

UU Fellowship of Visalia

Christmas Carol Service Script: Singing through Our Principles

12/25/16; Christmas Day

by Katrina Lewis

Gathering Song *“Hey, Ho, Nobody Home”*

We begin this evening with a gathering song that comes from the pre-Christian tradition of wassailing, in which the sharing of not only sustenance, but song and community was considered to be good for the health of all involved in the exchange. A brief note before we begin that the old meaning of “merry”, rather than joyful, is actually mighty or strong, which shines a different light on many familiar songs.

Heigh ho, nobody home?
Meat nor drink nor money have I none
Still we will be merry, merry

Welcome and Announcements

Welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Visalia. I'm Katrina Lewis and I'm your Worship Associate today.

We are a lay-led, welcoming congregation, which means that whoever you are and whatever brings you here, you are welcome.

Regardless of your ethnic or religious background, you are welcome.

Regardless of your sexual orientation, gender identification or preferences of dress, you are welcome.

Regardless of where you stand in your spiritual exploration, regardless the beliefs you hold, you are welcome.

I extend a warm welcome to our visitors and guests.

Congregational Affirmation and Song of Praise

Introduction

While we acknowledge that not all Unitarian Universalists celebrate Christmas, we acknowledge also that light in its many forms, both literal and metaphorical, is celebrated during this darkest time of year, and that no matter the message, the meaning is always one of hope. Also, we acknowledge and celebrate that these celebrations, especially Christmas, have borne a rich and varied musical tradition, and it is song through which we worship this evening. I've organized some music for us to sing together in order to celebrate the hope and the season, and to revisit the principles which we are committed to affirm and promote and the sources from which we draw our wisdom.

Chalice Lighting (and Candle Lighting)

In this holiday season,
May the darkness of winter
Be dispelled in this festival of lights,

And may the darkness of ignorance
Be dispelled in the strength
Of compassion, reason,
And sharing.

Joys & Concerns

I invite you now to come light a candle that we may fill this sanctuary with our light. This time will also serve as our joys and concerns. If you have something to share, please do so at that time. If you prefer to stay seated, we will bring a candle and the microphone to you. Following our candle lighting, we will join in a brief spoken meditation.

Let us be still in the darkness of our sacred space,
And listen to the quiet around us.
For even in the quiet, there is the gentle being with others.
Let us feel the warmth of our community,
Knowing we are not alone.
For in the quiet shadow is the glow of life within all.

Let us know in the darkness the gift each candle bears,
A small flame, a diminutive light—
Yet the wondrous gift to kindle another's glow.
Let us be in awe at this moment as we each take up the flame
And the light envelopes this room,
As hope for peace and goodwill fill this night.
So may it be.

Offertory “Christmas is Coming”

Christmas is coming
The goose is getting fat
Please do put a penny in the old man's hat
Please do put a penny in the old man's hat
If you've no penny
A ha'penny will do
If you have no ha'penny then God bless you
If you have no ha'penny then God bless you

Our Six Sources “Hallelujah”

We draw our wisdom from six sources:

1. Our direct experience of transcending mystery and wonder
2. Words and deeds of prophetic women and men on justice, compassion, and love
3. Wisdom from the world's religions
4. Jewish and Christian teachings on loving our neighbor as ourselves
5. Humanist teachings of reason and science
6. Spiritual teachings of earth-centered religions

Our first song finds itself in Christmas collections despite having nothing to do with the holiday, and mistakenly winds up in creedal church choirs from time to time (it was debated at my step-

father's Presbyterian church recently). Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" has had many permutations and recordings, but as Jeff Buckley stated in Alan Light's 2012 book about the song (*The Holy or the Broken: Leonard Cohen, Jeff Buckley, and the Unlikely Ascent of "Hallelujah"* by Alan Light) it is ultimately about finding the source for the sacred in every aspect of our lives and the stories that surround them, as we are called to do with our six sources. I'll read a few heavily reduced excerpts here, but I recommend reading it in full!

Cohen's song begins with an image of the Bible's musically identified King David, recounting the heroic harpist's "secret chord," with its special spiritual power... It was his musicianship that first earned David a spot in the royal court, the first step toward his rise to power and uniting the Jewish people.

"As a student of the sound, I understood the resonances of his incantation and invocation of David," said Bono, who added that he immediately responded to the "vaingloriousness and hubris" of the lyric. "I've thought a lot about David in my life. He was a harp player, and the first God heckler – as well as shouting praises to God, he was also shouting admonishment. 'Why hast thou forsaken me?' That's the beginning of the blues."

But this first verse almost instantly undercuts its own solemnity; after offering such an inspiring image in the opening lines, Cohen remembers whom he's speaking to, and reminds his listener that "you don't really care for music, do you?"

"One of the funny things about 'Hallelujah,' " said Bill Flanagan, "is that it's got this profound opening couplet about King David, and then immediately it has this Woody Allen–type line of, 'You don't really care for music, do you?'..."

Cohen then describes, quite literally, the harmonic progression of the verse: "It goes like this: the fourth, the fifth / the minor fall, the major lift." This is an explanation of the song's structure... He ends the first verse with "the baffled king composing Hallelujah!" – a comment on the unknowable nature of artistic creation, or of romantic love, or both. In the song's earliest moments, he has placed us in a time of ancient legend, and peeled back the spiritual power of music and art to reveal the concrete components, reducing even literal musical royalty to the role of simple craftsman.

The second verse of "Hallelujah" ... is now addressing the character who was described in the first verse, since the next lines invoke another incident in the David story, when the king discovers and is tempted by Bathsheba...

Following the David and Bathsheba reference, the sexuality of the lyrics is drawn further forward and then reinforced in an image ... taken from the story of Samson and Delilah...

Lisle Dalton, an associate professor of religious studies at Hartwick College, noted the many levels on which Cohen's linking of David and Samson works. "Both are heroes that are undone by misbegotten relationships with women. Both are adulterers. Both are poets – Samson breaks into verse right after smiting the Philistines. Both repent and seek divine favor after their transgressions.

"I don't know a lot about Cohen's personal life," Dalton continued, "but he seems to be blending these two figures together with, we presume, some of his own experiences. There's no 'kitchen chair' in the Bible! There's a biblical irony that highlights the tendency of even the most heroic characters to suffer a reversal of fortunes, even destruction, because they cannot overcome their sinful natures. The related tendency, and the moral message, is for the character to seek some kind of atonement."

In the third verse of "Hallelujah," Cohen's deadpan wit returns, offering a rebuttal to the religious challenge presented in the previous lines... He then builds to the song's central premise – the value, even the necessity of the song of praise in the face of confusion, doubt, or

dread. "There's a blaze of light in every word; / it doesn't matter which you heard, / the holy, or the broken Hallelujah!"

"A blaze of light in every word." That's an amazing line. Every word, holy or broken – this is the fulcrum of the song as Cohen first wrote it. Like our forefathers, and the Bible heroes who formed the foundation of Western ethics and principles, we will be hurt, tested, and challenged. Love will break our hearts, music will offer solace that we may or may not hear, we will be faced with joy and with pain. But Cohen is telling us, without resorting to sentimentality, not to surrender to despair or nihilism. Critics may have fixated on the gloom and doom of his lyrics, but this is his offering of hope and perseverance in the face of a cruel world. Holy or broken, there is still hallelujah.

Finally, the remarkable fourth verse drives this point home, starting with an all-too-human shrug: "I did my best; it wasn't much." Cohen reinforces his fallibility, his limits, but also his good intentions, singing, "I've told the truth, I didn't come to fool you."

And as he brings the song to a conclusion, Cohen shows that for a composition that has often come to be considered a signifier of sorrowful resistance, "Hallelujah" was in fact inspired by a more positive feeling. "It's a rather joyous song," Cohen said when Various Positions was released. "I like very much the last verse – 'And even though it all went wrong, / I'll stand before the Lord of Song / with nothing on my [tongue] but Hallelujah!' " Decades later, when he was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame, he recited this full last verse as the bulk of his acceptance speech.

"I wanted to push the Hallelujah deep into the secular world, into the ordinary world," he once said. "The Hallelujah, the David's Hallelujah, was still a religious song. So I wanted to indicate that Hallelujah can come out of things that have nothing to do with religion."

"He's rescued the word hallelujah from being just a religious word," said the Right Reverend Nick Baines, Bishop of Croydon, in the BBC radio documentary. "We're broken human beings, all of us, so stop pretending, and we can all use the word hallelujah because what it comes from is being open and transparent before God and the world and saying, 'This is how it is, mate.' "

Now, I've heard there was a secret chord
That David played, and it pleased the Lord
But you don't really care for music, do you?
It goes like this, the fourth, the fifth
The minor fall, the major lift
The baffled king composing hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Your faith was strong but you needed proof
You saw her bathing on the roof
Her beauty and the moonlight overthrew ya
She tied you to a kitchen chair
She broke your throne, and she cut your hair
And from your lips she drew the hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah

You say I took the name in vain
I don't even know the name
But if I did, well really, what's it to you?
There's a blaze of light in every word
It doesn't matter which you heard
The holy or the broken hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah

I did my best, it wasn't much
I couldn't feel, so I tried to touch
I've told the truth, I didn't come to fool you
And even though it all went wrong
I'll stand before the lord of song
With nothing on my tongue but hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah

First Principle “*Good King Wenceslas*”

We are called to affirm and promote our first principle: The inherent worth and dignity of every person. “*Good King Wenceslas*”, based on the characterization of an 8th century Czech saint, is a teaching song that instructs in the service of all persons, despite wealth and standing or lack thereof. Here, the monarch shows his subject by example why and how to provide for those who need it most. It also hints at the inherent spiritual payoff of loving all your neighbors, as the act of giving allows the two to persevere in impossible weather. (*If there are enough of us:*) Let's try singing with a traditional method where one side of the room sing's the king's lines, the other the page's, and we all sing the narrator together.

ALL:

Good King Wenceslas looked out
On the Feast of Stephen
When the snow lay 'round about
Deep and crisp and even
Brightly shone the moon that night
Though the frost was cruel
When a poor man came in sight
Gath'ring winter fuel

KING:

"Hither, page, and stand by me,
If thou know'st it, telling
Yonder peasant, who is he?
Where and what his dwelling?"

PAGE:

"Sire, he lives a good league hence,
Underneath the mountain
Right against the forest fence

By Saint Agnes' fountain."

KING:

"Bring me flesh and bring me wine
Bring me pine-logs hither
Thou and I shall see him dine
When we bear them thither."

ALL:

Page and monarch, forth they went
Forth they went together
Through the rude wind's wild lament
And the bitter weather.

PAGE:

"Sire, the night is darker now
And the wind blows stronger
Fails my heart, I know not how
I can go no longer."

KING:

"Mark my footsteps, good my page
Tread thou in them boldly
Thou shall find the winter's rage
Freeze thy blood less coldly."

ALL:

In his master's step he trod
Where the snow lay dinted
Heat was in the very sod
Which the Saint had printed
Therefore, Christian men, be sure
Wealth or rank possessing
Ye, who now will bless the poor
Shall yourselves find blessing.

Second Principle *"It Came Upon a Midnight Clear"*

We are called to affirm and promote our first principle: The inherent worth and dignity of every person. Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations. Unitarian Reverend Edmund Hamilton Sears wrote the poem "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear" in 1849 at 39 years old, which was set to music the following year.

It is considered Unitarian for never mentioning the Christ-child. Indeed British carol scholar, Erik Routley, wrote of the piece that, "in its original form, the hymn is little more than an ethical song, extolling the worth and splendor of peace among men."

It is rarely left in its original form, however. While most protestant hymnals include a version, the third verse in which Sears is most condemnatory of war is commonly omitted. He wrote during the Mexican War and the American forcible occupation of the southwest. He was outspoken about the wrongfulness of killing whether in private life or at war by order of the President, writing "And does he make men shoot and kill? Then let some pious folk, a gallows

build in Washington, and hang up Mr. Polk." So this song might be a fitting rumination for our sixth principle. But in striving toward peace, Sears envisions the compassion among humankind our second principle asks us to honor. Remarkably, our own hymnal leaves out the fourth verse on the poor and downtrodden, and the equity that justice would bring.

It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth,
To touch their harps of gold:
"Peace on the earth, goodwill to men,
From heaven's all-gracious King."
The world in solemn stillness lay,
To hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come,
With peaceful wings unfurled,
And still their heavenly music floats
O'er all the weary world;
Above its sad and lowly plains,
They bend on hovering wing,
And ever o'er its babel sounds
The blessed angels sing.

Yet with the woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long;
Beneath the angel-strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not
The love-song which they bring;
O hush the noise, ye men of strife,
And hear the angels sing.

And ye, beneath life's crushing load,
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way
With painful steps and slow,
Look now! for glad and golden hours
come swiftly on the wing.
O rest beside the weary road,
And hear the angels sing!

For lo!, the days are hastening on,
By prophet bards foretold,
When with the ever-circling years
Comes round the age of gold
When peace shall over all the earth
Its ancient splendors fling,

And the whole world give back the song
Which now the angels sing.

Third Principle *“Drummer Boy”*

We are called to affirm and promote our third principle: Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations. At the risk of being too trite, we all march to the beat of our own spiritual drummer and we all have something to bring to the conversation.

Come they told me, Pa rum pum pum pum
A new born King to see, Pa rum pum pum pum
Our finest gifts we bring, Pa rum pum pum pum
To lay before the king, Pa rum pum pum pum
rum pum pum pum, rum pum pum pum
So to honor Him, Pa rum pum pum pum
When we come

Little baby, Pa rum pum pum pum
I am a poor boy too, Pa rum pum pum pum
I have no gift to bring, Pa rum pum pum pum
That's fit to give our King, Pa rum pum pum pum,
rum pum pum pum, rum pum pum pum
Shall I play for you, Pa rum pum pum pum
On my drum

Mary nodded, Pa rum pum pum pum
The ox and lamb kept time, Pa rum pum pum pum
I played my drum for Him, Pa rum pum pum pum
I played my best for Him, Pa rum pum pum pum,
rum pum pum pum, rum pum pum pum
Then He smiled at me, Pa rum pum pum pum
Me and my drum

Fourth Principle *“O Come, O Come Emmanuel”*

We are called to affirm and promote our fourth principle: A free and responsible search for truth and meaning. And in our typically Universalist way, that often means embracing the power of myth and undressing the metaphor in sacred texts. In one of our hymnal carols, an unknown author has done just that: the traditional “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” has been rewritten. Emmanuel, or “the God among us”, has been recast as “the God within us” and renamed as Love, Truth, Light, and Hope. As in the secular reading of the Bible, “victory over the grave” is not sung here as a heavenly afterlife, but as the living of an enlightened life here on earth. This is one common way we find our truths, and the truths we interpret help us live with meaning.

(Hymnal 225)

O come, O come, Emmanuel, and with your captive children dwell.

Give comfort to all exiles here, and to the aching heart bid cheer.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come within as Love to dwell.

O come, you Splendor very bright, as joy that never yields to might.
O come, and turn all hearts to peace, that greed and war at last shall cease.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come within as Truth to dwell.

O come, you Dayspring, come and cheer our spirits by your presence here.
And dawn in every broken soul as vision that can see the whole.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come within as Light to dwell.

O come, you Wisdom from on high, from depths that hide within a sigh,
To temper knowledge with our care, to render every act a prayer.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come within as Hope to dwell.

Fifth Principle *"The Friendly Beasts"*

We are called to affirm and promote our fifth principle: The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large. I confess it was difficult to settle on a Christmas carol that embodied a democratic process.

Jesus our brother kind and good
Was humbly born in a stable rude.
And the friendly beasts around him stood
Jesus our brother, kind and good.

"I," said the donkey, all shaggy and brown,
"I carried his mother up hill and down
I carried his mother to Bethlehem town. "
"I," said the donkey, all shaggy and brown.

"I," said the cow, all white and red
"I gave him my manger for his bed
I gave him my hay to pillow his head. "
"I," said the cow, all white and red

"I," said the sheep, with curly horn,
"I gave him my wool for a blanket warm
He wore my coat on Christmas morn. "
"I," said the sheep, with curly horn.

"I," said the dove, from the rafters high
"I cooed him to sleep so he would not cry
We cooed him to sleep, my love and I
"I," said the dove, from the rafters high.

Thus every beast, by some good spell
In the stable rude was glad to tell

Of the gift he gave Emmanuel
The gift he gave Emmanuel
The gift he gave Emmanuel

Sixth Principle *“Do You Hear What I Hear?”*

We are called to affirm and promote our sixth principle: The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all. Many Christmas songs are for peace in one way or another, but “Do You Hear What I Hear?” was intended to be a peace song even more than a Christmas carol. The familiar carol was written by a Catholic-raised Unitarian Universalist convert, Noel Regney and his then-wife Gloria Shayne Baker. Regney, born in France in 1922, was steeped in a background of war and conflict. He was drafted into the Nazi army, deserted, joined the French resistance, acted as a double agent, and was shot in the arm by friendly French fire during a planned ambush. It was during the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis that he wrote “Do You Hear What I Hear?” with his wife.

Blogger Kathy Warnes writes: “In October 1962, musician Noel Regney walked through the streets of Manhattan, the weight of despair in his heart reflected on the unsmiling faces of the people that he passed on the street. A war of words and maneuvers called the Cold War held the world in an icy grip, with the United States and the Soviet Union the principal combatants. During these last two weeks in October 1962, the United States and the Soviet Union were heating the Cold War to the nuclear boiling point in a confrontation over the Soviet Union installing missiles capable of striking most of the continental United States in Cuba, just 90 miles away. History labeled this confrontation the Cuban Missile Crisis.

“Noel Regney felt terrified for his family, his country, and for the survival of the human race. He had fought in World War II and had experienced the fear and terror of war and death first hand.

Now he worried that the secure life he had built for himself and his family in the United States teetered on nuclear brinkmanship. He tried to think about something else. Christmas, the time of peace on earth and goodwill, hovered just a few months away and a record producer had asked him to write a Christmas song. He later recalled that he thought he would never write a Christmas song because Christmas had become so commercial. Then on his way home, Noel saw two mothers taking their babies for a walk in their strollers. He watched the two babies looking at each other and smiling and his mood lifted from despair to hope. Noel’s mind turned to poetry and babies and lambs. By the time he arrived home, he had composed the lyrics of Do You Hear What I Hear? in his head.

“As soon as Noel Regney arrived home, he jotted down the lyrics that he had written in his head and he asked his wife Gloria to write the music to match his words. The Regneys usually collaborated using the exact opposite method – Gloria would write the words and Noel would write the music. This time they switched roles. Gloria Regney later said, “Noel wrote a beautiful song and I wrote the music. We couldn’t sing it through; it broke us up. We cried. Our little song broke us up. You must realize there was a threat of nuclear war at the time.””

Bing Crosby, Perry Como, Robert Goulet, Susan Boyle, and Andy Williams are just a few of the artists that have recorded the more than 120 versions of Do You Hear What I Hear? in musical styles from jazz to reggae. Bing Crosby’s version in 1963 sold more than a million copies. According to his obituary, Noel Regney favored the Robert Goulet version of the song. “I am amazed that people can think they know the song- and not know it is a prayer for peace, but we are so bombarded by sound and our attention spans are so short that we now listen only to catchy beginnings,” he said in a 1985 interview.”

Said the night wind to the little lamb,
do you see what I see
Way up in the sky, little lamb,
do you see what I see
A star, a star, dancing in the night
With a tail as big as a kite
With a tail as big as a kite

Said the little lamb to the shepherd boy,
do you hear what I hear
Ringing through the sky, shepherd boy,
do you hear what I hear
A song, a song, high above the trees
With a voice as big as the sea
With a voice as big as the sea

Said the shepherd boy to the mighty king,
do you know what I know
In your palace warm, mighty king,
do you know what I know
A Child, a Child shivers in the cold
Let us bring Him silver and gold
Let us bring Him silver and gold

Said the king to the people everywhere,
listen to what I say
Pray for peace, people everywhere!
listen to what I say
The Child, the Child, sleeping in the night
He will bring us goodness and light
He will bring us goodness and light

Seventh Principle *“Deck the Halls”*

We are called to affirm and promote our seventh principle: Respect for the interdependent web of existence of which we are a part. Part of this practice comes from simply honoring the rhythms and cycles of the natural world. The familiar “Deck the Halls” does just that. It is about little else than enjoying the seasonal greenery and the joyful warm company that comes from the need to gather indoors in the cold weather.

(Hymnal 235)

Deck the hall with boughs of holly, Fa la la la la la la la la
'Tis the season to be jolly, Fa la la la la la la la la
Don we now our gay apparel, Fa la la la la la la la la
Troll the ancient Yuletide carol, Fa la la la la la la la la

See the blazing Yule before us, Fa la la la la la la la la
Strike the harp and join the chorus, Fa la la la la la la la la
Follow me in merry measure, Fa la la la la la la la la
While I tell of Yuletide treasure, Fa la la la la la la la la

Fast away the old year passes, Fa la la la la la la la la
Hail the new, ye lads and lasses, Fa la la la la la la la la
Sing we joyous all together, Fa la la la la la la la la
Heedless of the wind and weather, Fa la la la la la la la la

Extinguishing the Chalice

In this holiday season,
throughout the year to come,
and always in our lives,
may we know we are loved;
may we share the love we have;
and may we be the love we wish to see.

Closing Circle *"Boar's Head Carol"*