Kindling

Small Reflections on a Limitless Faith

for SATB choir and chamber ensemble

Elizabeth Alexander

Seafarer Press
Kindling

Small Reflections on a Limitless Faith

SATB and chamber ensemble *

Poetry ............................................. 2
Prologue ........................................... 4
I. First Touch ................................. 6
II. Pages ......................................... 13
III. Chosen People ............................ 21
IV. So Much Radiance ....................... 35
V. Strong Braid ................................. 46
VI. Where Belief Begins ..................... 60
Epilogue: The Chalice of Our Hearts .... 69
Composer Notes ............................... 74

* Chamber Ensemble Instrumentation:
   Flute (opt Piccolo)
   Horn in F
   Piano
   String Quartet

Duration: 25 minutes

Kindling may be performed with SATB and piano using the Choral Score (SEA-123-09)
Choral Scores and Instrumental Parts (SEA-123-08) may be ordered at www.seafarerpress.com

Also available as individual songs:
   Pages (SEA-123-02)
   Chosen People (SEA-123-03)
   So Much Radiance (SEA-123-04)
   Strong Braid (SEA-123-05)
   The Chalice of Our Hearts (SEA-123-07)

Seafarer Press
Kindling

Small Reflections on a Limitless Faith

Words and Music by Elizabeth Alexander

I. First Touch

Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life.

The first touch brings astonishment, then delight:
   Water, kitten belly, hydrangea blossom, warm mud.
   New ears learn to decipher footsteps and music.
   While watching a fuzzy caterpillar, small hearts lean towards God.

II. Pages

Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love

On the pages of the morning paper,
   People rebuild shattered schools and restore lifeless lakes,
   Knit reconciliation out of promise and pain,
   And sing to the deathly ill and the newly born.
Constitutions are still being written,
   And slaves freed, and truces forged.
We finish our breakfasts and roll up our own sleeves.

III. Chosen People

Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves

As children we are enchanted by the apple, the ark, the whale,
   The boy with the slingshot, the baby in the barn.
   Later we grapple with forgiveness, resurrection and compassion.
Chosen people are everywhere now – in the market, under the bridge.
The next chapters are still being written.

IV. So Much Radiance

Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life

Once we set forth in the dark empty hours of the night,
   In search of a Presence wondrous and unseen,
   Guided only by a voice still and small.
Our outstretched hands soon encountered
   The brass and grain of Cross and Menorah,
   And our fingers traced their contours with reverence and joy.
Only now, as the rising sun illuminates
   Wheel and Lotus, Yin and Yang, Star and Crescent, Eagle and Drum,
We begin to behold the Limitless:
   So much Radiance within our reach – even more beyond.
V. Strong Braid

*Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit*

Aloft in the heady air of faith,
Our senses heightened by incense and ether,
We may from time to time become ecstatic paper kites.
We dive and keel and rocket,
Riding each wayward gust with abandon,
Recklessly aspiring to Auroral heights —
Yet knowing all the while that we are safe,
Tethered to the ground by a strong braid, a steady hand,
And a mind that appraises the wind.

VI. Where Belief Begins

*Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature*

It comes down to this, in the end.
And in the beginning and middle as well:
Earth, generous and visceral,
Manifested in mountains and hidden within clouds,
Familiar to rhizomes and young knees.
Air and Water, faithful channels of change,
Whose currents and cycles nudge germination
All the way through to rot and back again.
What’s more, there’s Fire, dazzling and implausible,
Not only in the cores of planets and stars
But also in the hollow where belief begins.

Epilogue: The Chalice of Our Hearts

Our search for kindling takes us far beyond our selves –
There we gather Truth and Mystery.
We return in joy to tend the chalice of our hearts.

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Kindling
Prologue

Tenderly ($q = 120$)

Elizabeth Alexander

Conductors Score in C

Commissioned by First Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston

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I. First Touch

“Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life”
Solo or Tutti: p

The first touch

flutes

horns

saxophone

the first touch brings a ston-ish-ment

piano

strings

(Tutti: mp)

kindling - conductors score in c

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A LOT OF HARD WORK & CREATIVITY WENT INTO BRINGING THIS MUSIC TO YOU...

...AND SOME OF IT WAS EVEN MINE.

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New ears learn to decipher steps and music.

While

New ears learn to decipher steps and music.

While

New ears learn to decipher steps and music.

While

New ears learn to decipher steps and music.

While

watching a fuzzy caterpillar,

Small hearts

watching a fuzzy caterpillar,

Small hearts

watching a fuzzy caterpillar,

Small hearts

watching a fuzzy caterpillar,
nonritardando
(No fermata)

lean toward God

lean toward God

lean toward God

lean toward God

lean toward God

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12
II. Pages

“Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love”
A lot of hard work & creativity went into bringing this music to you...

...and some of it was even mine.

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A Tempo

Fl

Hn

pp

p

T

B

Cons-ti-tu-tions are still being written

Pno

pp

Con (no pedal change)

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc

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Kindling - Conductors Score in C

17
and roll up our own sleeves, and roll up our own sleeves, and roll up our own sleeves, and roll up our own sleeves, and roll up our own sleeves.
and roll up our own sleeves, and roll up our own sleeves, and roll up our own sleeves, and roll up our own sleeves, and roll up our own sleeves, and roll up our own sleeves, and roll up our own sleeves, and roll up our own sleeves.
III. Chosen People

‘Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God’s love by loving our neighbors as ourselves’
Kindling - Conductors Score in C

Fl
S
A
T
B
Pno
Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc

Solo or Tutti: \( p \)

As children we are enchanted by the ark.

3 3 3

mon
We are enchanted, we are enchanted

Tutti: p
We are enchanted,

We are enchanted,

We are enchanted,

We are enchanted,

We are enchanted,

Tutti:

We are enchanted,

We are enchanted,

We are enchanted,

We are enchanted,

We are enchanted.

by the whale,

by the whale,

by the whale,

by the whale,

by the whale,


mf

mf

mf

mf

mf

* with enthusiasm

*Tenors have cue-sized notes here; they may sing this line with basses if desired.
the baby in the chan ted by the boy with the sling shot, the baby in the chan ted by the boy with the sling shot, the baby in the chan ted by the boy with the sling shot, the baby in the chan ted by the boy with the sling shot, the baby in the chan ted by the boy with the sling shot, the baby in the chan ted by the boy with the sling shot, the baby in the chan ted by the boy with the sling shot, the baby in the chan ted by the boy with the sling shot, the baby in the chan ted by the boy with the sling shot, the baby in the chan ted by the boy with the sling shot, the baby in the chan ted by the boy with the sling shot, the baby in the chan ted by the boy with the sling shot, the baby in the chan ted by the boy with the sling shot, the baby in the chan ted by the boy with the sling shot, the baby in the chan ted by the boy with the sling shot, the baby in the chan ted by the boy with the sling shot, the baby in the chan ted by the boy with the sling shot, the baby in the chan ted by the 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G

Moving forward

La - ter we grap - ple with for - give - ness, for - give - ness,

We grap - ple with re - sur - rec - tion, re - sur - tion,
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238 poco rit.

Fl

Hn

S

T

B

Pno

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc

f

re

ci

on.

f

re

ci

on.

f

re

ci

on.

f

re

ci

on.

f

rec
ci

on.

f

espress.

f

espress.

f

espress.

f

espress.

f

espress.

f

espress.

f

espress.

f

espress.

f

espress.

f

espress.

f

espress.

f

espress.

f

espress.

f

espress.

f

espress.
Tempo meno mosso

Fl
S
A
T
B
Pno
Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc

242

mp

246

p

Kindling - Conductors Score in C

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S  A

p     tenderly

Pno

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc

J

pp

pp

pp

pp

people are ev'ry where now, are ev'ry

S  A

T  B

in the mar - ket, under the bridge.

pp

pp

pp

pp

where, ev'ry where,

Cho sen
Kindling - Conductors Score in C
The market, under the bridge...

next chapters are still being written.

glistening like drops of water

kindling conductor score in C
IV. So Much Radiance

“Wisdom from the world’s religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life”
Guided only by a voice,

whispered freely, unsynchronized

still and small

murmuring

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Our stretched hands soon entered brass and grain of Cross and Me.

And our fingers traced their contours with

"no rah,"
A lot of hard work & creativity went into bringing this music to you...

...and some of it was even mine.

The rest of this piece is not available online.

(YOU KNOW WHY.)

A complete perusal copy may be purchased from Elizabeth Alexander at

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We begin to hold the Limitless,
We begin to hold the Limitless:

So much Distance within our reach,
So much Distance within our reach,

So much Distance within our reach,
So much Distance within our reach,

So much Distance within our reach,
So much Distance within our reach,

So much Distance within our reach,
So much Distance within our reach,

So much Distance within our reach,
So much Distance within our reach,

So much Distance within our reach,
So much Distance within our reach,

So much Distance within our reach,
So much Distance within our reach,

So much Distance within our reach,
So much Distance within our reach,
Radiance within our reach, So much radiance within our reach.
Radiance within our reach, So much radiance within our reach.
So much radiance, and even more, and even more, be...
So much radiance, and even more, and even more, be...
So much radiance, and even more, and even more, be...
So much radiance, and even more, and even more, be...
So much radiance, and even more, and even more, be...
V. Strong Braid

"Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit"

*Pianist, allow yourself to waft and whirl to your heart's content, and use the lead-foot pedal technique that your piano teacher instructed you to eschew. - E.A.
* Composer's Note: Whenever I need to “pull a note out of the air” (no pun intended), I try singing/humming along with a different voice part whose pitch helps me get a handle on my own pitch. In this song, I’ve suggested a few such “stealth notes” for the upper voices.
A lot of hard work & creativity went into bringing this music to you...

...and some of it was even mine.

The rest of this piece is not available online.

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may from time to time become ec.

We static paper kites.

We static paper kites.

We static paper kites.
Kindling - Conductors Score in C

dive and keel and rock - et, We

dive and keel and rock - et, We

dive and keel and rock - et, We

dive and keel and rock - et, We

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a brief moment of stillness...

Riding each wayward gust with abandon.

Recklessly aspiring, aspiring, aspiring to Aud...
a tempo

knowing all the while that we are safe,

by a strong braid,

Solo or Tutti: 

Te thereof to the ground
Tutti: mp

by a steady, steady hand

and a mind that praises the

and a mind that praises the

and a mind that praises the

and a mind that praises the

(Think: "Strong hand")

molto cresc.

molto cresc.

molto cresc.

molto cresc.

molto cresc.

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Kindling - Conductors Score in C
VI. Where Belief Begins

"Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature."

Pensively (\( \dot{\text{j}} = 60)\)

Crystal clear, like raindrops (no pedal changes)
well. It comes down to this in the end. It comes down to this.
Earth, generous and visceral,
manifested in mountains and hidden within the clouds.
fa. mi. liar to rhizomes and young knees.

Earth. tenderly
more, what's more, what's more, what's more, there's

more, what's more, what's more, what's more, there's

more, what's more, what's more, what's more, there's

more, what's more, what's more, what's more, there's

more, what's more, what's more, what's more, there's

mp

mp

mp

mp

mp
rallentando molto

a tempo, meno mosso

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Epilogue: Kindling

Pensively (\( \dot{\text{c}} = 60 \))

Singers: Slowly close your folders and offer this final song to the audience with love and grace.

Our search for kindling takes us far beyond ourselves. There we gather truth and mystery. We return with joy to tend the

Kindling - Conductors Score in C

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Our search for chance of our hearts takes us far beyond our selves. There we gather truth and mystery. We return.
ry. We re-turn with joy
Our search for

ry. We re-turn with joy to tend the chalice of our

with joy to tend the chalice of our hearts.

Pno

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vc

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Our search for kindling takes us far beyond ourselves. There we gather truth and hearts.

Our search for kindling takes us far beyond ourselves. There we gather truth and mystery. We return with joy to tend the mystery. We return with joy to tend the mystery. We return with joy to tend the mystery.
A lot of Hard Work & Creativity went into bringing this Music to You...

...and some of it was even mine.

The rest of this piece is not available online.

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Composer Notes on *Kindling*

(Some small reflections on some small reflections)

by Elizabeth Alexander

Some commissions call me to grow spiritually, forcing me to grapple with questions I wouldn’t necessarily have chosen for myself. *Kindling* was definitely one of those commissions. Although I had set no fewer than 14 liberal religious texts to music – from Transylvania’s 16th century “Edict of Torda” to Emerson’s “Oversoul” – I had never thought of Unitarian Universalism’s Six Sources as terrifically inspiring. But when conductor Jason Oby handed me the ambitious goal of composing a cantata based on these universal sources of inspiration and guidance, I knew I couldn’t say no. How compelling!

And...um....how intimidating. Unitarian Universalists don’t celebrate their faith with the ecstatic abandon of Sufis, or the rich mysticism of the Eastern Orthodox. They lean more towards rational thought – but geez, I didn’t want to compose a treatise, or a dissertation, or a polemic. *(What is a polemic, anyway?)*

During long walks with my husband I waved my arms dramatically, lamenting: “The Six Sources? Who are they kidding? A song about humanism? Good grief, I might as well set the IRS tax code to music.” But over time, as I asked myself what the essential nature of each source was, a rhapsodic kernel within each one gradually emerged – yes, even within humanism.

Thus, *Kindling* is not a manifesto, no grand statement containing ultimate truths and universal revelations. It is a collection of small reflections on how experience, heritage and inspiration can cultivate a faith of integrity, service and joy:

I. When my 2-year old son Oliver first felt a hydrangea blossom against his cheek, he exclaimed, “Mom, that makes music!” My memory of witnessing that “First Touch” was all the inspiration I needed.

II. For me, the reading of a newspaper brings many emotions in quick succession: joy, fear, sorrow, inspiration and pain. I brought this shifting emotional terrain into “Pages,” along with the patient, perseverant steps of many visionary souls.

III. My parents were deeply engaged with the vivid stories and heart-rending questions of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and my childhood was better for it. The tenderness and passion in “Chosen People” reflects my gratitude and affection for this rich tradition.

IV. The modest aspiration of “So Much Radiance” is to honor all of the religions in the universe. In under 5 minutes. What’s a composer to do!? One thing I did was to use all the major chords of all 12 keys – often using more than one at a time!

V. Writing “Strong Braid” was challenging, because I had to face my own aversion to the word “humanism.” This is mind-bogglingly ironic, because I sincerely value rational thought. After many failed attempts, I decided to portray faith and humanism as interdependent, with humanism keeping faith in its proper sphere and thus bringing out the best that it has to offer. I was suddenly and inexplicably elated by this way of seeing things, imagining vast throngs of worldwide humanists, challenging whatever self-serving and destructive “teachings” might creep into their own religions from time to time. (I walked around for several days shouting “humanism rocks!”

(continued on next page)
VI. One thing I’ve come to appreciate about Earth-centered religions is that their daily practices are often profoundly simple: observation, acceptance, nurture, gratitude. From its spare opening bars, this movement brings us back to “Where Belief Begins.”

Epilogue. As a 25-minute work, Kindling is a “special occasion” piece for accomplished musicians. But this small epilogue can be sung by anyone, as a solo or as a canon. It seemed only right to end this way.

By the way, I found out what a polemic was, because I just looked it up. It is an argument that completely refutes other points of view. As it turns out, that’s exactly what Kindling is not. But I guess that shouldn’t really be a surprise, since that’s also exactly what Unitarian Universalism is not.

Elizabeth Alexander grew up in the Carolinas and Appalachian Ohio. Her love of poetry nearly eclipses her love of music – a passion which is reflected in her over 100 songs and choral works, which have received thousands of performances worldwide. She lives in St. Paul, MN, where her frequent commissions include works for orchestra, chorus, chamber ensembles and solo musicians.

A recent McKnight Fellow, she has received awards and fellowships from the Jerome Foundation, New York Council on the Arts, Wisconsin Arts Board, National Orchestral Association, International League of Women Composers, and American Composers Forum. Her composition teachers have included Jack Gallagher at The College of Wooster, and Steven Stucky, Yehudi Wyner and Karel Husa at Cornell University, from which she received her doctorate in music composition.

Elizabeth lives in Saint Paul, Minnesota, where she reads voraciously, makes pretty good biscuits, looks for all kinds of excuses to visit her two grown sons, and gardens during the three month period in Minnesota which is not winter.

She believes she has the best job in the world.

For more information about Kindling, including a Study Guide, recordings, and purchase information, visit:

www.seafarerpress.com/works/kindling