

Oct 30 Going Into the Dark

Susan Peck, with Chalice Singers & Worship Team

Introduction to Service

-Susan Peck

Autumn is liminal time: an in-between time. We wait at a threshold, when familiar patterns give way to the uncertainty of what might happen next. Trees are changing colors; and soon will be bare. We hang between summer and winter: the sun is bright and hot in the middle of the day, but we pull blankets around us on chilly starlit nights. As a nation, we wait on tenterhooks for the results of political decisions. Closer to home, we celebrate the harvest, roast our chiles, and hope the longer nights won't bring sadness. Liminal time: time of changes, uncertainty, hope. In many traditions, autumn is when the boundaries between our world and the otherworld are more easily traversed by spirits and souls. Pagan folks celebrate Samhain, the Celtic new year, when the veil between the worlds grows thin. The now mostly secular wizards, witches, ghosts, and goblins of Hallowe'en used to make their appearance before the Christian feast days for All Saints and All Souls. Many here in the Southwest celebrate Dia de los Muertos, building ofrendas: altars with marigolds, sugar skulls, and special bread, to honor the memory of loved ones who have died. These rituals call us to honor death and life together.

**Message: "Going Into the Dark"**

Homily, part 1

-Susan Peck

Praise god or the gods, the unknown, that which imagined us, which stays our murderous hand, and gives us still, in the shadow of death, our daily life.

Denise Levertov's October poem speaks deeply to me, to the metaphorical winter that dwells in my heart all too often: I grieve for the murderous discord in too many parts of the world. I fear that, as a citizen of the most powerful nation on earth, I am somehow complicit in that discord. I wrestle with my choices in a political system that betrays my trust. Like Levertov, in my Unitarian Universalist fashion of not wanting to pin down the receiver of my prayers, I call out to the unknown, to the universe, to the inherent good of human nature: for peace on earth. In the shadow of death, our daily life. In the shortening days, the harvest. In the lengthening nights, patience. In the liminal time, hope.

In his piece *The Paradox of Fall* (<http://fetzer.org/blog/paradox-fall>), Parker Palmer writes: "Autumn is a season of great beauty, but it is also a season of decline: the days grow shorter, the light is suffused, and summer's abundance decays toward winter's death. Faced with this inevitable winter, what does nature do in autumn? She scatters the seeds that will bring new growth in the spring—and she scatters them with amazing abandon....How shall we understand autumn's testimony that death and elegance go hand in hand?"

I find that this season of change holds three main gifts for the coming year: 1, the temporary things, like leaves, give up the ghost. 2, the season of growth yields its fruits. And 3, we are granted long nights so that we might slow down. The leaves turn golden and fall away, and we have a choices: throw them away, burn them, recycle them. In my yard, I rake the fallen leaves into piles for mulch, to nurture future plantings in a yet unplanned landscape. For now, I find comfort in compost, reminding myself that all things that fall away serve as nourishment for the next new thing.

Homily, part 2

-Susan Peck

A few weeks ago, I put my tiny community garden plot to bed, having reaped over the summer: a few bowls of cherry tomatoes, six zucchinis, handfuls of delicious volunteer basil, several small but extremely hot peppers, not a single strawberry, armloads of weeds, and lessons learned about how not to garden in the high desert. I'm grateful my tiny harvest as well as the coming fallow time when I can take time to dream and plan for next year's endeavors.

Wait a minute, our urban lives hardly follow the seasons so neatly. I'd like to lie fallow like my garden bed, meditate, curl up with cat and candles while I smell the green chile stew simmering on the stove, wait for new projects to germinate in the spring, but there's another rehearsal, another worship, Christmas eve services to plan, holiday parties and family gatherings that may be wonderful or may be crazy. These are paradoxes to embrace, rich connections that continue regardless the length of the chilly

nights. Still, the haze in the air reminds me, wouldn't it be lovely to pause, celebrate the nourishment of the harvest, and make space for quiet dark nights of reflection?

### Homily, part 3

The earth continues its orbit around the sun, the northern hemisphere leans into winter, next year's seeds wait in the ground for longer days, the starlit chill of night skies carries the scent of burning piñon, and the aspens' gold drapes the mountains.

What has come to fruition in your life, to sustain you through the coming months? What is maturing, dying, and falling away to make room for new growth? What thoughts and feelings might do well to rest quietly for a few months? What do you hope will grow anew in the coming year?