

***“Hold Out Your Candle”***

**READING** “Go Light Your World” by Chris Rice (adapted)

There is a candle in every soul  
Some brightly burning, some dark and cold  
There is a Spirit who brings a fire  
Ignites a candle and makes our home

Carry your candle, run to the darkness  
Seek out the helpless, confused and torn  
And hold out your candle for all to see it  
Take your candle, and go light your world  
Take your candle, and go light your world

Frustrated brother, see how he's tried to  
Light his own candle some other way  
See now your sister, she's been robbed and lied to  
Still holds a candle without a flame

So carry your candle, run to the darkness  
Seek out the lonely, the tired and worn  
And hold out your candle for all to see it  
Take your candle, and go light your world  
Take your candle, and go light your world

'Cause we are a family whose hearts are blazing  
So let's raise our candles and light up the sky  
Praying to Creator, in the name of Loving  
Make us a beacon in darkest times  
Carry your candle, run to the darkness  
Seek out the hopeless, deceived and poor  
Hold out your candle for all to see it  
Take your candle, and go light your world  
Take your candle, and go light your world

Hold out your candle for all to see it  
Take your candle, and go light your world  
Take your candle, and go light your world  
Take your candle, and go light your world

Songwriters: Christopher M. Rice  
Go Light Your World lyrics © Capitol Christian Music Group

**READING** "Dark Tremors Sweep Across Our Lives" ~ A Meditation by George Kimmich Beach

**Some days dark tremors sweep across our lives. Troubling events accost us. We have grown accustomed to such things, and often we have fenced off our natural sympathies with the thought: this belongs to somebody else.**

**But now a crisis of life brushes close to us, touches us, befalls us and those we love. We want, now, to know: how, and what, and why? We want an explanation, though we know that all our explanations put together do not finally explain. They but fend off worry, anger, and grief. The mysteries of evil and innocence remain. The darkness of being at a loss remains, and in this abyss of the heart we can but pray for light.**

**This is when I pray, and this is my prayer.**

**Let me be patient of all these feelings that drive me hither and yon. May I be at peace, more patient with myself. Let me live within the questions that promise no answers but only signal the mystery that gave them birth. Let me turn from every pettiness of the heart, willing to see and accept that the world does not revolve around me. Let the grief, the pain, and the nameless trouble that overcomes me also open me to feel what others have felt.**

**Giver of being and freedom, unbind my compassion for all beings about me, and again set free the child of grace within me. Amen.**

## **SERMON**

Well, Thanksgiving is over. Did everybody have a good day? It looks like you all survived whatever conversations you had with family and friends whose world view is radically different from your own. We did - though we did not visit with our families this year, so maybe we got off easy. Any leftovers remain in the fridge or the freezer? Not in my house I'll tell you. Friday and Saturday are all about the leftovers. Now, we put away the Thanksgiving decorations and move on to the December holidays. I already heard the unmistakable sound of Christmas music playing at Marden's yesterday afternoon.

Christmas is upon us. And not just Christmas. There are a dozen or more holidays both religious and non-religious that people celebrate during the winter months. One thing that characterizes most of these holidays is the use of light – candle light or lamp light or decorative light. We adorn our homes with lights. Any of you already have your holiday lights up and burning? City streets are ablaze with light and color during December. Personally, I love it.

Our Unitarian Universalist tradition recognizes the wisdom offered by religious traditions and we seek to respect and share the essence of world religions. We can experience a wide variety of religious observances between now and January. Most of these religious observances include candles or lamps. Why? Without light, the darkness would overtake us. We crave the warmth and the light of our candles and lamps. Religion serves humanity and so, we understand the incorporation of light into these winter holy days and holidays.

Let me give you an admittedly incomplete run down of the holidays and religious observances we will see in the coming weeks. It's not all about Christmas.

Buddhists celebrate light with a holiday known as **Bodhi Day** on December 8<sup>th</sup>. This is the day when the Buddha sat beneath the tree until he achieved enlightenment. Some Buddhists string colored lights onto a ficus tree, in representation of the many paths that can lead to enlightenment. Candles are placed in front of statues of Buddha. Buddhists everywhere perform

good works and services for others. It is a day on which followers can rededicate themselves to enlightenment, compassion, and kindness.

This year, the Jewish holiday **Hanukkah** begins at sundown on December 12<sup>th</sup>. Hanukkah rituals include the lighting of the Menorah, which consists of 9 candles in a holder. One candle is lit on each of the eight nights of Hanukkah, and the center candle is used for lighting the others. Hanukkah celebrates the victory of the Jewish people over their enemies and reminds Jews of the importance of maintaining the light during times of darkness.

Celebrated on December 13<sup>th</sup>, **Santa Lucia Day** is an important prequel to Christmas in many parts of the world. Throughout Sweden, the festival of Santa Lucia begins before dawn. The eldest daughter in each household, dressed in a long white gown tied with a red sash, and wearing a crown of lingonberry leaves in which are set seven lighted candles, comes to her sleeping parents. The procession includes her sisters and brothers also dressed in white, holding lighted candles, and singing of the light and joy of Christmas. Lucia is an ancient mythical figure with an abiding role as a bearer of light in the dark Swedish winters.

**Winter Solstice** – this year on December 21<sup>st</sup>. Solstice celebrates the shortest day and the longest dark night. People all over the world participate with festivals and celebrations. Long ago, people celebrated by lighting bonfires and candles to provide warmth and light in the darkness and to coax back the sun.

**Christmas** always falls on December 25<sup>th</sup> when Christians around the world celebrate the birth of Jesus. Celebratory decorations typically include “decking the halls” with holly, ivy, and other greens. And of course, a Christmas tree decorated with lights and ornaments is usually a staple to the house, particularly in the United States. Outdoor lights and indoor candles are everywhere.

**Kwanzaa** is a week-long holiday celebrated in communities in the United States and Canada, as well as in the Western African Diaspora to honor African heritage in African-American culture. There are seven core principles that are celebrated during Kwanzaa, including unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics,

purpose, creativity, and faith. Celebration of Kwanzaa can include colorful household decorations with art and African cloth, readings and reflection of the African Pledge, and a candle-lighting ceremony with a kinara which holds seven candles for the seven core principles.

**Yule** is a season and lasts from the beginning days of winter through the New Year celebrations. The Yule log burns brightly in the homes of many people.

**New Year** celebrations often include fireworks.

Winter holidays have been with us for thousands of years, begun at the dawn of agriculture among people who depended upon the return of the sun. These holidays celebrate light - literally, and symbolically. We need the light and warmth of fire and candles and festive lights to help us get through the cold dark of winter.

There is also the symbolic meaning of light. For people all over the world, these holidays remind us that darkness must ultimately yield to light. There is darkness in our world, and, there can be a dark tremor that sweeps through our lives.

For many of us, winter is not merely cold, and the daylight is not merely short. There is a psychological and spiritual darkness that comes over us during this time of year. It can be annoying for many. For some, however,, it is crippling or even devastating. We might call it seasonal affective disorder and try to cope better by sitting under a special lamp for a few hours each day. We might also recognize that each of us has times when our own light dims and is hard to see or feel, maybe it even goes out. At such times, it is hard to know what to do for oneself and it is hard to know what to do for someone we love.

Considering the need for candles in the darkness is when I heard the song "Go Light Your World" by Chris Rice. At first all I heard were these words:

***Carry your candle, Run to the darkness.***

Say what? Run to the darkness. Why? I spend so much of my time avoiding the darkness, why would I run, I mean run, to the darkness? And then, I see it. In my own hand is a candle. It is my candle, already lit and

burning brightly. Out there, somewhere, everywhere, are others who struggle to light their candle as they stumble through the cold and the darkness that surrounds them and keeps them in a tight unrelenting grip of suffering. Suffering that is sometimes small and at other times is so great as to be fatal.

You may want to think that it is an exaggeration to say that the darkness that surrounds some of us is fatal, but deep down, we know that it is true. Depression is a terrible illness, and sometimes it is fatal.

Loneliness is terrible. Addiction is terrible. Homelessness is terrible. Hunger is terrible. Illness and disease are terrible. Rape and assault are terrible. Racism is terrible. Being lost to one's own self is terrible.

The words of the song have it right ....

***Frustrated brother, see how he's tried to  
Light his own candle some other way  
See now your sister, she's been robbed and lied to  
Still holds a candle without a flame***

***So carry your candle, run to the darkness  
Seek out the lonely, the tired and worn  
And hold out your candle for all to see it  
Take your candle, and go light your world  
Take your candle, and go light your world***

Winter holidays – light in the darkness. There is a deep wisdom in these holidays. There is a deep humanity in our celebrations. Go, light up the darkness – in splendor and beauty. Do whatever you can to make these dark days lighter for yourself and for those around you. It helps.

As Unitarian Universalists, we say, among other things, that our religion is Love; Love in action. Indeed. There is a Love that gives us life and that keeps us alive until our final moment in this human life. As people of faith, we share the Love – freely and without judgement – or at least we try to do

that. Your candle, your flame, is a sign and a symbol of that Love... and of hope and possibility, and confidence ... confidence in the promise that what we do matters and that we really can, and so must, make a difference in this world.

And yet, for all of us, there may be days when our spiritual candle is cold and empty. I really do believe that all of us have those days – some more often than others. We know what it feels like to be dark and cold inside and out. On those days, let the rest of us bring you warmth and light. Open your heart and your soul to the kindness and good will of those who love you and share your world. We are here. We see you. Tip your flameless candle toward me as I run to your darkness and let my flame ignite your candle.

When your candle burns brightly, please, relish the feeling and know that the light within you comes freely and without judgement from the Love that surrounds us. Know that you are in a special and fortunate place where you can see and feel and appreciate that light. On those days, also know that there are others who need you and your light. If you can, if you will, hold out your candle, run toward the darkness, light up your world.

In the dark of winter, our ancestors knew that keeping the flame alive and the hearth burning was essential to life. We are the inheritors and keepers of the holidays created by our ancestors. We can help the process of keeping the flame alive by loving each other, and each of us living our life as a candle dispersing the darkness.

My dear Spiritual Companions, during this holiday season, may we be among those who hold out our candle to those who are lonely, depressed, hurting, tired, and worn. May we carry our candles bravely and boldly and each of us, go light our world.

Blessed Be. I Love You. Amen.