

Trimester Twirling
Rev. Kathleen Owens
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I can't make up my mind – if this season, especially after the Dec. 5th until THE BIG DAY is busier or if the busiest time is really in June at our General Assembly. Both include too little time to try and do too much with people I want to be with and yet at the same time, I just want time with my immediate family. Sometimes it can feel like the UU world at General Assembly and the world in this countdown of days to THE BIG DAY – is too much with us. William Wordsworth's poem speaks to this reality. He writes, "The world is too much with us; late and soon, getting and spending, we lay waste our powers; little we see in Nature that is ours; we have given our hearts away, a sordid boon! This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon, the winds that will be howling at all hours, and are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers, for this, for everything, we are out of tune; it moves us not. – Great God! I'd rather be a Pagan suckled in a creed outworn; so might I, standing on this pleasant lea, have glimpses that would make me less forlorn; have sight of Proteus rising from the sea; or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn." And I love the line, "Great God! I'd rather be a Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;" I'm not so sure it's outworn exactly...if you're lucky to have tickets to tonight's Solstice celebration, you'll see what I mean.

But I love the shout – "I'd rather be a Pagan." That line seems to call us back to a time when we like to think that life was simpler then, perhaps. And I don't necessarily think it is necessarily true. It is important to remember that ancient humans understood their lives according to the seasons. Without calendars and watches to keep track, they watched the sky. They looked to the sky and its movements, and the subtle shifts just as

we turn to the weather report on the local news...and it may be that the ancients had more accuracy than today's sky watchers. Nevertheless, our ancestors watched and acted according to what they saw.

So it happened back then, about this time of year, especially in the northern part of the country, the air would get cooler and the food all gathered and the daylight would get shorter. The nights are longer and with the growing nights, so too fear begins to grow. The wise one of the village tries to reassure the people...until one day, the wise one sees something that increases the fear. When the ball of fire in the sky went over the horizon, it didn't keep moving. It looked like it set in the same place as last night. Carefully they watch again and sure enough, the sun seems to sink over the horizon in the same place as before. No longer are the people sure that the sun is moving across the sky. What if it stays like this...plants can't grow without sunlight...without plants, no fruit and no animals to feed on them. Without fruit and animals, humans starve. The sun must keep moving. Can you imagine their anxiety? / Author Carolyn McVickar Edwards in her book, The Return of the Light explains it this way: the word "solstice comes from the Latin, sol stetit which means sun stood still. "For six days in the northern hemisphere's December, the sun ceases its southerly crawl on the horizon and appears to rise and set in almost the same spot. The ancients watched this quiet drama with drawn breath. Would the sun begin to move again? Would the light grow anew on the great wheel of life? Would life itself continue?"¹

Since language came into being, we have told stories to explain the world around us. Nature happens and we are left to live with, to deal with the consequences of it. So we

¹ The Return of the Light, Carolyn McVickar Edwards, page 2.

create stories to try and explain what seems inexplicable. An example from the Native American tradition – a Muskogee [Creek] Story.

When the Earth was first made, there was no light. It was very hard for the animals and the people in the darkness. Finally, the animals decided to do something about it.

"I have heard there is something called the Sun," said the Bear." It is kept on the other side of the world, but the people there will not share it. Perhaps we can steal a piece of it." All the animals agreed that it was a good idea. But who would be the one to steal the Sun?

The Fox was the first to try. He sneaked to the place where the Sun was kept. He waited until no one was looking. Then he grabbed a piece of it in his mouth and he dropped it. To this day all foxes have black mouths because the first fox burned his carrying the Sun.

The Possum tried next. In those days, Possum had a very bushy tail. She crept up to the place where the Sun was kept, broke off a piece and hid it in her tail. Then she began to run, bringing the Sun back to the animals and the people. But the Sun was so hot it burned off all the hair on her tail and she lost of it. To this day all possums have bare tails because the Sun burned away the hair on that first possum.

Then Grandmother Spider tried. Instead of trying to hold the Sun herself, she wove a bag out of her webbing. She put the piece of the Sun into her bag and carried it back with her. Now the question was where to put the Sun.

Grandmother Spider told them, "The Sun should be up high in the sky. Then everyone will be able to see it and benefit from its light". All the animals agreed, but none of them could reach up high enough. Even if they carried it to the top of the tallest tree, that would not be high enough for everyone on the Earth to see the Sun. Then they decided to have one of the birds carry the Sun up to the top of the sky. Everyone knew the Buzzard could fly the highest, so he was chosen.

The Buzzard place the Sun on top of his head, where his feathers were the thickest, for the Sun was still very hot, even inside Grandmother Spider's bag. He began to fly, up and up toward the top of the sky. As he flew the Sun got hotter. Up and up he went, higher and higher, and the Sun grew hotter and hotter still. Now the Sun was burning through Grandmother Spider's bag, but the Buzzard still kept flying up toward the top of the sky. Up and up he went, and the Sun grew hotter. Now it was burning away the feathers on top of his head, but he continued on. Now all of his feathers were gone, but he flew higher. Now it was turning the bare skin of his head all red, but he continued to fly. He flew until he reached the top of the sky, and there he placed the Sun where it would give light to everyone.²

We don't live in those times, though, do we? No – I think we live closer to the life that Wordsworth described... "late and soon, getting and spending, we lay waste our powers; little we see in Nature that is ours;" We've lost our way – lost our sense of connection with Nature and the cycles, the rhythms of Nature. This season doesn't have

² How Grandmother Spider Stole the Sun

to be so full of busyness. In an earlier sermon this season, just before Advent I encouraged us to rush, to walk, to inch our way into the dark and let it nurture our souls. Let us slow down and return to a more natural rhythm of being. You don't have to be a tree-hugger or nature lover to do this. Listening to great music can help us do this. Recently the San Diego Symphony and Master Chorale performed Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. And the lecturer before the concert, in his explanation of the movements demonstrated the stunning quiet of the third movement. After the first two rousing and robust movements, Beethoven slows us down and invites us to deeply listen. The lecturer demonstrated that it takes a full one minute and fifteen seconds to hear the first two phrases of the movement. We slow down to appreciate and absorb the fullness of the masterpiece.

This is one of the lessons of the season...slowing down to take it all in. There is beauty in the lights and the garland; in the people on the streets and in the stores...trying to find that gift that will delight and cheer. There is joy in the air as folks gather to sing and serve together – a politeness that comes with tinsel and the ringing of bells. The season is full of sounds and sights, delicious smells and tasty bites. The traditional holiday letter, if you are brave enough to write one, also highlights the fullness of our lives. It can be a little breath taking to read about a year in your life on one page. In the very short months that made up this past year, Cynthia and I both moved to San Diego, temporary living in five different places before moving into our home, the changing locations of our vocations, saying goodbye to old friends and saying hello to delightful new ones; and so much more. And your lives too, have been full. Life has been very

full...and the wheel keeps turning and it feels like it keeps getting more and more until it's jam-packed...much like a woman in her third trimester.

The mother-to-be was amazed at the miracle of her body. Never had she anticipated it could stretch and grow the way it did while pregnant. The first trimester was scary – new movements and sensations...some favorite foods tasting odd and cravings that helped her body add weight.

The second trimester felt better – the surge in hormones was sometimes a trial but Sarah grew more comfortable and the various sensations she felt were now assuming and sometimes enjoyable. It was more than amazing to feel the baby kick for the first time...and there settled within her a deep peace. She glowed and radiated a presence that others wanted to be near. In this blessed second trimester she felt and looked angelic.

It's amazing the difference a week or two makes. The third trimester was becoming too long. The angelic glow faded into a red-faced, overheated body with swollen feet and ankles. Pain now radiated down her back and into her legs and sleep was a distance memory. When she didn't think her stomach could stretch anymore, it did. The lightly felt kicks and jabs that once produced the surprised expression, "feel this" in the second trimester – now were jabbing stabs of pain and grunt-producing. Like this season of the year, she felt so full that she would burst and longed to do so.

This sounds pretty familiar to many this morning and I'm here to tell you that women are not the only ones who go through this – men do too. Okay, it's only part true...while men do not experience the physical realities of birth in the same way women do, men do labor and give birth, not to human life but other life-sustaining, community enhancing entities. We all have opportunities for this; we all have experiences in which

we have had a spark of an idea that has grown into a project that seems to take on a life of its own. There's the simple idea of, I don't know, the bathrooms in Bard Hall needing remodeled...and that idea, with more information grew into a bigger project that may have felt to some like it grew into something very big. And because of the positive vote last week, we all will continue to take part in nurturing that project to help bring it to fruition. It is exciting what this community is embarking upon – a project that will require all of us to roll up our sleeves, help each other breath through the labor of it and celebrate the new life and energy it will give to this campus and community – sustaining this liberal faith in this city for generations to come. We get to do this as a community and I am wondering: what are you individually waiting to give birth to – what is it that has been germinating inside you that you are ready to bring into being...what new habit, a new attitude or behavior? What risk will you take that will give more joy to the world? More justice and bring more peace?

The beauty of the solstice is that the sun didn't stop on the horizon at the same place every night...it did continue to move – slowly, yes but it did move. Solstice is a time for hope – for new life and the promise of the return of the sun and eventually longer days and warmer temperatures. Plants would continue to flourish and food would grow; animals and humans would not starve – life, this great gift – filled with mystery and wonder, life would continue. The ancients would tell stories and act out dramas – they would mourn the lost of the sun, would fast for a time and refrain from pleasure. But when the sun started to move again – relief would sweep over them and they would celebrate. They would rejoice with dancing and singing, with eating and drinking and wish one another well – pleasure and festival merry-making would ensue. That's why our

opening hymn is known as a solstice song – there is reason to celebrate and deck of the halls.

It sounds somewhat familiar, doesn't it? We celebrate this time of year with lights and songs, with merry-making and holding on to hope – that peace and love are possible. The carols we sing and the wishes we offer one another all have ties to that ancient way of being. And so we have the blessed gift of choosing how we will live out this new year – how we will embrace the new day that is on the horizon, how we will twirl our way into the new year. May we choose life – "life [that] mounts in every throbbing vein, love [that] deepens round the hearth, and clearer sounds the angel hymn good will to all on earth." May it be so. Blessed Be.