

"Commitment to Be the Light"

Rev. Linda Olson Peebles

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I heard it was coming, after 800 years....

A couple months ago – in December - A light in the sky – on the longest night of the year, the winter solstice. That night - My granddaughters and I looked out our windows – we walked outside, out of our yard, down the street trying to get a view – the clouds in the night sky were coming and going – and we were giving up. It was late, it was cloudy, it was cold.

And then – we saw it! There it was – in a gap in trees, far out in the night sky. The great conjunction – on the night of the solstice. The conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter, when those two bright planets appear to be right next to each other, and shine more brightly than any other planet or star ever does.

It seemed a miracle - the bright light, on a long dark day, the once-in-a millennium conjunction like a promise. Like the Christmas star so long ago, a promise of new light coming to a dark world.

..... each day since that night While we are still in covid separation, in spite of the pain on our planet earth, in spite of the January 6 attack on democracy - we are watching the light grow from day to day

Some are saying that we are in a moment in history that comes rarely - The Great Turning – a time of big shifts in human awareness, millennial shifts. What if that is true?

MaMuse sings – “It is time now, it is time now that we thrive. It is time we lead ourselves back to the well. It is time now. And what a time to be alive!! In this great turning we shall learn to lead in love.”

It is time now. And what a time to see how we are experiencing this together. We are inter-related, we are connected, we are part of the whole. We can be the Light – at a great conjunction, coming together to create a brighter light that the world so needs now.

All the crises have been coming at us together – Climate change, a serious and over-due reckoning around racial justice, questions about the nature of truth itself, democracy threatened and at a breaking point. It is time now – time for US to commit to one

another, to finding the solutions. This time, this Great Turning, need us all.

I know for some of us, the primary thing on our minds is getting through this pandemic. We are eager to get our vaccinations and get back to normal.

We're tired of Zoom meetings, of wearing masks, of not being able to hug our grandchildren, of people getting sick and dying, of kids trying to learn on computer screens, of general anxiety, of feeling disconnected. There is a **STRONG** desire to get back to normal!

Back to normal!?! What IS normal? What WAS normal before the pandemic?

Let me remind you – before the pandemic, this congregation was struggling internally. People were mad and hurt. Some left the congregation. Some withheld their money. Others remained in hope, but very hurt. And before the Pandemic - the world around us was filled with ills and injustices – we were in a mess.

The reality before the Pandemic is **NOT** the “Normal” we should want to go back to. **NO**. And you – the UUs of Charlottesville - don't go just back to the old normal - traumatized by August 12

and then by your own loss of faith in each other.

What I hope is that you will take advantage of this moment of great turning, of the rare conjunction of lights, of growing light – so that ALL of us together will seize this moment and go forward to a NEW normal, forward to the world as it SHOULD be!

What could our world be like post-covid?

– hugs and smiles and BEING with one another

- finding ways to continue the lessons we have learned – using technology to be more inclusive, to stay in touch with people

What would happen if we could all make the commitment, the promise together, to be a covenanted community – not just isolated individuals doing our own thing. What if the new normal could be a dawning revival, a NEW light shining on covenant, community, relationship, partnership, mutuality and humility with our diverse neighborhood?!

It is time now. Time to prepare for the other side of this moment. Use our freedom to journey with one another and with others to

heal the troubles and the wounds – within this congregation and in the larger society.

This is a pivotal moment for UUCville. You have been at the edge of real peril, real loss. But you have a strong will to survive! You have been turning back from that edge, and have a strong desire to not just recover, but to discover your new day, stronger and healthier than ever! And here we are at the moment of commitment – the pledge drive, when you will be asked – will you make sure you are ready for the Great Turning? Will you be able to go strongly into the new normal, post-covid, post-crisis?

It is a tough question, a challenging one, And I have told the Board – we are only asking you for your pledges now – in this month of March. We won't keep waiting into the spring, into the summer. If we don't get a promise of enough money - about \$100,000 more than last year - you will start next year without staff. It's now! NOW is the time when we must prepare ourselves for next year – and we need to know what we will have or won't have to work with.

Can I tell you something, in love, with compassion? You have a reputation of being ungenerous people – your average per-individual pledge levels are pretty far below other congregations.

I hear that this has been a struggle for decades. So many of your members pledge nothing or just a little, I had to ask your Board – is this a congregation filled with mostly poor people? Because of course, no one should be expected to give beyond their means. But no; some of our members do face economic hardship – and for them, we still ask a pledge – as a promise of being involved – knowing that pledge can be for a few dollars and a lot of commitment. No – the challenge seems to be understanding that pledging to give to a congregation is NOT like paying a membership fee or buying an admission ticket. And giving donations, while appreciated, is NOT as helpful as pledging, predicting what you will give. That is the only way we together can plan for your future. Pledges of giving are an investment in the well-being of the whole, in your HOME, and there is no one to support this congregation except YOU!

Your average per capita annual pledge is \$1,000 below what it takes nowadays to support the most basic of a church's work. So that is why it may seem like you are not generous people. But that doesn't make sense to me. I have seen how generous you are when we ask you to give to feed the poor or provide shelter to the homeless. How generous you are with our monthly Social Action collections. With our holiday seasonal giving campaigns.

So I know you ARE a generous people – with others . My confusion is this – why aren't you generous with YOURself? With your own families and children and beloved elders? Don't you see that giving to the congregation is giving to yourself - and giving to the health of this religious home strengthens your capacity to give to the wider community? Don't you think you are worth it? I think you are definitely worth it. I think you are thoughtful and loveable people, and you do SO much good in the world – you bring your ethical values and your altruistic compassion SO needed by your neighbors. So please – please – DON'T starve yourselves! Especially not now, as you have just survived falling off the edge, and you have the chance to get back to your shared journey of vibrant ministry to one another and the world.

Of course, some of you are hurting financially – you've lost jobs, or had extra expenses. You can make a pledge at the level that makes sense for you. But I believe that many of you can give more than you have – and I urge you to consider that. And I give thanks to those who have decided to give MORE to help support all of us.

Good things are happening in this congregation. Yes, you've had hard times, and you feel a little bruised. Yes, we are all weary of the Covid isolation and the violence and angst in our politics. But

good things are happening!! Right now! So this is the PERFECT time to be generous and give enough money to this congregation so that it can continue to come out of the shadows. DON't risk missing this moment. BE a part of the new day. BE a part of the light!

Commit to the "Great turning", to the future, to the new normal. Commit to reset your journey, to face the crises and BE the light which becomes the opportunity for a new normal.

Ignite the fire of your commitment, and see the light in one another – and then commit to BE the light that this congregation, this world NEEDS! Amen!