

“Seeds of Commitment”

Rev. Lyn Cox

February 4, 2018 (Imbolc)

The Celtic Pagan calendar is rooted in the seasons of light and dark of the northern hemisphere and the agricultural cycles of western Europe. There are other calendars and festivals for earth-centered cultures all over the world, but this is the one we're talking about today. At approximately the same time of year in the British Isles and here in Pennsylvania, the middle of winter means that we can start to perceive the time of sunrise and sunset edging toward spring, just a little more daylight each day.

February into March is the time of year when lambs start to be born, vulnerable and full of promise for the coming spring. They need to be kept warm. This is also the time of year when people who grow vegetables in climates like ours make a plan for the next six months, gathering seeds, starting a few indoors, and figuring out how to make the most of the soil and sun that will be available later. Making plans at this in-between time of year takes courage.

As Libby mentioned, the goddess Bridget and, in her later form, St. Bridget of Kildare are associated with this early February holiday. In the legends, Bridget protects access to clean, healing water. She is also a figure of light and flame. When you put fire and water together, you can make entirely new things out of what you had before. You can forge iron, cook food, sculpt clay and fire it into ceramics. Maybe this transformative potential is why Bridget is also associated with childbirth, poetry, healing, song, and art.

There is one thing that newborn lambs, vegetable seeds, soup ingredients, raw iron, and future poetry all have in common: They don't look at the beginning the way they are going to look at the end. You have to have some hope and imagination to believe in the transformation that is coming. You have to keep doing what you are doing, when the evidence for success has not yet appeared. We need to hold on through the long term, through step-by-step processes, through the discomfort of growth and change. And so another thing we learn at Bridget's holiday is the need for commitment.

Has anyone here ever had to practice something? Have you gone to sports or dance practice, or been in a play? Has anyone here ever had to work on a project that took more than a day to complete? Big things take a lot of time to get ready for, and it can be discouraging to work on something before you can know for sure how it will turn out. Imbolc is the holiday where we decide to stick to those projects anyway. Commitment.

If we're paying attention to a legendary figure of generosity, art, and transformation, it's a good idea to listen to the voices of poets who figured out how to sustain themselves and their families and communities through difficult times. During Black History Month, we are reminded of many examples of poets and artists who showed and inspired perseverance as they provided hope and imagination about a better world that was not yet visible.

We opened today's service with words by June Jordan, who was an African American poet, activist, teacher, and essayist. Her 1978 "Poem for South African Women" includes the often-quoted line, "We are the ones we have been waiting for." She wasn't a UU, but we can count her as a prophetic voice from the past who inspires us today. (Ann Stillwater/Cordell Affeldt) shared a poem by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. In her "sweet anthems of love and duty," I hope you heard the resonance with Bridget's legend of generosity, creativity, and commitment.

Listen more often to the ancestors whose breath comes to us through poetry. They teach us not only to put one foot in front of the other, one stanza at a time, but to sustain our minds and souls with enthusiasm for the smallest details and the biggest dreams. Poems can be quite short, and yet their evocative words plant seeds, growing into thoughts and conversations and relationships. Bridget's holiday is a good time for tapping into the creativity that sustains commitment.

This is also the time of year for members and friends UCH to think about commitments to the congregation for the next year, in terms of pledging and in terms of volunteering gifts and talents. You are welcome here, no matter what your capacity; that being said, those of us who are blessed with abundance of time or treasure will find satisfaction in sharing it with this community. The world is calling us to be innovative, strong, resilient, and practical. Those are some of the values that are highlighted at Imbolc.

Members and pledging friends will be able to pick up a stewardship brochure at the potluck this Friday. Over dinner, we'll talk about what we value about this congregation and what your dreams are for the future. If you missed the RSVP deadline on Friday, we can still find seats; talk to Ed Sykes or John Hargreaves. Otherwise, you can pick up your brochure next Sunday or wait for it in the mail. Like the raw iron and the soup ingredients and the acorn, this congregation has the potential to grow into something even more spectacular and life-giving than it already is, which is saying a lot. Your commitment will help make it so.

This Imbolc, may we be inspired to shape the future with courage, creativity, and commitment. May we create a meeting place for fire and water, past and future, winter and spring, celebration and potential. So be it. Blessed be. Amen.