

Flower Communion: Awakening to Delight

By Rev. Jane Bennett Smith, Channing Memorial Church, UU, Ellicott City, MD June 4, 2023

The ground has transitioned from brown to green, bare branches now laden with leaves and, in some cases, peppered with flowers of blue, purple, or pink. The scent of peonies, hydrangeas, and zinnias fills the air, mingling with the raw scent of mulch as bites of fresh fruit and berries meet eager taste buds and warming air is welcomed on skin accustomed to the chilly frost of winter. Late spring is simultaneously common and delightful, both a mundane, predictable transition and a bountiful celebration of new life reemerging while established flowers relish in all that is. Common and mundane or bountiful and celebratory – the difference is in the mind of the beholder. Today, we pause in this season of floral scents and of warmth, of color and of sweet fruit, delighting in the ordinary, celebrating all cycles echoed in the rising sun and budding vegetation.

There is abundant wisdom held in leaves and petals that reflects the musings of many of us. I wonder how this season can answer a question both simple and paramount, a query that has made its way through millennia – Why do we exist? Why are we here? We can taste the answer in a strawberry; we can see the reply in the yellow petals of a daylily - simply to be, and to find beauty inherent in being, and to share that beauty in abundance with others. Flowers offer beauty in scent, color, and sweet nectar. We offer beauty in authenticity, joy, generosity, and compassion. We are here to love, to delight, to interact with the wonders we experience through engagement with the senses. We are here to engage with the cycles inherent in living, where life and death, joy and sorrow, light and dark interact as if in an unending dance.

Let us pause and reflect upon the prose offered in a conversation between a poet and his sacred that Ostara read us earlier. What wisdom did this conversation impart? We are introduced to a God who had no real intention in creating all that is other than to simply create – whose reason for all creation was nothing more than to be able to offer love to this new world, the inanimate and the animate alike. We were created simply to love, and to be loved.

We meet a God whose command for life to begin was not one of powerful force and coercion but of a distracted yet intentional hum – a simple, beautiful song, sung into all that was, creating all that is. Why are we here? All of creation – a song hummed by God – a melody composed for God’s beloved sweetheart – for God, too, falls in love! This is a story of why, and how, we came occupy this small, blue dot, filled with the mundane and predictable, or, I offer – the simple, ordinary delights.¹

Let us lift up the wisdom found in the poetry of Mary Oliver. “Every day I see or hear something that more or less kills me with delight” Not, she continues, of “the very extravagant, but the ordinary, the common, the very drab.”² What of, I ask, mud or larvae or dandelions peppering a well-tended yard? Let us revisit these topically mundane and even bothersome commonalities of life through the lens of a child. I think of my sister and myself – turning mud into pretend pies for our imaginary friends, or finding and naming small, green-brown frogs amidst a pool of unsightly larvae, or making bracelets and necklaces from the dandelions considered weeds abundant all around us. So, I ask, as I assume Oliver asks, what does life become if we attune ourselves to delight in each moment? Clouds become artwork; the wind becomes a dance partner. We delight in all things animate and inanimate as all things animate and inanimate delight in us. Poet and artist Khalil Gibran writes, “And forget not that the earth delights to feel your bare feet and the winds long to play with your hair.”³ We are offered a life of reciprocal joys and enchantments – songs of God intermingling with one another. At this time of year, we find particular delight in those transitions we reflected upon earlier – brown to green, cold to warmth, darkness to light, a reemergence of tastes and smells – the rebirth of spring. And the gifts of early summer - established plants rejoicing in all they have accomplished – magnificent petals and leaves abundant.

“What is the point of life?” we asked earlier. I think of my own teenage musings, the answers of a distraught and distracted adolescent. My answer? To die satisfied with the life I have

¹ “Conversation with God” by Alfred K. LaMotte

² “Mindful” by Mary Oliver

³ From *Soul Matters Worship Research June 2023*

lived. And I began a spiritual practice, periodically asking myself, “If I die tomorrow, will I be satisfied?” I pondered this question throughout the monotony of school, work, and friendships. It was a reminder of intentional living that I carry with me to this very day. Am I living each of my days making the best of all that I am offered? I tie this together intimately with ordinary delights and the songs of God – is our chance of dying satisfied increased if we find jewelry in the weeds and a dance partner in the wind?

“What is the point of life?” we can ask a flower. She emerges green and new from hard, cracked dirt. She reaches to the sky, leaves inviting the nourishment of the sun, scented, colorful petals filled with fragrant nectar calling forth an array of flying and crawling insects. Her very being offers sense pleasures as she sustains her own life and the lives of others. The flower exists, as we do, “Simply to be, and to find beauty inherent in being, and to share that beauty in abundance with others.” The wisdom of a daffodil.

A daffodil peeks through the crusty earth, blooms vibrant colors, provides and sustains life, and yet ultimately recedes back into the earth, becoming dormant once again. She experiences the innate cycles of the seasons found in this corner of the world. Each piece of the cycle maintains its own beautiful, unique, necessary attributes. Spring, a season of birth, joy and new life followed by the satiated fullness of summer, leading to fall, a time of reflection ultimately returning to the rest and wisdom of winter, only to be birthed again. A pattern synonymous with so many cycles inherent in life – life and death, sorrow and joy, spiritual fullness after a dark night of the soul.

I vaguely remember my own spring, making nonexistent friends simply through my imagination, honeysuckles an astounding gift as if from a divine being! I know my parents gazed at me with so much hope held in their hearts. I now embrace my transition to summer – when I have an opportunity to enjoy or celebrate the marriage or vocation or hobbies or delights that have come to fruition and maturation after years of cultivation. I see my father enjoying his transition from fall to winter as his attention shifts from parenting and working to gardening

and cultivating a deeper faith, buried in introspection of all that has been. And my grandmother from my not-so-distant past – transitioning into sweet nothing, reflecting for hours each day on the nature outside of her window, and imparting her blessed wisdom on the younger generations. She left this world in peace and will always be held in our hearts.

Today we celebrate a season of hope and rebirth after prolonged death and dormancy. I find this to be a season of maybes as we imagine the great potential held sacred within all the new life. The “maybes” we heard in our story this morning, offered to an innocent child at the start of life, that I hope we can each relate to: “Maybe you will help others to see the beauty in each day... Maybe you are here to shine a light into places that have been dark for far too long... Maybe, just maybe, the world has been waiting for centuries for someone exactly like you.”⁴ We imagine these potentials with new infants, with small shoots peeking through the hard, brown-black earth. What will they become? How can we impart upon them all the hope we may have lost within ourselves? And yet let the warm air and vibrant petals of spring and summer remind us that potential never ends, but cycles through. Perhaps you will find new love, or foster new beauty or create new life, perhaps you will heal, and wounds will turn to scars. Perhaps. Maybe. Remember, you hold infinite potential within.

In this unending cycle these “maybes” of new life follow the “maybes” of death, as spring follows winter. Those possibilities of death and dormancy: Perhaps we are held in another realm of unending love, or perhaps we simply return to the earth and all that is, held alive simply in memories. Even though I had begun a spiritual practice of preparing for death, death still terrified me. I think it was the unknown. It was a of a cycle I had not yet completed, or even neared. And yet I remember the first metaphor that likened this great unknown to something familiar and calming – the cycle of day and night. An elder reflected with me on the joy of an early morning, arising with the sun with great excitement to begin the day. She wondered with me of the late evening, when we are fulfilled, satisfied, tired, and ready to return to sleep. Birth and death as sunrise and sunset. Death, winter, sorrow, darkness, night – a time of sleep, of

⁴ *Maybe* by Kobi Yamada

rest, of introspection, of cultivating wisdom. That which we in this moment are emerging from. A sacred time that allows for its opposite- life, joy, summer, light, and day. Colors, fragrance, pansies, and bumblebees.

So let us pause with a reflection on hope and love and joy. Dependable cycles bring hope. Each spring provides each winter with the promise that life will, again, begin anew. Budding flowers serve as a reminder that death is not eternal as our loved ones reemerge as willow trees and rhododendrons. Green shoots peeking through the earth can serve to remind us that sorrow is not eternal, either, as beauty reemerges. I see love as great-grandchildren are held within the arms great-grandparents – wisdom holding hope in cherished embrace, the arms of the one about to enter a time of quiet and peaceful sleep grasping the start of a brand-new day – the beginning and end. Or the joy of what might be. I have framed in my dining room a beloved black-and-white picture from decades ago of me holding my cherished younger sister in my arms – a picture of two young girls filled with excitement and potential. I can look at my young self and ponder “Maybe [she] will help others to see the beauty in each day.”⁵ With that daily reminder grasped in one tangible moment of time, I can continue to work to make it so. And when I am met with my own sufferings, I offer the reflection, “Maybe I can survive this, too.” And in this hope and joy and love I see beloveds in all seasons of life, basking in the unique gifts they are each offered. Ordinary blessings, abundant beauty.

Let us end with the question we began with: Why do we exist? In basic terms, we exist simply to be. To rejoice in whatever ordinary delights we happen to be surrounded by, and to engage fully in whatever stage of life we are in, celebrating cycles in perpetuity. We are meant to find the genuine beauty inherent in simply being, cultivating within us generosity, compassion, pure joy and true authenticity. And we are meant to share this beauty with others – as a pansy feeds hummingbirds and bumblebees alike. So may we be. May we be beautiful. And may we share this in abundance.

⁵ *Maybe* by Kobi Yamada

May it be so, and amen.