

Welcome and Announcements

Welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the Upper Valley.

Introduce yourself

And in a moment, you'll have chance to introduce your self as well.

The UUCUV is a Welcoming Congregation, celebrating families in every constellation; we are the partner church of a Unitarian congregation in Mukhap, India in the beautiful Khasi hills; and we are the UU Association's first Green Sanctuary, considering our responsibilities to our ecosystem in every decision. We are delighted that you've joined us this morning and hope you'll stay for fellowship hour at 10 for a good chat.

Have we anyone who would like to introduce themselves?

Thank you. Let us begin our service with music.

Prelude: "Before Dawn" by Ed Van Fleet

Chalice Lighting:

Water! Earth! Air! Fire!

Water: nurturer of life, sustainer of growth, basic to every living thing;

Earth: where every seedling takes root; the ground of our being, our home and perspective;

Air: in every breath inspiration, life, oxygen, power;

Fire: thwart cold, light darkness, symbolize our burning human spirit.

Water! Earth! Air! Fire! wherein our spirits are embraced.

Opening Words

Blessed are the heavens, for they declare the power of creation.

Blessed is the earth, our beloved home, for she is a planet of plenitude.

Blessed are the waters thereon, for they gave rise to living things.

Blessed is the land, for it is the source of life abundant.

Blessed is the air we breathe, for it fires us to life and love.

Blessed are the beasts of the field, for they are glorious to behold.

Blessed are the birds of the air, for they carve a graceful arc in the sky.

Blessed are the mountains and the seas and the valleys,
for their variety makes rich our habitat.

Blessed are the fields of grain, the orchards of fruit,
for they give sustenance, asking nothing in return.

Blessed are the dwellers on earth, for they cherish the privilege of living upon it.

Blessed are they who protect the earth and all her creatures,
from the plants of the field to the trees of the forest,
for their reward shall be harmony with the web of existence.

Rejoice, and be glad,
for the earth and her people are one.

Opening Hymn: For the Beauty of the Earth

1. For the beauty of the earth,
For the glory of the skies,
For the love which from our birth
Over and around us lies—

- Refrain:
Source of all, to Thee we raise,
This our hymn of grateful praise.
- 2. For the wonder of each hour,
Of the day and of the night,
Hill and vale, and tree and flow'r,
Sun and moon, and stars of light—
- 3. For the joy of human love,
Brother, sister, parent, child,
Lalalalalalalove,
For all gentle thoughts and mild

Story: Dear Children of Earth

Daroc will read.

Offering of Food for the Haven

Offering of Treasure to the congregation

Offertory: Hymn #118: This Little Light of Mine

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.

Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine

Ev'ry where I go, I'm gonna let it shine.

Ev'ry where I go, I'm gonna let it shine.

Ev'ry where I go, I'm gonna let it shine.

Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine

Building up the world, I'm gonna let it shine.

Building up the world, I'm gonna let it shine.

Building up the world, I'm gonna let it shine.

Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine

Sharing Joys and Concerns

Please let your joys be shared and thereby multiplied.

Let your sorrows be shared and thereby lightened with many willing shoulders.

Choose a stone - or let me choose for you - to hold your words or silent thoughts and place it in our chalice in acknowledgement of this community of safety and caring where our joys and our sorrows are honored.

Meditative Hymn #123

Spirit of Life, come unto me

Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion

Blow in the wind, rise in the sea,

Move in the hand giving life the shape of justice

Roots, hold me close; wings, set me free.

Spirit of Life, come to me, come to me.

Fuente de Amor, ven hacia mí.

Y al corazón, cántale tu compasión.

Sopla al volar, sube en la mar;

Hasta moldear la justicia de la vida.

Arráigame, libérame,

Fuente de Amor, ven a mí, ven a mí.

Readings: Readings from the works of J. R. R. Tolkien

You can imagine me, I'm sure, with dozens of good passages to choose from my favorite author... I finally settled on just one reading, this from *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

Old Tom Bombadil is a merry fellow;

Bright blue his jacket is, and his boots are yellow.

"Fair lady!" said Frodo again after a while. "Tell me, if my asking does not seem foolish, who is Tom Bombadil?"

"He is," said Goldberry, staying her swift movements and smiling.

Frodo looked at her questioningly. "He is, as you have seen him," she said in answer to his look. "He is the Master of wood, water, and hill."

"Then all this strange land belongs to him?"

"No indeed!" she answered, and her smile faded. "That would indeed be a burden," she added in a low voice, as if to herself. "The trees and the grasses and all things growing or living in the land belong each to themselves. Tom Bombadil is the Master. No one has ever caught old Tom walking in the forest, wading in the water, leaping on the hill-tops under light and shadow. He has no fear. Tom Bombadil is master."

A door opened and in came Tom Bombadil. He had now no hat and his thick brown hair was crowned with autumn leaves. He laughed.

Homily: Children of Earth, Indeed

Of course, there are 118 elements.

My Unitarian brain shouts at me every time I talk about four elements as at this morning's chalice lighting. "118, *That we know of*. Always more possible!"

Thank you, Unitarian brain.

My Universalist brain, meanwhile, gently reminds me, “Or five, according to Traditional Chinese Cosmology! Or I’m sure someone has three, or six, after all there are eighteen noun cases in Finnish...” My Universalist brain is an artist, and makes rather astounding connections.

I settle on four - usually - not because of anything inherent in fourness or in the universe, but in me. It *feels* right to have four elements I can touch, particularly if one is Earth. Honest-to-goodness, if I divide Earth into Wood and Metal as traditional Chinese cosmology then I get absolutely stuck on rocks, because they might have ore in them or they might be petrified tree bits and *then* it’s turtles all the way down!

‘Who is Tom Bombadil?’

“He is, as you have seen him, He is the Master of wood, water, and hill.’

“Then all this strange land belongs to him?”

“No!... That would indeed be a burden,...The trees and the grasses and all things growing or living in the land belong each to themselves. Tom Bombadil is the Master.”

Hold. Master. Let your multi-faceted modern brains shed connotations of dominance. Tolkien used the word from its roots as Magister, teacher, master-craftsman. Authority and responsibility.

Tom Bombadil is the Master. No one has ever caught old Tom walking in the forest, wading in the water, leaping on the hill-tops under light and shadow. He has no fear. Tom Bombadil is master.”

He has no fear. Goldberry cannot even speak of him without sing-songing. Richard Louv points out that children in our culture are taught to fear going outdoors. We have stalwart holdouts, particularly here in the Upper Valley. But I worry.

A door opened and in came Tom Bombadil. He had now no hat and his thick brown hair was crowned with autumn leaves. He laughed.

No fear. Crowned with autumn leaves. Master.

It probably won't surprise you to know that I talk to trees and that I listen to trees. It probably won't surprise you to know that I hear them talk to me.

My Unitarian brain rushes in to say, "But I actually know that they aren't talking! The ideas are from my own mind, and the tree thing is a metaphor..."

And my Universalist brain whispers soothingly, "And if the trees and the mind do resonate with one another ..."

And the Unitarian side rolls its eyes and agrees grudgingly, "Well if you're going to be all cosmic about it..."

It is a miracle every time I manage to get cereal and milk into the same bowl.

He has no fear... his thick brown hair was crowned with autumn leaves. He laughed.

There is a way to teach children about Earth justice which goes, "Everything is bad, it's humans' fault, it's your fault, you may or may not be guilty, but you're

going to have to make up for generations of irresponsibility, and it's hopeless, the Earth is doomed."

It doesn't work so well. Earth, frankly, is going to spin on. Dinosaurs and humans long gone, new things coming. One little mutation at a time, someone somewhere is going to adapt and move on.

Tolkien also had things to say about things decaying or - worse yet - trying to resist change.

What works is when we teach by Science - asking questions, the free and responsible search for truth and meaning leads us ever back to guidance of reason and the results of science... which leads us right back to direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life. Nick Warren, our biology grad student, is going to be leading the kids this morning in designing a *real* scientific experiment!

What works is rolling up our sleeves and asking what it is we can *do*. It works when we talk about Charismatic Megafauna. Sometimes, we need to save a particular kind of tapeworm, a giant mosquito, and thousands of different slimy bacteria. It's not easy to get excited about them. We *can* get behind saving Charismatic Megafauna - like pandas, or catamounts, or polar bears. The best way to save the polar bears, fortunately, is to save their good neighbors, the tapeworm and slimy things of its biome. Let the polar bear *represent* all his friends and neighbors, and let us work for them in his name.

So, I talk to trees. And then I listen to the answer. When I was younger and afraid they wept in pain. Now sometimes they tell stories. Sometimes they are philosophers. Tolkien reported what I have found - that the language of trees is

slow and stately and to say the whole name of one tree in its entirety would take the lifetime of that tree. That what we do with our lives is to name ourselves. As Treebeard would say:

“*Laurelindurenan lindelorendor malinornilion ornemalin...* They are falling rather behind the world in there, I guess.... Neither this country nor anything else outside the Golden Wood is what it was when Celeborn was young. Still, *Taurelilumla-tumbalemorna Tumbaletaurila Lumlanor* - that is what they used to say. Things have changed, but it is still true in places.... I do not understand all that goes on myself, so I cannot explain it to you. Some of us are still true Ents, and lively enough in our fashion, but many are growing sleepy, going tree-ish, as you might say. Most of the trees are just trees, of course; but many are half awake. Some are quite wide awake, and a few are, well, ah, well getting *Entish*. That is going on all the time.”

Some are quite wide awake. Indeed. One little change, passed on over generations of songs of trees.

Earth Mother.

I believe in her - both the Unitarian and Universalist sides.

I do not believe she is conscious or unconscious. I believe this beautiful cosmos - Source of All - is pre-conscious. Growing in complexity, more senses, more interconnections. Some day half awake, someday wide awake, someday getting *Entish*. I don't know what critical mass is for Spiritual Neurons. But I'm ready to be part of it. Conscious Universe. Someday.

Happy Birthday, Mother Earth.

Please join me in a spirit of openness as I read the “Earth Day Prayer: In the Spirit of Indigenous Traditions” by Vern Barnet.

Infinite Spirit, sometimes called Grandfather, Grandmother —
Father Sky, Earth Mother, Creator:

We gather to praise your creation,
to honor the swimmers and crawlers,
the four-leggeds and the winged ones;
we give thanks for the beauty and glory of creation
and open our hearts to new ways to understand
our place in the universe—not the center or focus,
but a humble and balanced place,
where every step we take becomes a prayer,
where every word we say
makes harmony with the vast, vibrating cosmos,
and where we know we are singing the song of life.
We pray to know more deeply that we are in the Garden
where every plant and animal and speck of dust
is a living prayer.
Without our brothers and sisters
of the plant and animal and mineral kingdoms,
the human family would end.
So we want to bless them, as they bless us.
We pray for humility—
not to humble ourselves before presidents or priests,
but before the ants and trees—
for if we cannot be in true relation to the ant,
we shall be outcasts of the garden.

Let us cast the pollution from our eyes
so we can see the glory and live with thanksgiving.
Great Spirit, let us remember
it is not how we talk but how we walk.
When we say we love animals, let us protect them.
When we say we that we love the plant people,
let us honor them by living lightly on the earth.
When we say we love the minerals,
let us use them only in necessity,
and remember their rightful places.
Oil belongs in the ground,
not in the air through our wasteful machines.
Wondrous trees, breathing life into the atmosphere:
your gifts of fire and shelter, fruit,
and sailing are precious to us.
And in many ways you offer us leaves of knowledge.
May the vision of mutual interrelatedness,
cosmic interdependence,
the seamless process of generations,
not end in cough-filled skies blotting the sun,
but rather may clear air, healthy forests,
wholesome water, expansive prairie, and pungent earth
nourish paths for all creatures
through mountain and valley, and the salt sea,
and through a protective atmosphere,
as we rejoice in the inhabitants.
Hear and empower our mantra: reduce, reuse, recycle.

With thanks for the surprise and mystery of it all,
we pray in the name of the Creator,
the Processes and Presences, and all our relations.

Closing Hymn # 1009

When I was younger, I had fear - I was afraid for the animals and I was afraid for the waters and I was afraid for the future and when I listened to the trees, they wept in pain and fear.

Well, then, what do you do?

You roll up your sleeves and do what one person can do and you pass the word. You find a little balance, a little center. Earth will spin on. Now when I listen to the trees, it sounds exactly like Hymn number 1009 - although much slower. Please join me in singing.

When I breathe in, I breathe in peace

When I breathe out, I breathe out love.

Extinguishing the Chalice:

We extinguish this chalice
But not the light of truth
The warmth of love
Or the fire of commitment
These we carry in our hearts
Until we meet again.

Benediction Let the flame in your heart be the light in your eyes, crinkling with joy as you turn to greet your neighbor.