



## Repair

Each month worship, religious education, community outreach ministry, covenant groups, and Wellspring Wednesday programs will offer opportunities to contemplate, consider, contend with and discuss an intergenerational curriculum based on monthly themes. Our hope is that this approach will bind us more closely together and inform our lives in positive ways. December's theme is... Repair

A few benighted souls among you will remember that in 1968 the Firesign Theater released an album entitled "Waiting for the Electrician or Someone Like Him." The title provides a quirky point of entry into this month's theme; repair. Just when you thought everything that could be said about the Christmas season had already been said along comes this new notion. Could it be we're "waiting for the electrician or someone like him"? Just for fun let's stretch this metaphor a bit.

Advent is the season of waiting. And Jesus could certainly be seen as a master electrician who is about to come down to hook us up to a power far greater than ourselves. See how it works? "Or someone like him" reflects our understanding that Jesus is not the only begotten child of God but rather, Channing would have said, a perfected human being whose ministry provides a path for us to follow. So we're not waiting for Jesus per se but for someone like him, someone whose way of being in the world calls us to a larger love.

Repair is not often used as a theological term. But we've chosen repair as our advent theme because it lends itself so well to the task of deepening our understanding of the task at hand. In a 17th century Jewish story attributed to Kabbalist Isaac Luria, it's told that God began to create the world by forming great vessels intended to hold the light. But as

God poured the light into them the vessels shattered. Countless shards flew out and covered all creation, each shard embedded with a spark of divine light.

Advent for families turn to page 12.

Our task then is to help free and reunite the scattered light, to heal, restore and yes, to repair, this broken world. Quite sure we are unable to heal the world by ourselves, we wait. In metaphorical terms we wait for a messiah who will lead us in the work, we wait for the redeemer, the one uniquely prepared to bring in the reign of light and love. In *Holy the Firm* Annie Dillard writes:

*...Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in his Holy place? There is no one but us. There is no one to send, nor a pure heart on the face of the earth, but only us, a generation comforting ourselves with the notion that we have come at an awkward time, that our innocent fathers are all dead - as if innocence had ever been - and our children busy and troubled, and we ourselves unfit, not yet ready, having each of us chosen wrongly, made a false start, failed, yielded to impulse and the tangled comfort of pleasures, and grown exhausted, unable to seek the thread, weak, and involved. But there is no one but us. There never has been.*

To stand firm in that knowledge should not delude us into thinking that our waiting is in vain. We easily fall into thinking that waiting is a passive state. In fact, waiting well can become an essential spiritual practice. Waiting well allows time for discernment. Waiting well helps us to discipline our minds for the work ahead. By waiting well we learn to befriend the emptiness, the "God-shaped hollow" inside us. And sometimes, just once in a while waiting well can teach us we need help from others. So wait well friends and when you need to call an electrician, or a plumber or a friend, place that call. You'll have to wait awhile but it will be worth it.

### Worship Theme Resources

#### BOOKS

***The Silence of Jesus*** James Breech (Fortress Press 1983, 1987) A brilliant work of textual criticism in which the author points to the parables of Jesus as authentic to his ministry and message.

***The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*** Jose Saramago (Harcourt Brace 1994) The Portuguese Nobel Laureate tells the ancient story with an astounding twist. Could it be that Jesus, like so many sons must do, was attempting to complete Joseph's unfinished business?

***Repair: the Impulse to Restore in a Fragile World*** Elizabeth V. Spellman (Beacon 2002) "We live in a world constantly in need of repair. We fix things and relationships all the time without giving it much thought." Could it be that another title for "the Prince of Peace" might be "Repairer of the World."

#### FILMS

***It's a Wonderful Life* (1946)**

There was a run on the bank! I know. It's hard for us to imagine (hmm), but this classic directed by Frank Capra is an all-time great.

***The Shawshank Redemption* (1994)**

A broken legal system falsely imprisons a broken-hearted man for the murder of his newly estranged wife. Time and "grace" do their best to repair the situation.

***Love Actually* (2003)**

This is a joyous and touchingly serious tale about finding wholeness and greeting the season with care and honesty.



## Advent for Families: Raising the Two-Marshmallow Child

**Waiting is a spiritual practice.** In a culture that has nearly lost the art of delayed gratification, parents sometimes feel as though they're swimming against a current of appealing advertisements, new technologies and relentless social competition. This season of Advent is a natural moment to turn our attention to the deep art of waiting and to teach it to our children.

In a longitudinal study started in the early 1960s, a psychologist at Stanford conducted an experiment in delayed gratification with four-year-olds. The children were given an option: eat one marshmallow now, or – if you can wait 15 minutes – we'll give you two marshmallows to eat then. The children who were able to wait for the two marshmallows matured into adolescents who were more socially adaptable, had better coping skills and demonstrated greater dependability. Reliably, one-marshmallow kids developed into teenagers with lower self-esteem who were easily frustrated and performed worse in school. Waiting is a life skill worth learning, and worth teaching.

Advent is an entire season of waiting, one mirrored in the natural world and in the liturgical year; it's a perfect opportunity to engage your family in the countercultural practice of delayed gratification. The journey into longer, darker nights and the anticipation of the sun's return, coupled with the excited anticipation that precedes Christmas, offer parents a chance to point out the blessings that come with being present in the moment, even if the moment itself doesn't offer us any fulfillment.

How to teach the practice of waiting? Here are some tips for families:

**Practice Advent.** Share in a family Advent wreath or Waldorf-style Advent spiral as a way to visually mark the weeks. Put up an Advent calendar. Note the times of sunrise and sunset each day. Sit in the darkness together each morning or evening without any

lights or candles. Take some time to fix the things in the house that need repair or mending. Make handmade gifts that take time and creative energy.

**Contain Christmas.** As a religious season, Christmas starts on the 25th and continues for the "Twelve Days" until Epiphany. For those of us who have a hard time sustaining joy and cheer and goodwill toward men from Halloween on, this makes a lot of sense. Limit the number of Christmas obligations throughout late November and December. Wait until Christmas Eve to put up the tree and enjoy it for 12 days. Consider stretching out the exchange of gifts in a way that works for your family (stockings on Christmas Eve, one gift on Christmas morning, smaller gifts each of the Twelve Days).

**Include naturally extended experiences in your family's Advent life.** Read a special chapter book at bedtime throughout Advent; kids learn that the story will continue tomorrow night. Bake bread as a gift for friends and family; yeast can't be hurried along and the rising dough is a pleasure to watch. Grow amaryllis or paperwhite bulbs in your child's bedroom; observe any new growth each morning. Explain how and why these things have to happen at their own pace.

**Play waiting 'games'.** While waiting in the airport lines, see how many UU songs you can sing or how many church friends you can name out loud before it's your time to go through the security check. Try doing the "marshmallow experiment" with your preschooler and then refer to it in instances where your child has to wait for something different. Set a timer and play, "Guess How Long 5 Minutes Is" to help develop your child's sense of time passing. Doing holiday errands? Have a book or quiet activity ready for times when you know there'll be a wait.

**Turn off the television.** In the marshmallow experiment, the least

effective parenting strategy for extending wait time was focusing on how the yummy the marshmallow would be when the child got to eat it. Advertisers' goal, of course, is to persuade children that their 'marshmallow' is the yummiest, so why not help our kids extend their capacity for waiting by sparing them the more than 3000 commercials they'll see in the four weeks before Christmas?

### Guest at Your Table Ends January 4

Families participating in UUSC's Guest at Your Table program should return their boxes (or a check written out to Unity Church – Unitarian with UUSC-GAYT in the memo) on Sunday, January 4. Families whose funds are not turned in by this date should send their donation directly to the UUSC ([www.uusc.org](http://www.uusc.org)).

### Have Yourself a Merry UU Christmas!

Our ancestors' contributions to holiday traditions should help even the Scrooges among UUs enjoy the season in good cheer. Sing, read and celebrate proudly!

- "Jingle Bells" was written by Unitarian James Pierpont and "Over the River and Through the Woods" was written by Unitarian Lydia Maria Child
- Nathaniel Currier, of Currier & Ives, was also Unitarian!
- Charles Dickens (who, for all intents and purposes invented Christmas), author of "A Christmas Carol" was a Unitarian
- "Little Tree" by Unitarian Universalist e.e. cummings, and Little Women by Unitarian Louisa May Alcott, are beloved holiday reads