

**Zion's UCC at Taborton**  
**December 31, 2017**  
**Rev. Patricia Raup**  
*For Zion's Sake, I will not Keep Quiet*  
**Isaiah 62:1, Psalm 148, Luke 2: 22-40**

A month ago, on the Sunday after Thanksgiving, I had the privilege of leading you in worship. As I recall I asked you, over and over again what you were ready to leave behind and what you wanted to carry forward into the New Year, especially into a new year and a new beginning for Zion UCC at Taborton.

Well, we've reached the end of the calendar year. It's New Year's Eve. Tomorrow will be the first day of the year 2018 in what we now call the Common Era. And I, like the prophet Isaiah, have decided that "For Zion's sake – in this case Zion UCC at Taborton – I shall not keep quiet." There are things that need saying.

Have you decided? Have you chosen what to leave behind? What to let go of? What have you decided is precious enough to carry forward and continue to offer to this Beloved Community?

Several years ago Konrad and I attended a Burning Bowl ritual in another church in Albany on New Year's Eve. We had been drawn to that particular time and place by its promise of a year's end ritual. It went like this:

During their regular evening worship service they made time and space for the people gathered to reflect on the theme of endings and beginnings. We shared about 5 minutes of silence, during which we were invited to pray about and name what we needed to leave behind – perhaps regrets, anger, fear, hatred, loss, home, loved ones, pride. It was up to us to name it. Then, if we wanted to, we could write a word or place a symbol on a small piece of paper they had provided for us.

When the period of silence was over, we were invited – again, only if we wanted to – to come forward and place that piece of paper, that tangible sign of what we were ready to let go of, into the burning bowl.

Now the bowl was a special design, as ritual objects often are. It was made of copper and it had a wide opening. It was more that big enough to hold all that the gathered group needed to be rid of. The burning bowl also held a surprise. It was electrified, in a special way. So that when the paper, which were also specially made, was placed in the bowl, it flashed momentarily into flame before settling as ash in the bottom of the bowl.

Even though all this had been explained to us before the worship service began, that sudden flash of fire, that moment of destruction, the reality of never being able to get that slip of paper back – came as a surprise and a shock. It shocked us into even deeper reflection when we returned to our seats.

Neither Konrad nor I have forgotten that night. For us it was a sacramental moment. It has had staying power, returning to our minds whenever we have been faced with difficult decisions, especially the kinds of choices we have had to make in order to move forward. Know what I mean?

So, I stand here before you this morning knowing that both Konrad and I have been called to travel for a while with you, the people of Zion UCC at Taborton. Or, as we now tend to put it, to “go up the mountain.”

I know what I want to bring forward into the new Year: the warm welcome you have offered us, so that it might spread and help to promote the healing and reconciliation that seems to have already begun within this congregation. There is a future for this congregation and, more importantly, this present moment.

I do have to admit, though, that I am having more trouble with my personal “letting go’s”. If I am going to travel with you for a while on this journey of faith, I know that I need to be free enough to be fully present to you while I am here. To be present in that way, and I do want to do this, I need to loosen my ties to my home church, to be OK with seeing people that I have come to care for deeply less often than I am used to. I am willing to do this, but there is some sadness, some loss in this transition we are making together.

To this point Anna and Simeon had something to say to me in today’s Gospel. They were elders who had been very loyal to God and their tradition, yet they were not stuck in their ways. They were able to see and recognize the unexpected newness, the Divine Child, when he was presented to them. Grounded in their life-long faith they were able to move unafraid into the newness of what God was asking of them and their tradition.

I don’t know where any of you are in determining what to leave behind and what to bring forward into the new year in order to make this congregation stronger, more vibrant and more faithful to the way of Jesus of Nazareth. What is it that God is asking of us now? As we in the UCC like to say: God IS still speaking.

I just hope that you have decided to come along on the journey, to be active participants in this new beginning. I know I have.

AMEN