

“Hope That Rises: Finding Strength When Life Feels Like Too Much”
Dianne M. Daniels; UUFS – December 14, 2025

Prelude #18 – What Wondrous Love

Welcome (as scripted)

**Opening Words: We have come into this room of hope by
Libbie D. Stoddard**

We have come into this room of hope
where our hearts and minds are opened to the future.

We have come into this room of justice
where we set aside our fear and name every oppression freely.

We have come into this room of love
where we know that no lives are insignificant.

We have come into this room of song
where we unite our voices
in the somber and the beautiful melodies of life.
May the words of this service empower you now and throughout the
week ahead.

Come, let us worship together.

Chalice Lighting: The Chalice Lit Among Us is a Beacon

If you have a home chalice, please join me in lighting it.

The chalice lit among us is a beacon
A beacon of hope in a world in crisis
A beacon of possibility, made manifest in community
A beacon of warmth through our interconnections
A beacon of light illuminating our shared wisdom
A beacon of connection by our being together

***Opening Hymn: #30 – Over My Head**

Sharing of Joys and Concerns (see script)

Offering & Offertory

Prayer & Meditation: I want to share with you a piece titled “**Winter Meditation**” by **Rev. Tess Baumberger**.

Something has changed in me this winter.

In the past, I’ve focused on how long winter is,
How miserable I find it, and how it seems so interminable.

This winter, I find myself thinking instead.
That every day, every hour, every minute
Brings us just that much closer to spring.

We all experience wintry times,
When things seem harsh and frozen,
Or muffled by layered shrouds of dry leaves, frost, and the promise
of snow.

It is helpful to remember that each day that dawns bleakly,
Each night that wraps its cold cloak around our hearts,
Brings us closer to that time of warm and vibrant sun.

It is perhaps helpful to consider that turning toward spring is an ac-
tive thing,
The earth, which seems so stable, in fact flies quickly through space,
On its path that tilts us ever towards the Source.

So, too, each memory we lay to rest,
Each truth in ourselves that we encounter and accept,
Each wrong act that we forgive ushers us on towards our renewal.

Reading – “An Affirmation of Hope” by Loretta Williams

We, bearers of the dream, affirm that a new vision of hope is emerging.

We pledge to work for that community in which justice will be actively present.

We affirm that there is struggle yet ahead.

Yet we know that struggle is the hope for the future.

We affirm that we are co-creators of the future, not passive pawns.

And we stand united in affirmation of our hope and vision of a just and inclusive society.

We affirm the unity of all persons:

We affirm brotherhood and sisterhood that allows us to touch upon each other’s humanity.

We affirm a unity that opens our eyes, ears, and hearts to see the different but common forms of oppression, suffering, and pain.

Yet we are one in the image of God, and we celebrate our hopes for human unity.

Within ourselves and within the gathered community, we will discover the strength not to hide in indifference.

Affirming that hope, publicly expressed, energizes and enables us to move forward.

Together we pledge action to transcend barriers — be they racial, political, economic, social, or religious.

We pledge to make our tomorrows become our todays.

Sermon: “Hope That Rises: Finding Strength When Life Feels Like Too Much” by Rev. Dianne M. Daniels

WHAT – Naming the Reality We Are Living In

Beloveds, we are living through times that feel tight, breath-stealing, and uncertain.

People all around us — and many of us right here — are stressed and stretched thin.

We're watching the news and wondering what is happening to our country.

We're entering the holiday season carrying not only gratitude, but also grief, worry, and exhaustion.

Inflation, family tensions, political upheaval, caregiving pressures, strained finances, relentless demands — all of it stacks up, layer upon layer, until the weight feels like it belongs on someone else's shoulders.

And in moments like this, hope can feel like a luxury we can't afford.

Some of us are asking quietly, or shouting internally:

- “Am I going to get through this?”
- “Why does everything feel so hard?”
- “What do I do when the situation feels hopeless?”

These are real questions. They deserve compassion. They deserve honesty. They deserve a faith community that doesn't look away.

Unitarian Universalism has never demanded that we pretend life is easy.

We don't offer platitudes or pretend that prayer alone will fix everything. Instead, we start with Love — with the courage to face truth together — and we anchor ourselves in values that remind us:

- We are not alone (Interdependence)
- We are capable of change (Transformation)
- We honor many paths to understanding (Pluralism)
- We commit to fairness and dignity for all (Equity, Justice)
- We remember the power of showing up generously, even when our own hearts tremble

And so today, we turn toward the question of hopelessness not with fear, but with courage, clarity, and companionship.

SO WHAT – What Do We Do When Life Feels Hopeless?

Hopelessness happens.

Not every situation can be immediately fixed — but **every** situation can be faced.

1. Letting Go When the Outcome Is Inevitable

When a situation cannot be salvaged, letting go may be the most intelligent and compassionate choice.

Letting go is not surrender. Letting go is wisdom. Letting go is an act of Love — for ourselves, our mental health, and our future.

And in our Unitarian Universalist theology, letting go is also an act of faith — faith that transformation is always possible, even after loss.

2. Allowing Ourselves to Feel Our Feelings

Many of us have been taught to push through, smile through, “stay strong.”

But purging our emotions in healthy ways helps us heal.

Whether we need a long walk, a good cry, a trusted friend, journaling, music, or silence — we honor Love when we honor our emotional truth.

3. Learning from the Situation Instead of Blaming Ourselves

Remember: There is always something to learn.

Reflection is a tool of Transformation — not punishment.

It helps us avoid repeating patterns and strengthens us for next time.

4. Remembering We Have Survived Before

Odds are you survived other situations that at the time may have seemed hopeless. Another reminds us to reflect on past victories, even when everything seemed lost.

Hope grows when we remember:

We have been through hard things — and we are still here.

5. Challenging Our Internal Narrative

Here's a powerful question: "Are you a victim of circumstances or a victim of your own thinking?"

This isn't judgment — it's empowerment.

Our inner world — our beliefs, thoughts, stories — shape our outer world...and we have the power to shift them.

This echoes our UU value of Transformation — the belief that change is possible, and worth working toward.

- How do we do that?
- Practice gratitude daily
- Focus on solutions rather than problems
- Stay in the present moment
- Use affirmations
- Examine our limiting beliefs
- Track our thoughts
- And meditate to ground ourselves in clarity

This is spiritual practice — the everyday work of staying awake.

6. Believing in Ourselves, Even When It Feels Impossible

Keeping faith is the only way to trudge through hard times and see yourself clear to better days. It can help to remember that others — our families, partners, spiritual community — often believe in us long before we do.

Self-belief is an act of Love. It is also an act of resistance — a refusal to surrender our agency to despair.

7. Using Setbacks as Fuel, Not Failure

Setbacks will happen... How you decide to handle them influences the type of life you'll live. Some standout reminders:

- Anger can be transformed into determination
- A setback can strengthen us
- Supportive friends matter (Interdependence!)
- A fresh perspective can unlock new options
- Sometimes the path forward is doubling our efforts
- And sometimes it's setting a new goal — letting go of what no longer fits

This is Pluralism in action — many paths, many ways forward, all valid.

8. The UU Spiritual Thread Through It All

When we weave these themes together, a clear spiritual message emerges:

- Love is our anchor
- Interdependence ensures we are never alone
- Transformation reminds us that despair is not the final word
- Pluralism opens us to many possible paths
- Justice acknowledges that some struggles are systemic, not personal failures
- Generosity calls us to share hope, compassion, and solidarity
- Equity reminds us that everyone deserves the tools and support to rise again

Hopelessness is real — but it is not sovereign. It does not have the last word.

Hope is quiet sometimes, but it is persistent.

Hope is fragile sometimes, but it is resilient.

Hope waits for us to notice it again.

NOW WHAT – How Do We Move Forward with Courage and Clarity?

Here are spiritual practices that we can offer ourselves and each other:

1. Let Go of What You Cannot Change

- Release the illusion of control, not your agency.

- Letting go is making space for transformation.
- Where do you need to loosen your grip?

2. Choose One Emotion-Releasing Practice This Week

- Walk, cry, pray, write, breathe, talk, meditate — choose one.
- Let it be an act of Love toward yourself.

3. Identify One Lesson Hidden Inside the Struggle

- Transformation begins with honest reflection.
- What is life trying to teach you gently — or loudly?

4. Reach Out — Not Inward — When You Feel Overwhelmed

- Hopelessness grows in isolation.
- Interdependence saves us.
- Call someone. Let someone hold you up for a moment.

5. Examine the Story You Are Telling Yourself

- When I was a member of the Norwich Sunrise Rotary chapter, every meeting we recited the 4-way test:
 - Is it the truth?
 - Is it fair to all concerned, and especially to you?
 - Will it build goodwill and better friendships, or concerning your own story, Is it keeping you stuck?
 - Will it be beneficial to all concerned – and specifically, to you if it's a story directly related to you and your life?

From a UU point of view, one based in our shared Values: What would a story rooted in Love sound like?

6. Remember Your Past Victories

Make a list — literal or mental — of times you survived what you thought you couldn't.

This practice is both gratitude and empowerment.

7. Take One Small, Concrete Action

Not the whole plan — one step.

- A phone call.
- A budget line item.
- A conversation.
- A prayer.
- A pause.

Motion creates momentum.

8. Let Hope Be Something You Practice, Not Something You Wait For

Hope grows not by accident but by cultivation.

It grows through choices, community, ritual, mindset, and compassion.

Closing Movement of the Sermon

Beloveds, life will continue to offer us challenges.

Some will be painful. Some will feel impossible.

But we are not powerless. We are not alone. We are not without hope.

Hope is not naïve.

Hope is not passive.

Hope is not denial.

Hope is an active, courageous, spiritually grounded way of being in the world.

Hope is the voice within us that whispers:

“You have come through fire before — and you can again.”

Hope is the hand we extend to one another when someone’s spirit is too tired to rise.

Hope is the transformation that begins quietly, in the small choices we make to live in Love rather than fear.

May we face the days ahead with clear eyes, strong hearts, and open hands.

May we refuse to be victims of our thinking.

May we remember our immense resilience.

May we practice courage even when we tremble.

And may hope — seeded in Love, nurtured in community, strengthened through practice — rise again and again in us.

So may it be.

May we be its carriers.

And may hope find a home in us today.

Amen, Blessed Be, Ashe.

Closing Hymn: #168 – One More Step

Closing Words: A Blessing for Rising Hope by Rev. Dianne M. Daniels

May the Love at the center of our faith hold you gently when you feel stretched thin or overwhelmed.

May the strength you have forgotten you possess rise quietly within you, reminding you that you are resilient, that you have survived hard things before, and that your story is not finished.

May the UU values we cherish —
Interdependence when you feel alone,
Transformation when the way forward seems unclear,
Pluralism when one path closes and another must be found —
guide your steps and steady your spirit.
May you release what cannot be changed,
embrace what is asking for your attention,
and trust that hope grows even in the dark.

And as you go from this place,

may you feel the presence of community beside you,
may you breathe deeply of possibility,
and may you walk forward wrapped in courage, compassion,
and the unwavering truth that you are never alone.

Go in Love, go in strength,
and go knowing that hope rises in you and through you.

Amen. Ashe. Blessed be.