



# New Garden Community Church (Unitarian Universalist) - a labor-peace church

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meeting at 6pm, UE (United Electrical workers), 37 S. Ashland, Chicago

December 21, 2006

*"Love for the Earth, Justice for the People"*

## Calendar:

- **Sunday, December 24, 6pm – "Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street"** – What better way to pass Christmas Eve than watch a movie classic about the Christmas spirit with others? Join us for wassail, potluck dinner, and fellowship.
- **Sunday, December 31, 6pm – New Year's Eve** – and we're having a low-key games-and-mulled-cider-by-the-fire sort of party at **Jean's house**. Bring a favorite cd or two. Plenty of time to go to your wild dance party later... Call for directions, 312-405-9470.

### Spirituality Book Discussion Group

**Tuesday, January 2, 6-8pm** – we continue discussion of Eckhart Tolle's classic, *The Power of Now*. Meet at the back table, Westgate Coffeehouse, 924 W. Madison. The public is welcome.

- **Sunday, January 6, 6pm – "Celebrate Peace"** – Following World Peace Day, January 1<sup>st</sup>, we celebrate peace with music and poetry and prayers for our leaders – Wake up! "End the war" doesn't mean "more troops!" Oops, sorry, got carried away.



## Solstice Lights

Today is the Winter Solstice – at 6:22 tonight, to be specific. Thinking about the mechanics of the solstice puts me in a cosmic frame of mind – the tilt of Earth, as it travels around the sun, the immense distances, the absolute blackness of space we can only imagine; the "weak" force of gravity that keeps us orbiting around our evenly burning sun like a yoyo. It's really a miracle.

But I have faith in the workings of physics, and the turning of the seasons, and the return of the Sun, and the coming of spring.



I'm a cultural Christian – that is, I grew up with the tree, presents, etc. of December 25, and am loathe to give them up. Religiously, I'm Unitarian Universalist, and embrace what the teacher Jesus said about helping the poor, about what it means to be a good person – "don't cheat, don't abuse others you have power over, don't use violence."

The other night my sister and I were singing and playing Christmas carols, and we worked on learning all the ones we didn't know in the ancient (1950s version) *Fireside Book of Folk Songs*. One especially caught my eye, written by William Morris, founder of the Arts and Crafts movement, and a socialist and activist of the 19th century.

"Masters in This Hall" is a lively old French tune, with a chorus that goes: "Nowell! Nowell! Nowell! Nowell sing we clear! Holpen are all folk on earth, Born is God's Son so dear: Nowell! Nowell! Nowell! Nowell sing we loud! God today hath poor folk raised, And cast a-down the proud."

William Morris wrote, in *Art, Wealth and Riches* (1883):

I want those who do the rough work of the world - sailors, miners, ploughmen, and the like - to be treated with consideration and respect, to be paid abundant money-wages, and to have plenty of leisure.

Morris did not believe that elections would bring about his vision; instead he supported trade unions as a countervailing power.



Morris's words, about poor folk being raised up, and the proud being cast down, were his way of describing the Christian message, and he worked for it on this earth, in this life.

Some people don't like the message of his carol, interpreted that way – "We are supposed to get our rewards (and punishments) in the *next* life, don't you see?" But I think the message of Jesus was about this life, not the next.

Owners are pretty tough about the need to keep the lowest classes from gaining the power to stop being exploited. And the exploited, when they can muster their solidarity and overcome their fear, are willing to go great lengths to end the exploitation and gain some control over conditions they must endure.

Those in the middle, those in between the owners and the exploited – don't like conflict. They don't see the need for it (they are fine, after all), and it is scary and disruptive.

The genius of the great spiritual teachings is in their ability to jolt us out of our obsession with the world we think we live in, to help us "wake up" to larger meanings of life. They get us to change the paradigm – from "It's mine, don't you dare take it!" to "We are here to love and be loved in return." To overcome the fear and anger, and to find more important values to care about than material things.

In musing about Earth in its orbit, I wondered what would happen if suddenly gravity ceased to work, and the Earth spun out into space, launched out of orbit, flying off into the cold... Perhaps we'd freeze quickly, leaving a snapshot of human life, in the midst of war, school, eating, making love, all the things we do. Some untold eons hence, some sentient being would find us, encapsulated in ice, freeze-dried in stop-motion.

Am I embarrassed to think we would be shown to be so self-destructive, rather like our mothers' telling us not to wear holey underwear, in case we were in an accident?

But it's a long time before Earth is swallowed up by the swelling sun, and our valiant deeds and sins against one another are obliterated. I have faith that the sun will return. And the part that is hardest to believe – that there will be a spring of human values, that Love will dawn and banish the dark of fear and hatred – I do have faith that we humans are becoming more conscious, that diplomacy will someday not be a last resort, but an integral part of countries relating to one another, that someday war will be unthinkable.

If ever we are freeze-dried in outer space, may the civilization those far-off beings find be one we can be proud of.

peace, Jean

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