

Hallmark by Mim Neal

We, as Unitarian Universalists, covenant to affirm and promote . . . respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

In no other year in living memory has the interdependent web been so blatantly obvious. What happens in China and New Zealand and the United Kingdom affects (and infects) all of us. Everywhere.

Of course, that statement refers to much more than the spread of a virus. [In fact, viral contagion was not a primary component of that idea. The interdependent web refers to the confluence of all – all microbes and planets and people. It acknowledges that the movement of a butterfly's wings on one part of the world, can affect the weather on the other side of the globe. That all that we are is part of everything else. We are stars and worms and even politicians.

But a pandemic illustrates, rather forcibly, that what injures one of us, threatens all of us.

More than threatened health, the current pandemic forces us into a perpetual round of isolation that is only minimally eased by Skype and Zoom and other artificial devices of communication.

None of which will ever replace a hug.

That is why I have personally embarked on a frenzied Christmas card campaign.

I bought more cards than I thought I could use ... then ran out. I bought some more, then ran out of them. Now I am sending e-cards. And I will continue to do so until Dec. 24<sup>th</sup>. And maybe afterward.

Anything that I can do to strengthen and acknowledge my connections with other people, I do.

Christmas cards are not frivolous creations designed to enrich the coffers of Hallmark (even if they do). Christmas cards celebrate hope, the promise of returning light, of new horizons, new possibilities. But most of all, they celebrate connection.

Perhaps they have never been more important.

But the need for connections is absolutely not confined to those who celebrate Christmas.

Muslims, Jews, Sufi, Native Americans, atheists, and the whole variety of human religious experiments share the need for connection.

It seems so essential, so important, so necessary. Especially now that most of us have been forced or persuaded into desolate isolation.

Connections have become rare and highly valued ... enabling even those who live alone to feel part of the human network. So, if there is anything I can do to reach out to people I know and care about, it behooves me to do so.

And of course, connections need not rely only on Christmas cards. And apply to only mere humans.

Connections occur whenever one human being acknowledges the existence of another human being with a smile or a cup of coffee.

When someone responds to the needs of others with generosity.

When someone plants a tree or rescues a cat.

All species are essential. All water is holy. All trees are sacred.

There are many ways to acknowledge this. Many ways to reinforce the fragile web. Any way we can find to do so, we must do so.

Even if it requires a stamp.