**First Sunday of Virtual Worship March 15, 2020 Community Gathering**

**Welcome** to my home office and library in Ashby. Though our connection is virtual. . .there is something precious about being present with and for one another from so many places, many of them, perhaps all of them home places. I'll guide us through our time together, with the hope that it allows us to center down despite anxiety, uncertainty.

**Chalice Lighting** If you have candle ready, light the flame as I read the words of Nancy Reid-McKee:

Our community knows no boundaries.

We are not confined by the physical limits of walls

Or, for that matter, of what often binds us, restricts us

Holds us back.

We are free-er than we know

When we release ourselves

And each other

From expectations of what is needed

For true community.

We are here together in this space

I see you.

I hear you

I love you

We light the flames of many chalices

Beacons of this community, our community

Holding us all together.

Here.

Now.

**Readings**

In my email about the decision to close First Parish for the remainder of this month, I shared a poem by Lynn Ungar. It is our first reading this morning – she entitled her poem Pandemic. I added a subtitle: reach out with your heart.

What if you thought of it as the Jews consider the Sabbath—

the most sacred of times?

Cease from travel.

Cease from buying and selling.

Give up, just for now,

on trying to make the world different than it is.

Sing. Pray. Touch only those to whom you commit your life.

Center down.

And when your body has become still, reach out with your heart.

Know that we are connected in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.

(You could hardly deny it now.)

Know that our lives are in one another’s hands.

(Surely, that has come clear.)

Do not reach out your hands.

Reach out your heart.

Reach out your words.

Reach out all the tendrils of compassion that move, invisibly,

where we cannot touch.

Promise this world your love--

for better or for worse,

in sickness and in health,

so long as we all shall live.

The second reading is entitled This Is The Part, written by Elizabeth Nguyen

It suggests what it can mean – maybe not right now but in time, in these days - it suggests what it can mean to reach out with your heart.

this is the part where we commandeer cruise ships for people migrating to feast at all you can eat buffets and party pool side and then split the corporate profits with the staff, right? PAUSE

this is the part where we teach ourselves how to make our own medicine - the kind from herbs and grandma's recipes and vaccines and antivirals and insulin and epipens too, right? PAUSE

this is the part where we open our spare rooms to the college student whose school is closed and the asylum seeker who just got out of detention, and our co-worker who just got evicted and the queer teen who needs a place to crash, right? PAUSE

this is the part where we feed lunch to the kid whose school is cancelled and text the people who can't be in public spaces anymore and we breathe, right?

this is the part where we introduce ourselves to our neighbors we've been living next to for 10 years because tomorrow we might need each other, right? PAUSE

this is the part where we ask "what do i really need for surviving?" and find a way to seek no more and no less, right? PAUSE

this is the part where we stay home, we cancel, we show up, we call, we fight, we let go, we stay, we don't let anyone go it alone, right? PAUSE

this is the part where when we say we, we mean: we elderly, we immunocompromised, we sick, we well, we in prison, we free, we who can buffer our way out with money and privilege and we who definitely can't.

right? right.

**Closing** Despite any physical distance between us we are connected by heart. Stay safe. Be well.