunderclap, the storm
laugh at the abundance of our grief
and our earnest attempt to avoid the inevitable

we are a delight
we could be another’s blessing
with our brief and epic lives
where every day
we are given the option
of love”

Every day we are given the option of love! [These words](#) from adrienne maree brown literally leapt off the page at me, from her book *Fables and Spells*, because I feel like that’s what we need right now. A few fables, a few spells.

This place in the year is one that often feels low for me. Although the days are getting longer, the time of grayness, of being inside, of increasing time for both rest and restlessness have started to exert a palpable drag on my energy and personal resources. Today, we have taken a look at an ancient holiday and a new one, that lead us to examine what is beginning to stir in the world.

Imbolc, in the Pagan tradition, is the holiday marking the midway point between the Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox - that was on February 1. It is often associated also with Candlemas, February 2, a Christian celebration of the sanctification of Mary 40 days after the birth of Jesus. Both of these holidays have lore around weather prediction, that took root in Germanic culture and traveled here, to Pennsylvania, to become our modern tradition of Groundhog Day. All these traditions are forward focused - what is coming for us? Spring is coming for us! Our hearts race with delight to see the greening come again. We want to hear the fables, the stories told again and again - the Earth is turning. The days are growing longer. Deep within the ground, seeds are preparing for days long enough to allow them to bloom and grow.

Luminescence, our new Unitarian Universalist holiday, is not placed in a specific spot on the calendar, but sometimes gets put into February because of its separation from other major holidays. Now this holiday hasn't gained too much ground in areas outside of the Pacific Region of the UUA, having originated in California. The idea of a new holiday, of weaving a new spell without a history of fables upholding it, is a bold endeavor. Will it succeed? Will this seed ultimately grow and bear fruit?

Time, and the turning of the wheel of the year, will tell us. Though we may take time to dwell in the past, though we may dream about the future, the movement of the seasons, the movement of the heavens, will ground us again and again in the present moment.

There's a bit of a spell in our chalice lighting [reading](#) this morning from Clint Smith, a wonderful poet who also happens to be an excellent long-form journalist writing for *The Atlantic* - if you haven't read his book *How the Word is Passed* on the legacy of slavery in the United States, I can't recommend it highly enough. But poetry, you see, is where the spells lie - like Smith's calling our attention to all that we carry with us:

"[...] there is always a streak of our past

trailing closely behind us
like a smattering of obstinate memories.

Even when we enter a new atmosphere,
become subsumed in flames, turn to dust,

lose ourselves in the wind, and scatter
the surface of all that rests beneath us,

we bring a part of where we are from
to every place we go.”

Every one of us brings with us part of where we are from. Maybe for you, that’s a strictly Christian upbringing. Maybe before you came to UUCYork, you’d never darkened the door of a church in your life. Maybe you are coming with uncertainty or confusion. Maybe you are also here today with a touch of seasonal depression, maybe you bring with you a sense of anticipation for things to come, maybe you feel trepidation about what the future holds.

And yet here you are. Here we are. We have lit candles for ancient traditions, and for new ones. We have lit candles to honor the memory of those loved, those lost. We have lit candles by which to name our deepest joys and to reflect the light of our anger, our sorrow.

A lit candle invites wonder. A flickering flame, so different from the harsh overhead of fluorescent lights, the light of flames is the same light that has illuminated us all for time out of mind. The origin of the word candle is from the Latin *candela*, which means “to shine.”

In Clint Smith’s poem, we can reflect on the wonder of a shooting star, a passing meteor, reflecting how much we carry with us - and how gloriously that can blaze.

In adrienne maree brown's spell, we can reflect on the beauty of our lives - where we can anticipate the harvest and still be shocked by a storm, and where we can remember that we are light.

“we are a delight
we could be another's blessing
with our brief and epic lives
where every day
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of love”

We have celebrated with song and music, with movement and words. We have considered the past and the future. Let us never forget that each day, each present, each now - we can be another's blessing. Each day, we are given the option of love.

So may it be.