

Blue Christmas 2024  
Sunday, December 24, 2023  
Tri-County Unitarian Universalists  
Summerfield, FL  
Rev. Cynthia A. Snavelly

A few days ago I received a regular email from Uplift Access whose tag line is uplifting disability access in Unitarian Universalism and Beyond. Gretchen Maune wrote, "I am writing this after deeply sinking into the Holiday Blues Service, held annually at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Columbia, Missouri, which is my church. We hold this evening event because not everyone feels the joyful holiday spirit society seems to deem a requirement this time of year.

"Despite the bright, twinkling lights and the chiming bells, some of us are full of grief, fear, and pain. We believe there should be a time to honor these feelings as well. As a person who has lived with chronic, clinical depression for most of their life, I greatly value this service and the space it provides me to let my heavy heart rest freely in our church's sanctuary, feeling wholly accepted for all that I bring with me.

"This year, I needed the service more than ever, as I am still deeply grieving the loss of my dear friend, and fellow UU, Qhyrrae Michaelieu, who worked with me for many years on our Disability Justice and Inclusion Team, always making sure we didn't forget to uplift depression, anxiety, and other invisible disabilities. Authenticity was one of her greatest values, and I felt like I was safe at home when I was with her. I learned so many things from her, but the one that's settled in my heart as of late is that I don't need to hide my tears."

She then included this poem by Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer.

"Watching My Friend Pretend Her Heart Is Not Breaking"

"On Earth, just a teaspoon of neutron star  
would weigh six billion tons. Six billion tons  
equals the collective weight of every animal  
on earth. Including the insects. Times three.

"Six billion tons sounds impossible  
until I consider how it is to swallow grief—  
just a teaspoon and one might as well have consumed  
a neutron star. How dense it is,  
how it carries inside it the memory of collapse.  
How difficult it is to move then.  
How impossible to believe that anything  
could lift that weight.

“There are many reasons to treat each other with great tenderness. One is the sheer miracle that we are here together on a planet surrounded by dying stars. One is that we cannot see what anyone else has swallowed.”

As our Whistlestop video noted one does not have to be dealing with depression to have some dread rather than joy about Christmas.

As I know from personal experience, it is not fun to go Christmas shopping when what the grandkids want most is gift certificates or cash. And then for whom do you need, and it can feel like need not want, to get gifts? There are six grandchildren, four children, three spouses of the children, and your sister. That is fourteen people. How much can you afford to spend? And then you know the neighbor is going to bring you some homemade gift. Shouldn't you make something or buy something for her? Oh, and then your mail carrier left you their information. They obviously are hoping for something. And the secretary at the condominium office has been so helpful this year. Maybe you should give him some token gift. It can feel like all the shoulds are piling up and drowning out joy, and, perhaps, stressing your budget.

Christmas is not what it was like when I was young when my grandparents, my parents, my siblings, my aunts and uncles, cousins, and a couple of great aunts and uncles would all gather. If I drove to Pennsylvania this year, likely the only family with which to gather would be my sister. My brother and sister-in-law and nephew would likely be in North Carolina with my sister-in-law's parents. My grandsons will be with their Dad. My daughter will be with her sisters. I have decided to not make the drive this year. I will gather with some of you for the Christmas day potluck, but some nostalgia can bring on a little melancholy.

I said I chose not to drive to Pennsylvania from Florida this year. For those who are traveling, driving hours to get to one's destination and then needing to load the car with gifts and holiday dinner leftovers to drive home or dealing with crowded airports and planes may not be high on your list of “oh, isn't this fun” holiday activities.

I have always worked on Christmas eve, but I hate when, like last year, Christmas is on a Sunday, and I end up also working on Christmas day. If I do want to travel, I can't leave until after the morning service. And generally, I have found that the number of congregants who show up for a service on a Christmas Sunday morning is small. Maybe you aren't going to have Christmas dinner until late because your daughter, a nurse, is working a twelve-hour shift from six to six. Maybe you are serving dinner in shifts because one grandchild has to work at the convenience store till 3 and another starts work at 4.

Maybe you are not having a traditional Christmas gathering this year because a family member is in the hospital. You will be sitting with them, worrying about if they will ever come home, trying to give them a little Christmas despite the circumstances, but wondering if you have at all succeeded in the effort. The hospital may be serving turkey and stuffing. You may have brought a poinsettia, but this is not the way you want to be marking the holiday.

Maybe you just don't do Christmas. You are Jewish or atheist or Buddhist, but it seems like everyone else is doing something special on December 25. You are deciding whether to go to the Chinese restaurant, a movie, stay home. Somehow it feels like whatever you decide you have been left out of something.

Last year it had only been two months since my mother had died, and, somehow, it still felt important to go home for Christmas. Now it has been over a year and going home for Christmas did not seem like a necessary part of the holiday. Maybe you have a family member or a friend who is no longer here. If that passing is recent you may feel like there is a hole the size and shape of that person in your holiday plans. If that passing is a bit further in the past you may still be thinking of that person a bit more and what you used to do with them.

And then there is the news. There are wars. There are refugees fleeing for their lives. There are hostages. There are prisoners of war. There are families bereft of loved ones killed. What right do we have to be joyful amidst so much sorrow?

Unitarian Universalist minister Debra Falk wrote a piece titled, "In our Heart Not All is Joyful"

"All around us are bright lights and merry messages  
Yet in our heart not all is joyful  
There is grief with the loss of relationships,  
Those we love, no longer with us because of death  
Those we have loved who are estranged from us  
Those we love, yet experience a diminishment of intimacy  
There is grief with the loss and change of relationship,  
Grief, bittersweet for it is a consequence of the presence of love  
...this season brings forth many feelings.

"We find comfort in naming these feelings; we find some peace in being together

"All around us are bright lights and merry messages  
Yet in our heart not all is joyful  
There may be pain in our bodies,  
Physical pain as a natural outcome of aging  
Physical pain that presents itself in illness  
Pain in the body that forces us to change and imposes limitations  
Pain, bittersweet for physical experience includes both pain and pleasure and  
...this season brings forth many feelings.

"We find comfort in naming these feelings; we find some peace in being together

"All around us are bright lights and merry messages  
Yet in our heart not all is joyful  
There may be anger and regret with the memories we hold,  
Anger with past experiences of hurt or abuse,  
Regret of our own actions that may have caused hurt to others,  
Anger that life has not turned out as we imagined,

Regret for what we might have said or done,  
Anger and regret, bittersweet in presenting the possibility for healing and forgiveness,  
...this season brings forth many feelings.

“We find comfort in naming these feelings; we find some peace in being together

All around us are bright lights and merry messages  
Yet in our heart not all is joyful  
There may be uncertainty that accompanies transition and change,  
Uncertainty of what the future may bring with changes,  
Uncertainty of direction or purpose after retirement or change of vocation,  
Uncertainty when changing residence, by choice or necessity,  
Uncertainty, bittersweet for change, a constant in life, let’s us know we are alive, and change  
along with  
...this season brings forth many feelings.

“We find comfort in naming these feelings; we find some peace in being together.

“All around us are bright lights and merry messages  
Yet in our heart not all is joyful  
There may be a sense of hopelessness,  
Hopelessness in the face of so much violence and suffering  
Hopelessness with attempts to heal our aching world and ourselves  
Hopelessness in witnessing what we have not managed to accomplish  
Hopelessness, bittersweet for its longing reminds us of our capacity for hope and the human  
spirit’s tenacity and courage that rest deep within each of us as  
...this season brings forth many feelings

“We find comfort in naming these feelings; we find some peace in being together.

“All around us are bright lights and merry messages  
Yet in our heart not all is joyful  
There is loneliness,  
Loneliness when we find ourselves alone after being long-partnered,  
Loneliness when we are separated from loved ones,  
Loneliness when we move to a new community and struggle to find our way,  
Loneliness that never seems filled even with good company,

Loneliness that is an ever-present aching in the heart,  
Loneliness, bittersweet for it is felt only when we have known connectedness and  
...this season brings forth many feelings.

“We find comfort in naming these feelings; we find some peace in being together

“All around us are bright lights and merry messages  
Yet in our heart not all is joyful  
We know grief and pain,

We know anger and regret,  
We know hopelessness and loneliness,  
We know all these feelings, we name them, we live them for such is the human experience  
That love presents us with the possibility of being hurt, with the grief of loss,  
That connection holds the potential of loneliness and uncertainty,  
That forgiveness can begin to heal anger and regret  
That being alive is a courageous act in which we engage all of our emotions and  
...this season brings forth many feelings

“We find comfort in naming these feelings; we find some peace in being together.”

May we indeed find some peace this morning in being together with all our feelings and being able to share them with one another.