

Solstice

Continued from Page 1D

may suppose He was too). Now, with those good folks and their folks gone, this time of year can stir lonely feelings and somber thoughts. Again, Henry by his pond, offers a word of solace: "Every little pine needle expanded and swelled with sympathy and befriended me. I was so distinctly made aware of the presence of something kindred to me, even in scenes which we are accustomed to call wild and dreary" (Walden).

Swirling snow; night calls of the owl; low, fiery sunset; skiing, sledding, snowshoeing; parties and parades; shopping and spending (never-ending); wrapping, sending – receiving, opening.

There's the gift. The natural gift pre-

sented to all of us. Receiving, opening; giving what we can, who we are. Nature presents an opening at the closing of seasons, an opening of unwrapped days and years. We can only imagine the strings of light stretching into the future.

So we go to services or choose to be of service – maybe both. We share a roast or raise a toast and join in the chorus before us, the symphony of simple gifts laid out in extravagance before our eyes.

After all, what is a holiday? What are we celebrating? Life – our common lives in circles of home and community, country and world. Isn't this old earth a fragile, sparkling ornament spinning on the great Tree of Life?

Once we discover and celebrate each day as a holiday and every season in turn as another invitation to the party of Presence, we may understand our mys-

terious place in the wholly secular, the holy sacred. What does that mean? Heaven if I know.

"The presence of something kindred." Do we feel that in the drama on display in our annual play? Do we find our kinship in gods and angels, or in family, friends and more natural messengers? Are the wild things our rela-

tions? Can our lungs, filled with fresh forest breath, be the prayer we need? Does the Christmas carol or the dance of Hanukkah send a spark of comfort and joy to our crowded, lonely world?

Even as we sing to a baby or celebrate liberation, we might remember, whatever our string of lights – our stories and traditions – Nature is the reason for the season, providing the seasoning that delights and lights the way ahead.

Circling crows talking; riverside walking; deers to spy under Blue Ridge sky. Hark! the hawk's cry over bellowing elk in snowy Smokies. This generous land, wrapped in wildness, giving, receiving, giving more.

Chris Highland served as a Protestant minister and interfaith chaplain for many years. He is a teacher, writer, freethinker and humanist celebrant. Learn more at chighland.com.