

## CALL TO WORSHIP

Good morning. [pause for response] And a very festive morning it is thanks to Jim Hall, Peggy Krapf, and Alan and Mary Turnbull, for their highwire decking of the halls before last night's Yule Sing. The words of our chalice lighting this morning were from Clarence Skinner, a renowned Universalist minister. He wrote them shortly before his death in 1949. At the threshold of the bland and boring Fifties, how startling that the world could have seemed so disturbing. Apparently, in the words of a famous old song, it really is still the same old story. The fundamental things really do apply, as time goes by.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "I like the silence in church before the service begins, better than any preaching." It is a lovely moment. The modest stirrings of getting ready are so noticeable. Being there, I feel the great setting aside underneath all of it – of time and effort for these loving preparations: measuring the spaces between the chairs, making sure the joy and concern table looks graceful, even brewing the coffee. Mundane doingness gone reverent.

And when the rest of us get here, and the chalice is lit, and the musicians swing into the prelude, and someone says, "come, let us worship together," everyone begins to breathe in a common reverent air.

What is it that we revere on Sunday morning? Is something extraordinary enough happening to warrant all this setting aside of time, effort, money? We banish our usual fixations and look elsewhere for an hour. And just where would that elsewhere be?

The poet John Donne once said, "there is nothing that God hath established in a constant course of nature, and which therefore is done every day, but would seem a miracle, and would exercise our admiration, were it done but once." So would be the acting out of the part of our nature that moves us to worship, week after week, were it done but once. And yet, like all repeating miracles, this one can fall victim to complacency, habituation, and the cynicism that curls its lip at the very sound of the word miracle.

So to catch worship before it falls, to lift it up again, so that it may life US up again, we go back to square one this morning. We ask sincerely, what are we up to here? Come, let us live in this question. Come, let us worship together.