

UNITARIAN FELLOWSHIP OF PETERBOROUGH

JUNE'S THEME: A COMMUNITY OF BLESSING

FLOWERING FROM WITHIN...OF SELF BLESSING

THE REV. JULIE STONEBERG

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OPENING WORDS *Flower Communion (adapted) ~ Elizabeth Strong*

Enter into this communion of friends...into the communion of flowers.

Enter with joyful hearts.

Enter with reverent thoughts.

It has taken long months beneath
cold ground for the flowers we share today
to prepare their blooming.

It has taken each of us long times
of growth through sorrow and joy
to prepare for our living now.

The blooming season is short,
The flowers stay only a brief time.

We are travelers upon the earth:
travelers through all-too-brief life times.

Therefore let our moments be bountiful.

Let us rejoice in our unique colors, aromas, and sounds.

Let us celebrate together in love;
that when we leave this place, we take with us
the memory of golden time together
among the flowers.

Let us celebrate together in love.

NEW MEMBER WELCOME

We are joyfully welcoming into membership today: Jess Grover, Sharon Harrison, Judy Jordan, Mary McCall and Julia Wallace

READING *Saint Francis and the Sow ~ Galway Kinnell*

The bud
stands for all things,
even for those things that don't flower,
for everything flowers, from within, of self-blessing;
though sometimes it is necessary
to reteach a thing its loveliness,

to put a hand on its brow
of the flower
and retell it in words and in touch
it is lovely
until it flowers again from within, of self-blessing;
as Saint Francis
put his hand on the creased forehead
of the sow, and told her in words and in touch
blessings of earth on the sow, and the sow
began remembering all down her thick length,
from the earthen snout all the way
through the fodder and slops to the spiritual curl of the tail,
from the hard spininess spiked out from the spine
down through the great broken heart
to the sheer blue milken dreaminess spurting and shuddering
from the fourteen teats into the fourteen mouths sucking and blowing beneath
them:
the long, perfect loveliness of sow.

REFLECTION *Flowering From Within* ~ Rev. Julie Stoneberg

I want to speak briefly this morning of self-blessing. I've used three wise sources to compose my remarks...the poem that Paul read just a few moments ago, a 'dharma talk' by Tara Brach¹ also inspired by that poem, and a chapter about judgment in Rachel Naomi Remen's book, *Kitchen Table Wisdom*².

Remen and Brach tell of something quite remarkable. They both say that plant spores found in mummies, thousands of years old, have unfolded into plants when once again given the opportunity of nurture. I don't know if this is true, as I couldn't find, by way of google search, any scientific evidence. But no matter. I still love the idea of it, and think the image serves us well.

Just think of it...a hard little seed, or nut, tucked away in some dark place, just waiting for sunlight and water. Some life force, enduring endlessly. Just waiting...holding the possibility that one day, if given the chance, it will bloom.

And then imagine that such a hard place exists within you...a hard place formed by disapproval and judgment, by disappointment and failure, by unmet expectations and criticism, and by the resulting buildup of shame. Do you recognize this hard place? Are

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhYpvWXz80k>

² *Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories that Heal*, By Rachel Naomi Remen

you aware of such a place deep within you? In an effort to survive, we have tucked bits of ourselves away, and perhaps even forgotten those parts exist. We have locked in a sense of 'not-rightness'... a paralyzing combination of not fitting in...or not belonging...that lack of approval we feel from outside, AND our own self-criticism. We even criticize ourselves for being self-critical, right?

Everything flowers from within, says Kinnell in his poem. Everything flowers of self-blessing. From within. Which implies that we have to go within and shed light on those waiting spores. In order for them to blossom, we need to give them the nourishment they need. It may be just as simple as that, although sometimes the simplest things are the most difficult.

Brach uses another metaphor. Imagine that you encounter a dog acting aggressively... growling and barking. And you judge the dog as bad and not to be trusted...until you notice that the dog's foot is caught in a trap. At that moment of noticing, your heart turns; you feel compassion, and you have understanding for why the dog is behaving the way that it is.

There are many ways that we ourselves are caught in traps...traps that are painful, that cause suffering. We have formed neuro-pathways in our brains that have become ruts of behaviour; we go back and forth, over and over doing that which doesn't serve us. We keep repeating learned self-messaging in which we continue to tell ourselves that we are not good enough...that we are not okay as we are...that we can't live up to what is expected...that there is something wrong with us.

And so we turn to what Brach calls a 'false refuge'...ways that we try to soothe ourselves. Over-working, over-eating, over-medicating...too much stimulation, too much screen time, too many diversions. The way to healing is not to see these behaviours as more fuel for our self-judgment fires, but rather to see them with compassion, as understandable responses to the pain and disconnection we feel. When we can see that we are caught in traps of suffering, our hearts can turn toward compassion for ourselves, and can begin to feel the warmth of self-acceptance.

Those traps, Brach says, are the gateway, the place where we need to deepen awareness. Rather than continuing to hide what we perceive to be our brokenness, we instead can turn to these places with gentleness and curiosity, with a mind on freeing ourselves from the pain the traps cause.

Now, unlocking a trap, which might well be rusty and jammed, takes careful attention and the strength to pry it open. Perhaps this is an extreme version of ripping the band-

aid off...it hurts, but then it gets better. It might feel worse at first...to name and recognize our hurt...but there's something in that process in which healing can begin.

The beginning of self-blessing is the ability and the willingness to see the larger picture...to accept ourselves and our behaviours as cause and effect...and simply part of being human and being alive. It is not wrong to have tried to protect ourselves, nor is it wrong to want to be loved. We can take all of this out...this longing...and examine it, and see that our wholeness contains both fear and courage, both generosity and selfishness, both vulnerability and strength. We have within us a full range of responses to the complexity of life. It just is. It's all part of being who we are. And, letting go of feeling 'wrong' is what frees us to blossom.

I believe that this is the saving message in our first principle. It tells us that each person has inherent worth and dignity...within. Worth is not subject to approval or lack of approval...to acceptance or lack of acceptance...our worthiness is a given. Who we are is just right, and needs no further justification. And this worthiness is for every one of us...it's not reserved for a select few. This is what being Universalist is all about.

Now, this doesn't mean that everything we DO is right, or that we act perfectly in all situations. There will always be things for us to work on, to improve, to learn. But it does mean that we can accept that our most basic reality is goodness, and radiance, and love.

I believe that this is the messaging that some, perhaps some of you, find in a relationship with Jesus or with a personal god. They find a voice that consistently tells them that they are loved, and valued, and protected. No matter what, there is someone they can turn to who will accept them unconditionally.

That voice, those messages, are also available to those of us without such a relationship. I believe that voice of reassurance is actually always and already present within us, and that we can choose to hear it and to believe it. That hard spore will flower. That trap will unclamp. We have the ability to tenderly turn our compassion, and our warmth and our light toward ourselves, and toward each other, in order to bring out the beauty and the wholeness that resides there...so that we each might blossom...from within...of self-blessing. So be it.

FLOWER COMMUNION BLESSING

Take the flower you have chosen and hold it in front of you. See its many parts. Offer it a word of thanks for what it is, just as it is. For just like you, these flowers are gifts of countless value. Just like you, these flowers hold the seeds of infinite possibility. Just

like you, the flower that you hold belongs, deeply and truly, in the community of all that is. Blessed are you. Blessed is this community.

***CLOSING** *Body Blessing*³ *inspired by Lisa Bovee-Kemper*

I invite you to participate in an act of self-blessing. If you're comfortable doing so, I'll ask you to use your flower to bless yourself.

[first, touch the flower to your own forehead, if it feels natural] May you be blessed with wisdom, knowledge and understanding. May your curiosity take you far on your journey. You have been blessed with reason; may you use this gift every day.

[throat] May you be blessed with voice. May you learn the complex nature of truth-telling and the ability to speak the truth in love. Every day, seek the joy that comes with sharing your truth compassionately, as well as listening to others.

[heart] May your heart be full and blessed with love. Your heart is a strong and resilient organ, one that can bear heartbreak as well as the bursting forth of joy. May you heed the wisdom of your heart, especially when it tells you that you are worthy.

[abdomen] You are blessed with the gift of sexuality. May you always remember that you are a beloved child of the universe...that your body is sacred and belongs to you alone. This gift comes with great responsibility. May it also bring you many blessings.

[hands] When you were a baby, your tiny hands were your first contact with the world. May your hands be gentle and strong. May you use them to carry light into the darkness and rest to the weary.

[wrap arms around whole body] May you always remember that you are a whole person, that each of these parts work together. May blessings be upon you...body, mind and spirit. And as you journey, may you always remember that you are not alone.

[gently touch your flower to one or more your neighbours and offer them a silent blessing] May we all remember that we are goodness, and radiance, and love. May we be blessed in all things and carry blessings with us wherever we go.

So be it. Amen.

EXTINGUISHING THE FLAME

³ <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/blessing/body-blessing>