

**“The Power of Hope – Even in a Small Flame”  
Dianne M. Daniels; UUCN, December 21, 2025**

**Sermon: “The Power of Hope – Even in a Small Flame”  
by Rev. Dianne M. Daniels  
Remember to SLOW DOWN**

Good morning, beloveds. I am thankful to be with you again today, and hope this time finds you feeling restored, perhaps slowing down a bit, and anticipating the final few days before Christmas.

**WHAT – Naming the Small Flame**

Hope doesn't usually arrive in our lives as a roaring fire.

Most of the time, hope shows up quietly.

As a flicker.

As a small flame cupped carefully in our hands, protected from the wind.

Kent Nerburn writes:

“We are not saints, not heroes – we build tiny hearthfires that may be just what that person lost in the darkness needs to see in order to find the road to safety or even salvation. The smallest of lights chases away the darkness – that flickering flame, the light of a single candle, can guide a sailor home.”

That image matters – because it tells the truth.

Hope is not about perfection.

Hope is not about certainty.

Hope is not about being fearless, saintly, or heroic.

Hope is about keeping a flame alive, even when the night is long.

And let's be honest — many of us are tired.  
We are navigating uncertainty in our world, in our communities, in  
our families, and in our own inner lives.  
Some of us are carrying grief.  
Some are carrying regret.  
Some are carrying the quiet fear that the dreams we once had no  
longer fit who we are now.

Hope, in times like these, can feel fragile.  
It can feel naïve.  
It can feel risky.

And yet — here we are.

Still showing up.  
Still lighting chalices.  
Still believing that something better is possible, even if we can't  
fully see it yet.

That, my friends, is hope already at work.

## **SO WHAT — Why Hope Still Matters**

So what does that small flame of Hope — the one we all can feed  
and help sustain - actually do?

Hope gives us orientation.  
It helps us remember where we are headed — even when the path  
curves, detours, or disappears for a while.

One of the most powerful misunderstandings about hope is the  
idea that it should remain fixed — that once we name a goal, a  
dream, an aspiration, it should stay the same forever.

But that's not how **real** lives work.

Our hopes evolve as we evolve.

What we longed for at 25 may not be

what sustains us at 45, 55, or 65.

That doesn't mean we failed; it means we grew.

Aspirations – Goals – Dreams - move through stages — from wide-open optimism to reality-tested responsibility, to renewed dreaming, and eventually to realignment and momentum.

## **How Aspirations Change Over Time**

Hope doesn't disappear when life gets complicated.

It often just goes quiet — waiting for us to notice it again.

And here's where Unitarian Universalist values come alive.

Transformation reminds us that change is not betrayal — it's faithfulness to who we are becoming.

Pluralism teaches us that there is more than one right path, more than one meaningful dream.

Interdependence tells us that we do not tend our flames alone — we borrow light from one another.

Justice insists that hope is not just personal comfort, but collective responsibility.

Equity calls us to notice whose flames are most vulnerable to being extinguished.

And Love, at the center of it all, is what keeps us showing up anyway.

Hope is not passive wishing.  
Hope is a relationship we maintain with the future.

And the way we speak to ourselves matters deeply in that relationship.

The voice inside our heads can either shield the flame — or blow it out.

Negative self-talk erodes hope quietly.  
It whispers that it's too late.  
That we missed our chance.  
That we should be satisfied with less than we long for.

But hope responds when we practice intentional, uplifting self-talk — when we replace shame with affirmation, fear with honesty, and overwhelm with presence.

### **How To Practice Self Talk That ...**

Hope grows when we say:  
“I am still learning.”  
“I am allowed to change.”  
“I am not done yet.”

Hope also asks us to look regret in the eye — not to wallow in it, but to refuse to let it dictate the future.

Regret keeps us anchored to what cannot be changed.  
Hope asks: What can I do now?

Living without regret doesn't mean pretending the past didn't happen.

It means choosing action over paralysis — choosing meaning over perfection

## **How to Live Without Regret**

Hope is the courage to take a small step, even when we can't see the whole staircase.

And that step matters — not just for us, but for others.

Because here's the truth Nerburn names so beautifully:

We may never know whose darkness our small flame helps to illuminate.

## **NOW WHAT — Practicing Hope as a Spiritual Discipline**

So what do we do with this?

We stop waiting for hope to feel big.

We stop waiting for absolute, ultimate clarity before we act.

We begin by tending the small flame.

**First**, we allow our hopes to be honest.

Not what we think we should want.

Not what others expect from us.

But what quietly calls to us when we are paying attention.

That kind of discernment takes reflection.

It takes time.

It takes asking ourselves real questions — about what matters, what nourishes us, and what kind of life we want to grow into.

How Can I Figure Out My Aspirations...

Hope is strengthened when it is named.

**Second**, we protect hope through the way we speak to ourselves.

Hope cannot survive constant self-attack.  
It needs encouragement, truth, and compassion.

Practice noticing your inner narrative.

Ask yourself:

- Would I speak this way to someone I love?
- Would I say this to a child?
- Would I say this to someone whose flame I was trying to protect?

If not, change the script.

Hope is not arrogance.  
Hope is not denial.  
Hope is choosing words that make room for possibility.

**Third**, we take one small, meaningful action.

Not everything.  
Not all at once.  
Just one step.

Hope grows through movement.

Make the phone call.  
Have the conversation.  
Sign up.  
Begin again.

Action doesn't require certainty — only willingness.

**Fourth**, we share our flame.

Hope multiplies when it is visible.

When we live our values openly.

When we stand for justice, even when it's uncomfortable.

When we practice generosity with our time, attention, and compassion.

When we refuse to let despair be the loudest voice in the room.

Your hope does not have to be loud to be powerful.

A single candle can guide a sailor home.

And finally, we remember that hope is communal.

We do not tend the fire alone.

We gather.

We remind one another.

We borrow light when our own flickers.

That is why we come together.

That is why we keep telling the story.

That is why we keep lighting the flame.

Because even the smallest light matters.

Especially in the dark.

## **Closing Thought**

We are not saints.

We are not heroes.  
But we are flame-keepers.

And sometimes, the hope we carry — fragile, flickering, imperfect  
— is exactly what someone else needs to find their way.

May we tend it well.  
May we trust its power.  
And may we never underestimate the strength of a small flame,  
carried with love.

Amen.

**Closing Words – Hope Does Not Need to Be Loud – by Rev.  
Dianne M. Daniels**

May you leave this place remembering  
That hope does not need to be loud to be powerful.

May you trust the small flame you carry —  
the quiet courage to begin again,  
the steady willingness to keep loving,  
the simple choice to take one more faithful step forward.

May you tend that flame with compassion for yourself,  
with honesty about what has changed,  
and with courage to shape what comes next.

And may you remember that none of us walks this road alone.  
We borrow light from one another.  
We share warmth.  
We become, together, a hearth against the cold.

As we now turn to music —offered by Denis Lanoue and Aaron Daniels, leaders in our community and fellow keepers of the flame — may these notes remind us that hope is not only spoken, but sung, played, shared, and carried forward in harmony.

Go in peace.

Go with courage.

Go in hope — even when it is just a small flame.

Amen. Ashe. And blessed be.