

Monthly Letter from the Minister

December 2024

Every December, I become obsessed with two concepts: food and home. This month, my favorite read is a book of essays on food titled, “Bite by Bite: Nourishments & Jamborees” by poet Aimee Nezhukumatathil.

About mint, Aimee wrote, “In Greek mythology, Minthe was a nymph who had an affair with Hades, and when Persephone discovered this, she trampled her to the ground, turning her into a plant. But the more she stomped, the more fragrant was the air.” Oh, the drama!

And tomatoes? The author stated, “The fear of tomatoes goes back hundreds of years. Folks in the Middle Ages thought tomatoes were poisonous, but that’s only because they regularly ate them off pewter plates, which leached lead.” Regarding pineapple, she shared this fact, “The French priest Father Du Tertre called pineapples ‘the king of fruits because it wears a crown.’”

Pineapples are also a commonly recognized symbol of home and hospitality. For example, in the Caribbean, the pineapple is a symbol of warmth, generosity, and community. It is often used in traditional rituals and celebrations to bring people together. Although we don’t incorporate pineapples in many of our annual Unitarian Universalists of Clearwater winter celebrations, we do seek opportunities to gather, to laugh and to tell stories.

However, every year, when old traditions such as singing of carols, decorating with natural greens, lighting of Yule logs, and baking countless cookies ensue, I begin thinking about past holidays, the places and people who now only exist in my memories. I know I am not alone.

This melancholy or longing for a home that likely doesn’t and probably never entirely existed has a name. It’s *hireath*, a Welsh word. How does this feeling, this homesickness or sense of wistfulness come about?

We humans have the capacity to imagine all sorts of scenarios whereby we are sure others are having a better time than we are. We tend to use selective approaches when we reminisce, thereby retaining only the pleasurable parts of experiences of the past but not the difficult times when someone was

fighting or drank too much, and spoiling the family or community celebration. It might also involve the “grass is greener” idea too.

Look, I am a strong advocate of the idea that “home is a state of being” rather than a place and time. And yet, for me, it takes persistent adjustment through meditation and quiet reflection to keep this perception front and center.

Finally, as the old year eases and a new one arrives, there is much trepidation about what’s to come in the year ahead. Many are fearful for good reason. And yet, here too is an opportunity to reclaim the power of covenanting to “make a home where all are embraced.” That is, to creating a space for joy, trust, authenticity and safety in our Unitarian Universalist meeting spaces such as Unitarian Universalists of Clearwater.

The following lyrics from former American Idol winner, Phillip Phillips seems appropriate:

*Settle down, it'll all be clear
Don't pay no mind to the demons
They fill you with fear
The trouble, it might drag you down
If you get lost, you can always be found
Just know you're not alone
'Cause I'm gonna make this place your home.*

-Lyrics from the chorus of the song “Home”

Happy Holidays!

With you on this journey,

Rev. Amy Kindred