

## It's ALMOST Time

Theodore Parker Unitarian Universalist Church

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Children's Pageant    **How the Sun Was Brought Back to the Sky**, by Mirra Ginsburg

Offertory                **It's Almost Time**, words and music by David Wilcox

Just across the sea on this world so round  
The sun's shining hot right now.  
And even though the winter still surrounds this town  
I can still feel that sun somehow.

When I know that my sun will shine just as sure as this world can spin,  
I can hold on fine, 'cause it's almost time, for that sun to come 'round again.

So I'll walk beside the sea on this frozen ground  
Where there once was a warm weather crowd.  
Even though that summer's been a long time gone,  
I can still feel that sun somehow.

[Chorus]

When your love grows cold and your heart grows dark  
And the blame seems to fall on you.  
Well look how seasons must change and don't think it so strange  
That your love goes in circles too.

And just know that your sun will shine just as sure as this world can spin,  
And I know you'll find, that it's almost time, for that love to come 'round again.  
We can hold on fine, 'cause it's almost time, for that love to come 'round again.

Reading                from *An Altar in the World*    Barbara Brown Taylor

A few years ago a friend of mine was walking the Mother Labyrinth in Chartres Cathedral with a group of other pilgrims when she noticed an older man and woman standing near the entrance watching. After about twenty minutes of looking, they walked straight to the center of the labyrinth and bowed their heads in prayer. Then the woman took off her shoes and handed them to her husband, along with her purse. As he watched, she took the long way out of the labyrinth,

following the path this time. She cried on the way. He cried just watching her. When they had pulled themselves together, my friend went up to ask them what had just happened.

They had come to celebrate the end of the woman's [medical] treatment[s], they explained. They had never even heard of a labyrinth before they walked into the cathedral that day. The woman could not explain why she was drawn to walk it, but when she did her husband decided to hold down the center, giving thanks for her life while she found her way out.

"I began to feel at peace in my body again after being very angry that it had let me down," the woman explained. Walking, she found herself remembering all the people who had walked with her through her surgery and treatment. "I now know this is why we came here," she told my friend.

*Solvitur ambulando*, wrote Augustine of Hippo, one of the early theologians of the Christian church. "It is solved by walking." What is "it"? If you want to find out, then you will have to do your own walking.

SERMON

### It's ALMOST Time

the Rev. Anne Bancroft

Years ago, I wrote a homily about being what I called One Shy . . . It was my birthday, but not a big round birthday. It was the one before the big round birthday, hence "one shy."

I remember my daughter saying, "well, at least you're not hmmm-hmmm!" We thought it was so big then we didn't even say the number! Silly us.

One Shy of the Big One. As I was thinking about it, I remember being aware of expressions like "one egg shy of a dozen," or "one card shy of a full deck." "One shoe shy of a pair" or "one lightbulb shy of a chandelier."

Anything come to mind for you?

They're all sort of *if only* statements. You know, if only I had this, I'd be complete.

How about, one apology shy of authentic. One war shy of world peace?

They all turn, of course, on the concept of *unfinished, incomplete, not quite there, almost but not quite*. And the question becomes one of how we live in that space . . . that liminal space . . . that one-shy, ALMOST time, without feeling – sometimes desperately – that we want to be, or should be, or could be somewhere else, somewhere better, somewhere more complete.

I wonder about **your** one-shy, **your** almost . . . . Are you looking for a new job? Or something new to engage with? Are you waiting for something to be complete in your life, or for something to begin: a new project, a new relationship, some repairs, some new phase?

I wonder . . . because I'm actually pretty sure that every day is ALMOST time, right? Every day, after all, is a path to something else.

Our dilemma is in not knowing what that something else is.

There's this funny tension we set ourselves up with in this culture around planning: not just organizing our lives, but about planning for the future. We start paying attention to it from day 1, it seems. We watch children for all their firsts: first step, first word, first tooth. And before we know it, it's time for preschool and then often a long trajectory of education . . . planning life forward. Learn everything you need to get into college, maybe; get a good job; work, and save so you can retire and enjoy . . . it feels that the experience of satisfaction, of having arrived at something, is often just beyond our grasp! We may feel it momentarily but then it slips away and we're back to reaching. What is that saying about life – that it's what happens when you're busy making other plans?

And even for those of us whose lives are somewhat settled in good balance just now, the world at large is so challenged that it inclines us to chase the what if's.

ALMOST time.

And here's the rub. It's almost the Solstice, right? On December 22<sup>nd</sup>, next Saturday, there will be light for more time than there will have been on Friday, the 21<sup>st</sup>. If I'm only holding on to looking forward to the 22<sup>nd</sup>, because it marks a turning I'm looking forward to, what might that say about how I've engaged with the hours of light that I had today, or even on the 21<sup>st</sup>?

We've been talking this month about the Advent season – this time leading up to Christmas – this time of anticipation, of getting ready. **This** is ALMOST time, these four weeks. The difference from regular life is that – like the Solstice – it has an end-point. Christmas, in just over a week, will come and then we won't be waiting anymore, except for everything else in our lives . . . just that.

But one gift, I think, is the time to have become aware. This pause, this season, has given us the time to think about the things that we're really waiting FOR. Whatever particulars might come to mind for you – better health, better financial stability, a better political landscape, whatever it is – no doubt we are all waiting for, or looking for a way to find more faith, more hope, more joy, more love – those things of the spirit that buoy us on our journeys. This season illuminates, literally illuminates our longing for those four, and our wish that they are just around the corner.

Can you feel them? More faith in our lives' having meaning; more hope for a world where all lives – human and non-human alike – are valued; more joy in the moments we share on this earth; more love everywhere, because remember the poem by Warsan Shire that ends:

i held an atlas in my lap  
ran my fingers across the whole world  
and whispered  
where does it hurt?

it answered  
everywhere  
everywhere  
everywhere.

I was thinking the other day how curious it is to put so much longing into the birth of a child, who then – according to the story – has to wait 33 years to begin his ministry! We think – wait, I thought he was born and then we had peace on earth?! And it's not here yet!

Remember in our story this morning how all the animals noticed the sun had gone missing, and figured out what they could do to bring it back? What THEY could do . . . hmmm.

But let's go back to that pause time for a moment.

Have any of you ever walked a labyrinth? Originally, they were more like mazes, with multiple choices of direction and destination. You could get lost in them – in fact, that was the point – a little like life, maybe! These days, labyrinths are those large circles of paths, meandering back and forth, “unicursal,” progressively leading you to the center, and then back out again. The whole idea is moving and not having to worry about where it ends, so you can focus on the experience.

It is a journey of inward meandering, *solvitur ambulando* . . . it's a pause from the ALMOST time, the incomplete. And it can be amazing to see where one's mind goes when one doesn't have to be concerned with destination, with end point, even as you're still moving. It's already taken care of, so you just follow the path and see what you discover. Imagine trusting THAT! (Not worrying about the end point, that is . . . I think we're all worried about that.) The woman in our story discovered the company she had been oblivious to, that her journey – as arduous as it had been – was not alone. It made her weep.

The interesting thing is that most of us don't have that freedom of discovery in our everyday lives because we don't know the endpoint. Our lives are . . . yes, incomplete, unfinished, not quite done – and isn't that good news that we are still on almost time? That we are still one shy?

In the book from this morning's reading, Barbara Brown Taylor suggests, "*People seem willing to look all over the place for this treasure [of spirituality] . . . . The last place most people look is right under their feet, in the everyday activities, accidents, and encounters of their lives . . . . the reason so many of us cannot see the red X that marks the spot is because we are standing on it.*"

There IS more faith, more hope, more joy, and more love right here, right where we are together, right now. And there are things we can do in this Almost Time to make them manifest for ourselves, for each other, and for the world around us.

And isn't that our task?

Life is always one shy, always *almost*.

Our efforts at a perfect life remind me of the monks or artists who practice drawing circles over and over. They get close, but I think the point is that they are always almost but not quite perfect. It's not our job to get to perfect, OR complete. It's not always our luxury to even get close, in whatever way that might show up for you. Our job is only to practice what it means to get closer, as we are able: to practice more faith, to practice more hope, more joy; to practice more love. The circle comes round, again and again. It's our task to engage it, and to trust that each new day presents a new opportunity.

When I know that my sun will shine just as sure as this world can spin,  
I can hold on fine, 'cause it's almost time, for that sun to come 'round again.

Let's look East, then . . . from whence the sun comes.

Hymn 226      because Love is always on the way.