

Kearsarge Unitarian Universalist Fellowship



**Andover, New Hampshire
Sunday, November 1, 2020**

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Today's Message: "The Weirdness of It"

Guest Speaker: Betsy Woodman

Gathering Music – "The tranquil clarify of the Intelligence" 1944
Charles Koechlin. Music after Revolt of the Angels by Anatole France

Welcome and Announcements

Greet your Neighbors

Prelude – XIX "The Garden of the Muses" Koechlin

Lighting the Chalice – All Recite

Opening Words – Henry Wadsworth Longfellow "Haunted Houses"

Opening Hymn – #6 "*Just as Long as I Have Breath*"

Affirmation of Fellowship: – All Recite

Candles of Joys and Concerns

Words of Reflection – Revelation 16

Silent Reflection

Offertory Music – XII "The Human Complaint" Koechlin

Offering – Please send check to: KUUF P.O. Box 1578,
New London, NH 03527

Offertory Response (to "Old Hundredth")

Hymn – #52 "*In Sweet Fields of Autumn*"

Message – **The Weirdness of It**

Closing Hymn – #1 "*May Nothing Evil Cross This Door*"

Extinguishing the Chalice – All Recite

Postlude – XXI "The Sweet Hours" Koechlin

Closing Words – Cherokee Prayer Blessing



OPENING WORDS

“Haunted Houses”

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882)

All houses wherein men have lived and died
Are haunted houses. Through the open doors
The harmless phantoms on their errands glide,
With feet that make no sound upon the floors.

We meet them at the door-way, on the stair,
Along the passages they come and go,
Impalpable impressions on the air,
A sense of something moving to and fro.

There are more guests at table than the hosts
Invited; the illuminated hall
Is thronged with quiet, inoffensive ghosts,
As silent as the pictures on the wall.

The stranger at my fireside cannot see
The forms I see, nor hear the sounds I hear;
He but perceives what is; while unto me
All that has been is visible and clear.

We have no title-deeds to house or lands;
Owners and occupants of earlier dates
From graves forgotten stretch their dusty hands,
And hold in mortmain still their old estates.

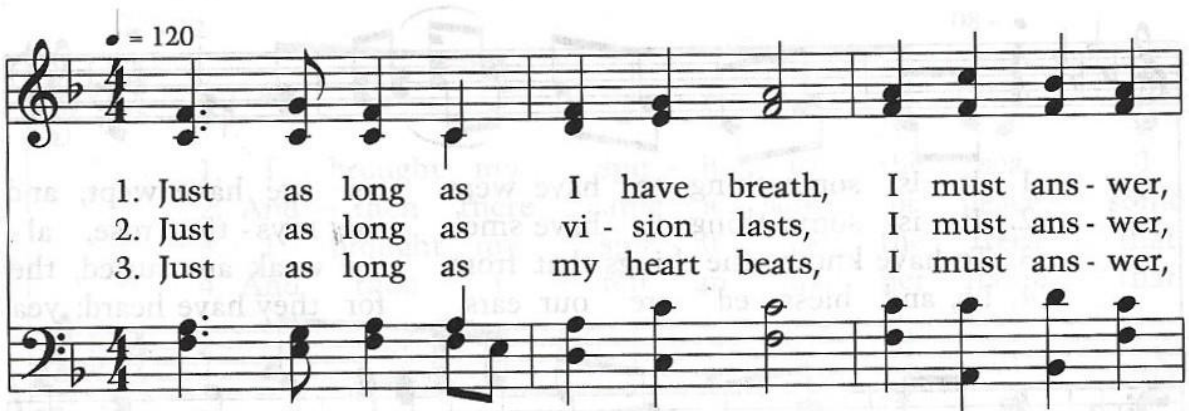
The spirit-world around this world of sense
Floats like an atmosphere, and everywhere
Wafts through these earthly mists and vapours dense
A vital breath of more ethereal air....

Opening Hymn

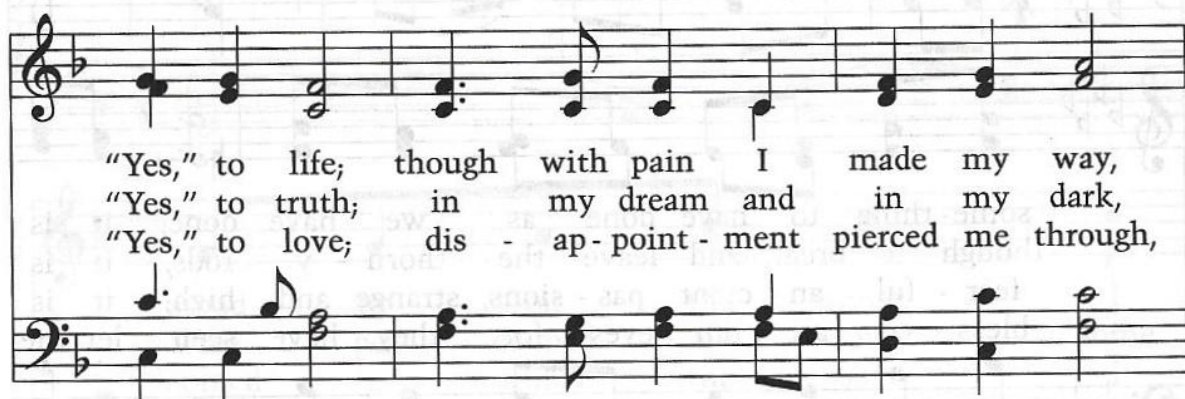
Join in and sing from the comfort of your home

6 Just as Long as I Have Breath


$\bullet = 120$



1. Just as long as I have breath, I must ans - wer,
2. Just as long as vi - sion lasts, I must ans - wer,
3. Just as long as my heart beats, I must ans - wer,



"Yes," to life; though with pain I made my way,
"Yes," to truth; in my dream and in my dark,
"Yes," to love; dis - ap - point - ment pierced me through,



still with hope I meet each day. If they ask what
al - ways: that e - lu - sive spark. If they ask what
still I kept on lov - ing you. If they ask what



I did well, tell them I said, "Yes," to life.
I did well, tell them I said, "Yes," to truth.
I did best, tell them I said, "Yes," to love.

Affirmation of Fellowship:

May we be reminded here of our highest aspirations and inspired to bring our gifts of love and service to the altar of humanity. May we know once again that we are not isolated beings but connected in mystery and in miracle, to the universe, to this community and to each other.

Candles of Joys and Concerns



Words for Reflection

Excerpts from Revelation 16 (New International Version)

16 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth."

2 The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly, festering sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.

3 The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead person, and every living thing in the sea died.

4 The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood.

8 The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was allowed to scorch people with fire.

10 The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in agony 11 and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

12 The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up...

13 Then I saw three impure spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet.

14 They are demonic spirits that perform signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.

16 Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

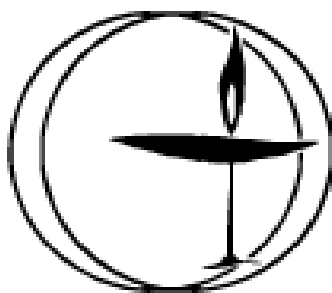
17 The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!" 18 Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since mankind has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. 19 The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed.

20 Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found.

21 From the sky huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds,[a] fell on people. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

Silent Reflection





Offering to KUUF

Mail Check to:

KUUF

P.O. Box 1578,

New London, NH 03257

Offertory Response

(to "Old Hundredth")

Please sing along from the comfort of your home

From all that dwell below the skies
Let faith and hope and love arise
Let beauty, truth and good be sung
Through every land, by every tongue.

In Sweet Fields of Autumn

♩ = 104 *Unison*

1. In sweet fields of au - tumn the gold grain is
 2. The snows of De - cem - ber shall fill wind - y
 3. The still - ness of death shall stoop o - ver the

fall - ing, the white clouds drift lone - ly, the
 hol - low; the bleak rain trails af - ter, and
 wa - ter, the plov - er sweep low where the

wild swan is call - ing. A - las for the
 March wind shall fol - low. The deer through the
 pale stream - lets fal - ter; but deep in the

dai - sies, the tall fern and grass - es, when
 val - leys leave print of their go - ing; and
 earth clod the black seed is liv - ing; when

wind - sweep and rain - fall fill low - lands and pass - es.
 dia - monds of sleet mark the ridg - es of snow - ing.
 spring sounds her bu - gles for rous - ing and giv - ing.

The Weirdness of it All

Betsy Woodman

For the Kearsarge Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, November 1, 2020

The darkness of fall closes in, giving us stunted little afternoons. We're now in the middle of a three-day season called Allhallowtide.

Yesterday was All Saints' Eve, or Halloween, a Western Christian feast day for remembering the dead, and a modern children's holiday for gorging on sugar.

Today is All Saints Day, to honor the saints.

Tomorrow is All Souls Day, to remember the faithful who have died.

There's a spookiness about the season that makes us ponder life and death. Poets speak of how closely the two nestle together.

You heard Henry Wadsworth Longfellow conjure up spirits that waft through our houses, sit at our tables.

For the poets, the line between the dead and the living is not all that clear.

Going through my grandfather's memorabilia, I feel his presence. His daily account book is so endearing in its precision. Cigar, 5 cents. Mouse trap, another 5 cents. Broom, 40 cents. Teddy Roosevelt's Bull Moose Party got \$1. (That's about right for a political contribution, don't you think?)

Sifting through yellowing bits of paper and old postcards, it's almost as if I could reach through that invisible barrier that separates past from present and the living from the dead.

My apologies. I'm afraid I'm getting weird.

Say, don't you hear the word weird a lot lately, and isn't weird a weird word? Even its spelling is weird. What ever happened to "I before E except after C?"

The meaning of weird is weird, too. Spooky.

"Strikingly odd or unusual, especially in an unsettling way...suggestive of the supernatural...relating to fate or destiny...causing an uneasy sensation...uncanny..."

The Scottish word *wyrd* means, "relating to fate or the fates."

Weird can be magnificent! Nature offers us strikingly odd or unusual sights, at least to human eyes. Take giraffes. Or peacocks.

And in human activity, a small and deliberate dose of weird is benign and fun.

Think of Halloween, alas, a bit subdued, this year. Sweet little witches in pointed hats, pint-sized devils with pitchforks, ghosts with costumes made out of sheets. Twick or tweat!

Trick or treat. Even in normal times, an undertone of death and violence lurks in the background. But the dosage is small.

One Halloween, my son Ben, age four, announced that he wanted to dress as an "evil clown." He didn't succeed in looking evil, just incredibly cute. I recently asked if he remembered why he wanted to be an *evil* clown.

He said, the clown part was the most important, but he knew that the point of Halloween was to be scary. Clown faces *do* scare children. Apparently, there's something about the way a painted face on top of a real face doesn't move in a natural way. It's tied to our fear of the "uncanny valley."

My missionary boarding school Bible classes instantly made me think..."Lo, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death..."

But no. The term “uncanny valley” comes out of robotics. In the 1970s, Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori found that as robots become more life-like, people’s comfort level with them rises. Then, even if the robots get more realistic, people’s comfort level takes a sudden dip. When the robots become extremely life-like, people feel better again.

That little dip is the “uncanny valley.” People’s brains struggle to figure out, is this a machine or a living being? Our neurons fire like crazy.

Weirdness. Today, sometimes things look normal—our houses, our gardens, our kitchen tables—and other times they seem so strange. People in masks—what’s under them? Is the person smiling or frowning? Again, our brains go into overdrive looking for clues. No wonder we’re tired.

Part of the weirdness is an overdose of catastrophe. Turn on the evening news, and the end of the world is here. Fires in the Northwest, floods in the Southeast. Political turmoil raging. And steadily, relentlessly, the death toll from Covid-19 climbing.

The word “apocalypse” pops up over and over, sometimes in the phrase “zombie apocalypse.”

In zombie apocalypse movies and novels, civilization is in danger.

Creatures that were once human climb out of their graves and roam the earth. They stumble about, their arms reaching forward, their eyes demonic and unblinking.

Infected by the zombification virus, they bite normal people to turn *them* into zombies. People flee, search for food and weapons, hide out in safe zones. Meanwhile, swarms of zombies overrun the police, military, health services, water supplies, electrical power, media broadcasting, and governments.

These themes from pop culture often strike too close to home.

The Second Coming, the iconic poem by William Butler Yeats, was first published in 1920, but it seems written for today. Here’s the first stanza.

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.*

So. How to stay sane?

Well, there's escapism. A regular dose may well be necessary. For weeks, I found comfort in a South Korean TV serial called *Heaven's Garden*. It's set just a few years ago, but it transports one to a safer and kinder time. It is the story of several families in a mountain village, at first fraught with old feuds and resentments and family dysfunction. But as the tale goes on, people actually grow and mellow, mend the rifts, forgive, find new and better ways of living together. This is a case of fiction keeping positive ideals alive.

Then there's humor mixed with practicality. On the CDC website, of all places, there's a graphic novel—a comic book—about how to survive a zombie apocalypse. The message is actually about preparation for *any* disaster—have an escape plan, store so much drinking water for each person, fill up your car with gas, etc. To counteract unusual and terrifying dangers, the zombie comic book offers practical tips.

Another resource we can draw on is history, although whether history is comforting or discouraging is matter of debate. But one thing it does teach is that bad times end, even though it doesn't seem like they're going to.

On the eve of the United Kingdom's entry into the First World War, British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey remarked to a friend, "The lamps are going out all over Europe, we shall not see them lit again in our life-time." And yet, the lights *did* go on again, and in Sir Edward's own lifetime.

The Western Front in that so-called Great War was a man-made version of hell—and yet, finally, the guns were silenced.

In World War II, the battle of Britain, the Bataan death march, the siege of Stalingrad were long and nightmarish, among so many other catastrophes.

My dad recalled the invasion of Normandy, when he was on a landing craft that escorted soldiers onto the beach. Sixty years later, he remembered the decks slippery and rancid with the smell of vomit, the ocean running red with blood, the noise deafening.

It was hellish. But it passed.

The 1918-1919 influenza pandemic infected a third of the world's population and caused 50 million deaths on the planet. In the United States, life expectancy dropped by 12 years.

In our home state of New Hampshire, more than 2,700 people perished. (Covid-10, on the other hand, has caused 482 deaths in New Hampshire as of October 30.)

The press downplayed the disaster so as not to detract from the war effort. President Woodrow Wilson made no public statement whatsoever on the flu—he was too focused on the war.

The influenza pandemic left millions of people sick, weakened, and grieving. However, it did end.

But, you say, these catastrophes went on for so long. What's comforting about history if it teaches you *that*?

Hm. Good point. I guess we need another essential tool. Patience.

In jest, I used to call patience “one of those sucker's virtues.” You know, like humility. Something you wished *other* people would practice. Now that people in high places equate heroes with suckers, I don't make that joke any more.

Now, whether or not we like it, patience is something we're all forced to summon up.

But let's be proud for doing so. Bahá'í teacher 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844-1921) called patience "magnificent." "Manifest magnificent patience," he said, "during every calamity and hardship."

Patience is not a sucker's virtue—it's heroic in its own quiet way.

Escapism, history, patience...these obviously aren't the only strategies to get through this zombie apocalypse with your sanity intact. You undoubtedly have several of your own.

Political activism might be one of them, and more power to you. Anything that restores reason to the current scene is a fight against the zombie apocalypse.

Plugging away at your job, caring for others, keeping in touch with friends and family, donating to your favorite causes, reading, writing.... Normal things might not feel heroic, but they fight the zombies. Normality is the front line in the service against pathological weirdness.

One day, if we just hold on tight, we'll be able to enjoy benign weirdness again, in a dosage we can tolerate. We'll smile at giraffes and little ghosts on Halloween and laugh at old movies about the zombie apocalypse.

For the moment, we have to draw on magnificent patience.

And remind ourselves that this too shall pass.

May Nothing Evil Cross This Door

1

♩. = 44

1. May noth - ing e - vil cross this door,
2. By faith made strong, the raft - ers will
3. Peace shall walk soft - ly through these rooms,
4. With laugh - ter drown the rau - cous shout,

and may ill for - tune nev - er
with - stand the bat - tering of the
touch - ing our lips with ho - ly
and, though these shel - tering walls are

pry a - bout these win - dows; may the
storm. This hearth, though all the world grow
wine, till ev - 'ry cas - ual cor - ner
thin, may they be strong to keep hate

roar and rain go by.
chill, will keep you warm.
blooms in - to a shrine.
out and hold love in.



Let this flame remain with us, a symbol of the holiness we seek, dispelling the gloom, lighting a path to faith and hope, its radiance calling us to wholeness, casting the light of freedom, justice and peace upon the world.

CLOSING WORDS

Cherokee Prayer Blessing

May the Warm Winds of Heaven
Blow softly upon your house.
May the Great Spirit
Bless all who enter there.
May your Mocassins
Make happy tracks
in many snows,
and may the Rainbow
Always touch your shoulder.

It's
COFFEE
time



November 1, 2020

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Charles Koechlin. Music after Revolt of the Angels by Anatole France

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