

**"New Beginnings I" ©**  
**Shoreline Unitarian Universalist Society, Madison, CT**  
**The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd**  
**January 5, 2020**

**Sounding of the Gong**

**Gathering Music** *This Is the Moment*, Frank Wildhorn

Nick Stanford, Pianist

**#Welcome**

Neil Schultes, Treasurer  
Board of Trustees

**Prelude** *Auld Lang Syne*, Traditional

**Chalice Lighting** (*The flaming chalice is the symbol of our free faith*)

Today, we start Chalice Quest. For the next seven weeks, in recognition of our seven principles, we invite you to return home or to some other special place, to light a chalice and reflect on each Sunday's chalice lighting words. Many choose to do this at dinner time, but other times can work, as well. Spiritual practices sustain us in challenging and promising times. But, they require practice. Such practices can improve our resilience and bond us more closely with those with whom we share them. When practiced, such a ritual can become an anchor of stability in tough and changing seas, for you and/or your family. To help you get started with this chalice quest, you will find chalices made by our children in the foyer and fellowship hall.

Light Chalice

Our chalice words, this week, are written by Michael Tino. They are:

"The flaming chalice was first used by the Unitarian Service Committee as a symbol of life-saving refuge for people fleeing persecution in Europe. As we light this chalice, we invoke the love that called people to put their lives at risk to save others. May we be vessels of life-saving welcome."

In the coming week, you are invited to reflect on these words, and to share those moments in your journal or with friends or family. This week's chalice quest questions, are . . . *When and how, have you extended a generous welcome to others? Why did you do so? Why did it matter?*

This reflection will be posted on the website under This Week's Chalice Quest.

**#\*Opening Hymn 188** *Come, Come Whoever You Are*

There are hymnals in the seats in front of you if you need them.

**Story**

Jenny Lee

**Offertory Words**

Rev. Lloyd

Here, we share with generosity what treasure we have with others whose needs are greater than our own. Each week we donate half of our total cash offering to a non-profit program that serves others. This month your cash contributions will go for Fuel Assistance on the Shoreline. The days may be getting longer, but winter has just begun. Many in our towns are struggling to keep their heat on, and our donations address this critical need.

Please give generously.

**Offering & Offertory Music** *A Change in Me*, Menken & Rice

**#Sing the Young People Out** *Children's Recessional* (please see back of hymnal)

And, now I invite the children to light their candles and go to their classes while we sing them out.

**Honoring Our Joys and Sorrows by Spoken Word & Ritual**

In the coming moments, we will share with one another our joys and sorrows. We do so in two ways.

You may come forward to the mic to speak (or, if needed we will can bring a mic to you). Afterwards you may come forward to light a candle silently.

**Verbal Expression**

If there are those among us who would like to share their joy or sorrow from the microphone, please come forward now (or raise your hand as needed).

**Silent Expression**

And, now let us enter into a time of quiet reflection.

[Bell]

In this time let us slow down the pace of life, see past the distractions, and pay attention to that which, perhaps, you've been too busy to notice. It could be a joy, it could be sorrow, it could be something with which you are struggling . . .

In these moments, ground your feet on the floor (as you are able), relax your body . . . breathe deeply. Reflect for few moments in silence on that voice longing to be heard . . . acknowledge it . . .

Silence

As the spirit moves you, you may come forward to light a candle for that which is on your mind or in your heart.

Silent Expression (Lighting Candles)

**Musical Meditation** *Begin Again*, The Piano Guys

Let us remember with reverence the joys and sorrows spoken and unspoken today. May it be so.

[Bell]

**Reflection**

*New Beginnings, Part I*

Rev. Lloyd

This service is part of a two-part sermon series on the challenges of change. This week, we'll reflect on personal change. Next week, organizational change.

So . . . here we are together. At the beginning of a new year. 2020 . . . the beginning of a new decade. Don't we all wonder what this year will bring for each of us; for each of those we love and care about; for this congregation; for our country; for this world? What joys? What sorrows?

I am well aware of all the hype that happens this time of year. The great expectations and hopes for change; the cynicism that says its "ok" and to be expected that our best hopes will fall flat, and we, as though it were a common curse of humanity, we, will once again fall short of our best hopes and dreams.

And, to that cynicism, I say, baloney! Yes, ladies and gentlemen, friends and guests, you heard it right here. I say, baloney!

I believe there are two kinds of change. The kind that hits you uninvited, unwanted; the kind for which, no matter what preparation you had in life, you were ultimately unprepared. I think of this as "reactive change". Pretty much all we can do in such a moment is react, survive, maybe try to positively adapt to it, but, nonetheless it has

come upon us and at first, or for always, it requires we change. It is a challenge, a wave, that if everything goes right, perhaps we will get on top of that wave, and ride its crest successfully to shore, stronger and confident at the end of that ride, before the next wave of change comes along.

Reactive change is the kind you heard about in the Candle Story for the children.

The other kind of change is what I think of as a preemptive, self-initiated, change. This is the kind of change people normally talk about at the new year. A time when, in winter, reflecting on the past year, we might say, "it's time for some change in my life. I'm feeling a little stuck, and little too comfortable. I need something that grounds me closer to that which brings the most resonance to my life". I call this kind of change, "break-out or break-through change". For, you see, for this kind of self-initiating, self-desiring change for a little chaos (not too much), it is in response to being a little too comfortable, a little too set in our ways, and indeed, being a bit stuck.

The concept of being stuck, is, for me a good one. Too often, being the somewhat self-absorbed people that we are, we think we are solely responsible for our stuckness. We think that if we were stronger, better, had more character, more discipline, smarter, more athletic, more artistic, more loving, more compassionate . . . you name it . . . we would magically change into the person we were meant to be. Too often, we see our failure to change as a lack of something in ourselves, a deficit for which we are to blame. But, it doesn't really make a lot of sense to blame ourselves for who we actually are. But, we do it anyway. It is as though we've gotten a flat tire when driving, and then, because we're so intent on blaming ourselves and making it worse, we go ahead and flatten the other three tires.

Some of us, blame ourselves for not being someone else. We say we should be "magenta", when we are orange, and then blame ourselves for not being magenta enough or for being too orange. And, then, for some of us, this non-sensical cycle of thinking turns in our minds, incessantly, effectively making us more stuck by adding cynicism and despair to our hopes and dreams.

But, newsflash! The kind of break out/break through change for which we strive, is rarely just about us. This is the fatal mistake most of us make in trying to change something about ourselves. It's not just about you. We are each caught in systems (some might call them cultures) that hold us in our place. They may or may not be systems of our own making, but few of us can easily, effortlessly, escape these patterns without good planning and support. They are the systems within which we live and breathe and love and struggle. Our lives are integrated with others, through families, community groups, jobs, schools, cultural values, and so forth. We are part of a larger

world, that we don't always control, but that may often (by our unawareness of ourselves and our inaction) control us.

So, the first step in break-out/break through change, is to do some real work, some real discernment, some real self-reflection. To name first, "What brings the most resonance and joy to your life?" And, then to name second, "What parts of your life reinforce or inhibit you from living your life more completely, in resonating harmony with your desires?"

Big questions . . . to which only you have the answers . . .

I have a short story to tell you. There was a day, years ago, when I was leaving a job for the last time. I had done a good job there, and people were sorry to see me go, but it wasn't for me. It didn't feed my soul, it didn't resonate for me in ways that made my life feel like it was worth living. I had given my resignation weeks before, we'd had my farewell party, I'd packed up my things, and was driving home for the last time from that particular job. It was a warm spring day, but not too warm. My driver's window was half way down. As I was driving, I noticed there as an ordinary black fly, clinging to the edge of the top of my side window. It caught my eye, because it stayed there, hung there, evidently refusing to leave as I drove for miles. When I stopped for a stop light, it clung on, somewhat relaxed, almost casually. When I drove off, it still clung there. When I drove faster (secretly encouraging or challenging it to move on) it clung more fiercely. It would not be moved . . . What surprised me, was that it clung harder and more ferociously, as I drove faster. It didn't just fly off. I talked to it. I reminded it, that it had wings! It didn't need to stay stuck on the window. I wondered if it was afraid? I told it that there was nothing to fear, it could let go, it would and could fly to new horizons. And, yet, it clung with fierce tenacity until finally, after several miles, it finally let go, and flew away. I learned a lesson from that fly: Though we often don't know it or acknowledge them in our greatest moments of paralysis, we have wings, wings of hope. We only need to choose to use them. And, if we do so with perseverance, we will, quite likely, not only be "ok", but even better, (as we build our muscles and capacity to face and/or adapt to the next change).

I believe that our fear of change is most often prompted by our fear of failure in other's eyes. Fear of being judged by ourselves or others as having "failed". And, this fear of failure, becomes an obstacle to even starting toward a goal. But, change only occurs when we get on the path, when we make the path as we walk it. We have to start out as pioneers, through the weeds and thickets, through uncut woods, crossing streams, heading to the horizon. We have to start out, step after step (baby step after baby step), making a path that didn't exist before (at least not for us). In time, if we keep making those small but steady steps, we can turn around and see the path we've made.

We will have come much further and far closer to our goal for harmonic resonance with life, than we could have ever imagined. And, that friends, is about the best we can hope for - - - to get closer to that place of harmony that brings meaning to our lives.

Now, as someone with a background in behavioral science, I know that instead of waiting for our mind to will a change in who we think we are, the real way to change is to change our behavior first. So, rather than waiting for inspiration to strike, as Nike says, "just do it." Do it (grudgingly, perhaps) but do it. If you start with baby steps and do it often enough, the behavior will change you, change your attitude, your confidence, and your sense of resonance and reverence for life. Just do it, take those baby steps, the rest will follow. Those that are cynical about our capacity to keep New Year's resolutions, fail to understand that break-out/break-through change doesn't usually happen overnight. It's the planners who will be the most successful, and too often our cynics are not planners. Planners embody hope, assume success, and inspire confidence.

Be a planner, and while you're at it, plan the start of your new goal for a specific day. It doesn't have to be New Year's day, but it could be. It could also be Martin Luther's King's birthday, in honor of the changes he shaped; or Valentine's Day, in honor of those you love and who love you; or, your birthday, starting a new life; or perhaps more poignantly it could be the day someone you loved, died . . . you might dedicate your effort to fulfilling your dreams, in honor of the gifts they left you.

In the coming week, I want you to take some real time to think about those moments of joy that ground your life most deeply. It could be any number of things. It could be running, camping, being here, reading, being with loved ones; it could be your job (I hope it is); it could be nature, children's laughter, working in a soup kitchen. Something (I don't know what it is) speaks to your soul and in response your soul sings. Reflect on what brings you joy, and when you can name it, or them, write it down.

As an example I'll give you my New Year's resolutions: they are (1) to move more (because I know that when I am stronger, I feel stronger; (2) to create more quiet space in my life; and, (3) to weave again (because I love its creative process). You'll note that for me, none of these things have to do with my thinking or character or saving the world. (I get to work on those elsewhere in my life.) They all require movement though. Movement is good for me. It takes me out of my head where I tend to spend too much time. It helps create the harmonic balance I need to do everything else.

So, find those 2-3 things that bring you joy in life. These are the things to which you need greater connection. And, then, with time, but not too much time, your job is to create a plan. Take those things that bring you most joy in life. Study them. Figure out

what needless things get in the way. Create a plan. Set a launch date. Splurge and use some of those electronic apps, or other tracking system, to keep you accountable to your own goals. Tell one or more friends, enlist their help as cheerleaders. They will want it as much for you, as you do, if they see that what you are striving for will let you fly as you were meant to fly.

One last thing. Once on the path - - - something will come along to derail your progress. I guarantee it. Expect it. Plan for it. Here's the secret to a good plan . . . those who are successful in reaching their goal - - - always try one more time.

May it be so.

**\*Hymn 1024**      *When The Spirit Says Do*

**\*Closing Words & Extinguishing the Chalice**

Please remain standing as you are able. In this season of flu and respiratory illnesses, instead of joining hands, I invite you to touch elbows as you are willing.

We extinguish this flame, but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. We extinguish this flame, but not the sure knowledge that we are a hopeful people, who are better together than apart. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Let the congregation say, Amen.

Please be seated to sing the first verse of our closing song.

**Closing Song 55**      *Dark of Winter, v.1*

**Silent Reflection**

Let us sit together in silence as we absorb the message and meaning of today's service.