

“Sources of Our Faith”

Sermon by Rev. Rebecca Bryan

January 2, 2022

Happy New Year

Good morning! Welcome to 2022, a year that many of us have been waiting for a long time, perhaps even since March 2020. This year, 2022, is the year of the Water Tiger in the Chinese New Year, starting on February 1st. It is predicted to be a year with “no middle ground,” with great success for some and risk of being burned for others.¹ The Farmer’s Almanac encourages us to prepare for a winter of “shivers” as the months ahead look extraordinarily cold. Predictions continue to be grim, for climate change and beyond, if we do not make major changes.

Yet, as a species, humans lean toward optimism. It is perhaps a built-in defense mechanism or element of resiliency to keep us going when times are tough. For the year ahead, I have a sense of optimism that I didn’t have at the start of 2021. I can’t fully explain it, but I’ll take it.

Many good things *did* happen in 2021, even with all its challenges. Astrologist Rob Brezsky compiled an inspiring list, and because we do draw our inspiration from many sources, I will share some of them with you now.

Things That Made the World a Better Place in 2021

- *The Oscars Had Their Most Diverse Year Ever
- *Over 9.7 million Americans are now following plant-based diets, up from only 290,000 in 2004
- *The United States rejoined the Paris Climate Accord and the World Health Organization
- *More Than 8.47 billion Covid-19 Vaccinations Were Administered Globally
- *United Flew the First Passenger Aircraft with 100-Percent Sustainable Fuel
- *Mexico elected the country’s first transgender lawmakers
- *A Filipino was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in a first for her country
- *Sales of Zero-emission Vehicles Surpassed Diesel Sales in Europe

- *An African Woman Leads the World Trade Organization
- *Protections Were Restored for Three National Monuments in the US, including the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Off the Coast of New England
- *Derek Chauvin Was Found Guilty on All Three Charges Related to George Floyd’s Death and Sentenced to 22.5 Years in Prison
- *The Fossil Fuel Divestment Movement Grew
 - *Monarch Butterfly Populations Are Bouncing Back
- *National Geographic Cartographers Recognized the World’s Fifth Ocean
 - *Kamala Harris Became the First Female and Black Vice-President of the United States
 - *Donald Trump Was Banned from Twitter
 - *China Eliminated Malaria
 - *Drones Helped Us Get a Handle on Plastic Pollution
 - *Dutch ‘Bee Hotels’ Helped Bee Populations Remain Stable
 - *The Met Removed the Sackler Name from Its Galleries
- *A Thought-to-Be-Extinct Orchid Was Found on a London Roof
- *Uber Drivers Were Granted Workers Rights in the UK²

I’m optimistic that people are taking things seriously, including the need to be involved in making the changes they want to see in the world, in no small part by removing barriers to relationships across differences and caring for one another.

In keeping with that theme, we recognized at FRS the need to be vigilant in protecting our and others’ health and at the same time to create as many options as possible for people to connect more safely. The Reopening Team is grateful for the support they have received in response to their decision to move all worship services online,

1 <https://www.rd.com/article/year-of-the-tiger/>

2 <https://freewillastrology.com/>

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through February 13th. We hope we can resume both in-person and online worship starting on February 20th.

We are also continuing a long-held commitment to making a difference in the lives of our members, and others, as we prepare to welcome the Mirzayee family of eleven to our Parish Hall in the second week of January. This Afghan refugee family will be coming to us after waiting to come to a place of safety while living in dangerous conditions in their country, most recently in tents. This is an example of how we put our values into practice, in partnership with other churches and community members dedicated to making the world a better place.

Thank you to everyone who is stepping up to help with cleaning and preparing the Parish Hall, donating items and funds, and offering to support the family once they arrive by doing laundry, driving them to medical appointments, and teaching ESL classes. We encourage you to join the Afghan Refugee Resettlement email list serve to stay up to date with all that is happening. You'll also hear more about this initiative next Sunday.

In general, we are seeing an increase in church involvement, and we have made it through another holiday season together. Yes, things are not perfect, and still there is much to feel good about and look forward to.

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Sources of our Faith

The ministry theme for this month is Unitarian Universalism. What a perfect theme to kick off the New Year! We have an exciting array of Sunday worship services, as well as other small group activities that you can join to learn more about our faith tradition.

Today I begin the exploration around the sources of our faith, which is something I invite all to continue throughout 2022.

One way you can do that is by participating in a once-a-month gathering on Zoom where each time we meet, for six months, we will be discussing a different tradition from which we draw our faith.

You may often hear about the principles of Unitarian Universalism, the seven principles that

we, the member congregations, covenant to affirm and promote, including the inherent worth and dignity of all people, the democratic process, and the interconnected web of life of which we are all a part. You are less likely, perhaps, to hear about the sources of our faith, the taproots on which we build our theologies. This is unfortunate because religious pluralism is one of our biggest strengths as a religious body.

While the Unitarians and Universalists officially merged in 1961, the principles and sources were first adopted in 1960. Their modern form was adopted in 1984, and the sixth source of our faith was added in 1991. Indeed, we are part of a living faith tradition that is open to ongoing revelation and evolution.

We draw inspiration, wisdom, and spirituality from six sources of our faith:

- *Direct experience* of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life.
- *Words and deeds of prophetic people* which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love.
- *Wisdom from the world's religions* which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life.
- *Jewish and Christian teachings* which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves.
- *Humanist teachings* which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit.
- And spiritual teachings of *Earth-centered traditions* which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

This is a beautiful cornucopia of sources, each rich in history and possibility. We are blessed with the freedom to find the path or paths that resonate with us, that challenge us, and that help us grow. Yet with this blessing comes a responsibility to take the work of spiritual journeying seriously. If we apply genuine

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intention and disciplined effort into learning from these traditions, our spirituality and theology are sure to grow roots and deepen over time and use. If we expect such benefits without such commitment, we will be disappointed. We do not have to be fanatical about this, but we do need to be truthful and consistent in our efforts.

The beauty of the diversity of our sources is balanced by a corresponding risk of skimming the surface or not going deep into the tradition where you find the treasure and gold. It's good to be familiar with, comfortable around, and open to all of the sources of our faith; however, it's best when we choose one, or two, and befriend them and commit to learning what we can, even for an extended time, say a year.

As Unitarian Universalists, we believe there are many pathways to truth. Our President Reverend Susan Frederick-Gray says, "In the end, we cannot speak or write about the Sources without acknowledging the One Source that runs underneath them all – love."³ The goal isn't to find the one perfect path; rather it is to trust that they are all portals to great truths: of love, compassion, bravery, and kinship. We must follow a source for it to offer its true wisdom to us. There may not be one pathway to truth, but there does need to be some pathway we follow.

I invite you to choose one or two sources that you are drawn to follow this year. This may be a source you want to learn more about, or it may be a source you need to be reconciled with. Pick one.

Sign up for daily meditations, read the source's sacred texts, and engage in one of its spiritual practices. Join the sources discussions with me if you want to learn more. Maybe even make a commitment with a friend at FRS to learn more about the tradition together.

This year I will be deepening my journey with our earth-based source by following the moon cycle. I'll be keeping a moon journal as well as engaging in spiritual practice and ritual. I will also be learning the harmonium, as part of my practice and learning about the Sikh tradition. I know from experience that such deep dives will only deepen

3 Rolenz, Kathleen, editor. *Sources of our Faith*, Boston, MA, Skinner House, 2012, p. xi.

my commitment to our Unitarian Universalist faith and, in my case, to my Christian roots.

Whatever you choose, know that you do so with the love and support of this entire community. For as one of us grows, we all grow. The path to wisdom is rich and deep. May you follow it wherever it shall lead.

Amen and blessed be.