

**Welcome:** Christine McD.

**Prelude:** *Song Without Words*

by Nikolay Mikhailovich Ladukhin (1860 - 1918)

Linda Hoover, piano

**Chalice Lighting (Mark):** Look inside, your soul's the kindling of the hearth fire pilgrims knew. Hearth behind us, guard we ever the sacred embers carried in our minds and hearts.

**Opening Words (Sparrow):** Responsive Reading 439

**Opening Hymn #295**

**Story for All Ages (Mark):** Household treasures

What is a treasure?

Do you have any treasures in your house?

Do you have any books in your house?

Are books treasures?

What's the best book in your house?

How many of the adults here like books?

WOW!

Do you guys think that most UUs like books?

Why is that?

Do you have to spend a lot of money to read a book?

Where can anyone borrow a book? (Libraries!)

How did the Libraries get there?

Well, we're going to talk about books in here and your teacher Bess is going to talk a little bit about how libraries are made. Have a great class!

**Sacred Sharing:**

Often our joys are too great for one heart to hold. This is a time and place for sharing that joy.

Often our sorrows are too great for one heart to bear. This is a time and place for sharing that burden.

Let us together place the first stone for our Rev. Lee Devoe, who is undergoing treatment for her cancer right now. Hold in in the light and your tender caring.

This last stone will represent those joys and sorrows which remain unexpressed.

**Hymn # 123 Spirit of Life**

**Reading (Joshua): from *The Hobbit* by J. R. R. Tolkien**

**“If you had dusted the mantelpiece you would have found this just under the clock,” said Gandalf, handing Bilbo a note (written, of course, on his own note-paper).**

**This is what he read:**

**“Thorin and Company to Burglar Bilbo greeting!**

**“For your hospitality our sincerest thanks, and for your offer of professional assistance our grateful acceptance. Terms: cash on delivery, up to and not exceeding one fourteenth of total profits (if any); all traveling expenses guaranteed in any event; funeral expenses to be defrayed by us or our representatives, if occasion arises and the matter is not otherwise arranged for.**

**“Thinking it unnecessary to disturb your esteemed repose, we have proceeded in advance to make requisite preparation, and shall await your respected person at the Green Dragon Inn, Bywater, at 11 a.m. Sharp.**

**Trusting that you will be punctual,**

**“We have the honour to remain**

**“Yours deeply**

**“Thorin & Co.”**

**“That leaves you just ten minutes. You will have to run,” said Gandalf.**

**“But - “ said Bilbo.**

**“No time for it,” said the wizard,**

**“But - “ said Bilbo again.**

**“No time for that either! Off you go!”**

**To the end of his days Bilbo could never remember how he found himself outside without a hat, walking-stick or any money, or anything that he usually took when he went out; leaving his second breakfast half-finished and quite unwashed-up, pushing his keys into Gandalf's hands, and running as fast as his furry feet could carry him down the lane, past the great Mill, across The Water, and then on for a whole mile or more. Very puffed he was, when he got to Bywater just on the stroke of eleven, and found he had come without a pocket-handkerchief!**

**Choral Anthem:** *Building a New Way*

Words and music by Martha Sandefer, arranged by Jim Scott

UUCUV Choir - Linda Hoover, director

**Homily - There and Back Again - Sparrow F. Alden, CRE**

Why is a Book-in-Common a great idea for a religious community?

Shared experience allows communication. I remember clearly Polly Gould and my daughter, who was then about five or six, dancing together here in worship because they had cooperatively explored some ideas and images during the summer series of sacred dance gatherings.

They danced together. Here! In Vermont! And an experienced UU-librarian-social activist and my kid-learning-to-read could make eye contact and

smile, could have something to talk about, shared as equals something meaningful and expressive.

Shared experience is one reason we choose to be a congregation instead of ‘spiritual but not religious’ individuals engaged in independent searches for truth and meaning.

And books? Books *feel* right, they *smell* right. If someone in the congregation can’t make it to the service, they can read along with us from home. If you go to visit Nancy Martin, maybe you can offer to read her a chapter. Maybe your kid is away in college or spending endless nights walking the floors with a colicky baby - send them *The Hobbit!* Or read it aloud to that baby.

Read aloud as a family! Reading great literature aloud happens to be a time-honored and successful courtship activity. Get the audiobook for your morning walk! In fact, as you log your miles and steps, please do join me and Daroc and the Kutter-Walkers as we move our magnets along the list of milestones in this great book.

You can see why I advocate that this congregation share a Book in Common. But we have Study Action Issues in common and serious, important problems to solve together. Why on Earth would we read something *fun*? Because this congregation needs a little fun right now. We’re doing hard work. Let’s play through story. And let us benefit from the graces of such a story, what Tolkien called recovery, escape, and consolation.

“If fairy-story as a kind is worth reading at all it is worthy to be written for and read by adults.”

I am reading from one of Tolkien’s essays called “On Fairy Stories” in which Tolkien extols those tales in which Our Hero enters Faerie - wherever that may be. When Joshua reads, it is from *The Hobbit* itself.

“The magic of Faerie is not an end in itself, its virtues are in its operations: among these are the satisfaction of certain primordial human desires:”

First among these, he lists the realization of imagined wonder - 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;

By ‘recovery’ Tolkien meant the “Renewal of freshness - to look at green again and meet the centaur again, not go further into strangeness and delirium.” I look at the TV or internet and... I prefer walking between twin birches to meet green again.

Verse 1 (lyrics from *The Hobbit* by J.R. R. Tolkien)

Roads go ever ever on,  
Over rock and under tree,  
By caves where never sun has shone,  
By streams that never find the sea;  
Over snow by winter sown,

And through the merry flowers of June,  
Over grass and over stone,  
And under mountains in the moon.

Why is The Hobbit a great book?

Not just a faerie story, but absolutely *great*? Hero goes, has adventure, returns home. Well. I find some great, *religious* themes that we can explore as we read together.

Do you have a Baggins side and a Took side? What happens when that shadow side has room to create or to poke at the hornet's nest?

**“Then Mr. Baggins turned the handle and went in. The Took side had won. He suddenly felt he would go without bed and breakfast to be thought fierce. ....Many a time afterwards the Baggins part regretted what he did now, and he said to himself: “Bilbo, you were a fool; you walked right in a put your foot in it.”**

Would you betray the trust of someone you care for to keep him from folly?

Would you cheat - to save your skin?

What was the turning at which you became someone you respected?

Verse 2

The Road goes ever on and on

Down from the door where it began.  
Now far ahead the Road has gone,  
And I must follow, if I can,  
Pursuing it with eager feet,  
Until it joins some larger way  
Where many paths and errands meet.  
And whither then? I cannot say.

Let's begin our work with this Book in Common. The first religious question I put to the congregation to consider as you read:

**What if we get caught out on the road without our pocket handkerchief?**

What are you carrying forward that you don't need? What are you carrying that you are *sure* you need, and I dare you to go without? BJ Shabel has cleared her attic - the least we can do is rise to that challenge. Yes. I am hereby promising to clean my desk.

I know a woman who has held some grudges over eighty years. Everyone else in those stories is dead, but the grudges are alive - troubling her with weight she does not need to carry, with tears she shouldn't have to count now.

Sometimes it's hard for me to retain good memories - and far too easy to encode negative ones. Maybe you have that depressive tendency, too. I don't know how to let go of that kind of baggage, but I promise I'm trying.



If you're carrying along attic contents or negative memories or grudges or fifty extra pounds or futile outrage or suspicion, I invite you to read *The Hobbit* with me. Let's communicate to our hearts - which read faerie stories, not memos - that it's we're ready to leave things behind.

Bilbo sets out without his pocket-handkerchief, but in the caverns of the great dragon Smaug, among thousands of objects of treasure, he finds the one great treasure of the dwarves that will save them from a terrible folly. In another dark place, he sets his hand down on a Ring. In the final battle against fierce and frightening foes... well. No spoilers.

These amazing strokes of luck are what Tolkien calls consolation. Not *deus ex machina*, but *deus in machina*, in which "Powerful and poignant is the effect of eucatastrophe (positive amazing event) in a serious tale of Faerie. In such stories when the sudden "turn" comes we get a personal glimpse of joy, and heart's desire, that for a moment passes outside the frame, rends indeed the very web of story, and lets a gleam come through. ... It is a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted upon to recur. It does not deny the existence of dyscatastrophe, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance. It denies *final defeat* and in so far is *evangelium*, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief."

Verse 3

Roads go ever ever on

Under cloud and under star,  
Yet feet that wandering have gone  
Turn at last to home afar.  
Eyes that fire and sword have seen  
And horror in the halls of stone  
Look at last on meadows green  
And trees and hills they long have known.

**Offertory - Jigg by Jeremiah Clark (1669 - 1707)**

The offering which supports the work of this congregation will be gratefully received.

**Closing Hymn #112 Do You Hear?**

**Tending the Chalice (unison)**

We extinguish this flame,  
But not the light of truth,  
The warmth of love,  
Or the fire of commitment:  
These we carry in our hearts until we meet again.