



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York

“Welcome, Ostara! Welcome, Spring!”

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One year ago, on the third Sunday in March, we here at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York returned to our sanctuary, opened our doors to in-person worship for the first time since...the third Sunday in March, 2020, at the uncertain onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have described an entire wheel of the year since then.

The spring equinox, that moment when the tilt of the Earth on its axis brings the planet in direct perpendicular relationship with the rays of the sun, will occur tomorrow at 5:24 p.m., Eastern Daylight Time. The sun will rise directly in the East and the sun will set directly in the west. In the Southern Hemisphere this will herald the longer nights and shorter days, but here in the Northern Hemisphere we have been waiting and sensing and knowing that spring is coming. The longer days. That scent on the wind, the sound of that wind, the tiny buds and blossoms that begin to make their way into the world. Some of them grow and thrive, some of them are ripped away because spring doesn't simply arrive all at once. The equinox moment signals spring, but it is NOT spring. Spring is a process.

Unitarian Universalism names many sources to our faith tradition - the pathways of the Abrahamic faiths, the direct experience of mystery and wonder, all the information our senses and our science bring to us - but it is at these times of shifting, of process, of change, when I reflect most deeply on the Earth centered traditions that are also a part of our heritage. This is why I am so glad that our Weeping Beech group is here to support those who feel most

called to that particular spiritual path, and why I am glad that we began this morning by calling the corners. We welcome the guardians of the directions, we welcome the many faceted experiences of the divine, we welcome the shifting of night and day, of dark and light, of cold and warm. We welcome the joy and the heartache that the processes of the world bring to us, for change is inevitable. Change is constant. Change is life and the ground of all being.

The wheel of the year describes eight holidays, two solstices, two equinoxes, and four at the midway points between those times. This draws a pattern of consistency which is a comfort in this life of change. We can name when each of these holidays will fall but we cannot guarantee that the weather, for instance, will cooperate with our expectation of the day.

The name for the holiday set at the Spring Equinox is Ostara, which is the name for the goddess of the dawn, or the East. In folklore and tradition, when Ostara is awakened by the stomping, busy feet of rabbits running free of their winter burrows, she brings with her the warm winds and strong sunshine of spring. Spring, the time of increase. Spring, the awakening after the time of rest. Spring, who for so many bears hope and light for the year ahead.

Spring, the return.

A year into our return, where are we in our journey? What are we patching up and what are we growing anew? Some of the first buds of spring are ripped away by the howling winds of winter. And some grow into the tallest flowers, the most productive vines, in the garden.

At the moment of the turning we do not know which is which. At the moment of the spring equinox we do not know which seedlings will survive and which will fail; we do not know which trees will yield the most fruit and which will be felled by the changes of time, of weather, of circumstance.

Here, at this moment of the turning of this year, we returned again to a text that I also shared with you last year. I didn't actually remember this when I

selected it; [this poem](#), one of my personal sacred texts, simply lives in my soul at the point on the wheel where spring returns. We experienced the growth and change and shifting of this poem together - thanks, Matt, for helping us to embody this change! - and I'll remind you of a few lines now.

"[...] / When all the shock of white
and taffy, the world's baubles and trinkets, leave
the pavement strewn with the confetti of aftermath,
the leaves come. Patient, plodding, a green skin
growing over whatever winter did to us, a return
to the strange idea of continuous living despite
the mess of us, the hurt, the empty. Fine then,
I'll take it, the tree seems to say, a new slick leaf
unfurling like a fist to an open palm, I'll take it all."

I'll take it all. A full turn of the wheel of the year brings a lot with it. In the past year since we reopened to in-person worship, we have had times of joy and times of loss, we have been delighted and frustrated and angered and enchanted. Such is the life of any community - such is any life - because these are the seasons of change in every year and every life. My heart warms at the start of spring even though I know that every leaf and bud will grow and change, will turn into that green skin growing over the ravages of winter, that will then subside in the fall to make the base of death out of which the next spring will arise. There is always turning, there is always change, there is and will always be joy and heartache just as long as there are those to feel it.

In her prophetic works of fiction *The Parable of the Sower* and *The Parable of the Talents*, the late Octavia Butler introduces a fictional faith tradition called Earthseed. The principle tenet of Earthseed is this:

"All that you touch
You Change.
All that you Change
Changes you.

The only lasting truth
Is Change.
God
Is Change.”

The lasting truth of change - change, as our ground of being - is rich and layered. For in speaking about change not just as an inevitable outside “other,” but as something that is at each of our fingertips, Butler sets out a frame for the challenge of being not simply beset by change but also being an agent of change.

The wheel of the year turns. We don’t turn it. But the wheels and cycles of our lives, and of the lives of our communities, are turned and changed and shaped by each of us. No matter how much we personally love it or hate it, the return of warm weather on a regular yearly basis is not in and of itself an injustice. But if we consider it from the perspective of climate change, if we consider how the shifts and changes of our yearly cycles have been impacted by the touch of our living, then we must recognize ourselves as agents of change. And if the change we have been an agent of has done harm, then we must consider our role as an agent of change to repair that harm. We must consider our role as an agent of change to right what can be righted; to bring balance to the cycle when balance is possible; always to consider our own partnership in the changing of the world.

It has been a year since we returned in person, and the work of our community continues. It has been three years since the first uncertain days of shutdown and lockdown, of something that felt very outside the usual movement of the wheel of the year. We have witnessed change that is outside of our control and we have witnessed change that is within our control. We have witnessed what can occur when people work together to make change; we have witnessed what can occur when deep division means that humanity can no longer agree on what we should change, or how, or why.

Changing together - trying to use our ability and obligation to act as change agents in a way that benefits the most of us, that does the most good - is a huge challenge. And there will be ways we try to change that do not work. Some of those buds are going to come out too early and be nipped in the cold wind. Some of them are going to bloom too late and never have time to yield what they might have done. Change has no moral valence in and of itself. This is part of the role of the faith community, of the community of shared values - considering the kind of change we may be able to make and considering the impact that change can have.

Tomorrow the sun will rise directly in the East and set directly in the west. We will continue our own patient, plodding return to the strange and beautiful idea of continuous living. We will witness change and we will make change. And when we are uncertain or afraid, we will turn our hearts again and again to the values at the heart of our faith. We will turn again and again to love and the changes we make, together.

So may it be.