

**BLOSSOMING INTO THE FUTURE: ANNUAL FLOWER SUNDAY**

THE UNITARIAN FELLOWSHIP OF PETERBOROUGH

REV. JULIE STONEBERG

JUNE 9, 2019

**OPENING WORDS**     *Flower Communion*

~ Lynn Ungar

What a gathering – the purple  
tongues of iris licking out  
at spikes of lupine, the orange  
crepe skirts of poppies lifting  
over buttercup and daisy.

Who can be grim  
in the face of such abundance?  
There is nothing to compare,  
no need for beauty to compete.

The voluptuous rhododendron  
and the plain grass  
are equally filled with themselves,  
equally declare the miracles  
of color and form.

This is what community looks like –  
this vibrant jostle, stem by stem  
declaring the marvelous joining.  
This is the face of communion,  
the incarnation once more  
gracefully resurrected from winter.

Hold these things together  
in your sight – purple, crimson,  
magenta, blue. You will  
be feasting on this long after  
the flowers are gone.

Let us enter this time of feasting on beauty, together.

**STORY FOR ALL**     *The Curious Garden*     ~ Peter Brown

*(A young boy living in a dreary grey city, discovers a few wildflowers along an abandoned railway, and nurtures them into a garden that eventually greens the whole city!)*

**READING**     *Garden Prayer*     ~ David M. Horst

Early in the morning, before the children are awake and while the grass is still dewy, I

like to walk in my garden. It's "my" garden only because it shares the same small plot of land my family and I inhabit. The garden does not really belong to me; I belong to it – at least for the short time I'm here. Today I'm still in my slippers and have my first cup of coffee in hand.

Much of what grows had been planted two or three homeowners ago, some I've planted since our arrival; but, if they belong to anyone or anything, the plants and flowering trees I come to see and smell – viburnum, dogwood, magnolia, and crab apple – belong to the sun and rain and soil. These living things are a beauty not of my making, though surely made of my desire.

At the moment, the rose bushes are in full burst of red and perfume. The hydrangeas are sure to open their mopy heads as soon as the sun falls upon them. The weedy looking globe thistles are turning lovely blue and spiky. The foxglove, however, rules the garden. Its central stalk is five-feet high and heavy with pink, scoop-shaped blossoms with charming freckles inside. I am awed by the abundance.

I'd intended to walk the garden simply to observe and wonder. Ah, but there's a weed that must be pulled, a stray stem the needs to be pruned, a blossom drooping and fading that should be snipped. So I set down my coffee cup on the back porch, grab a small pail, and go to work. I end up with muddy hands, wet slippers, and a pail full of weeds and trimmings. Why can't I simply observe and wonder? Won't the beauty of my small garden world survive without me?

I step back to the porch to retrieve my coffee, now cold, stamp the dew off my slippers, and take one look back at the garden before I return into the house. The garden is no more beautiful now than when I first arrived. My weed pulling, pruning, and snipping haven't really improved the garden nor made that much of a difference as far as I know.

It's like prayer: The words I speak don't really change anything, but I know they change me.

**REFLECTION**    *Blossoming into the Future*        ~ Rev. Julie Stoneberg

Look at this bouquet. Like each of you, the individual blossoms have untold worth. Really, look at this bouquet. Squint your eyes, take the long view. Instead of seeing the individual flowers, see the collection. Behold the beauty.

Imagine going out into the natural world. Go out into that infinite collection of individual blooms and sproutings, individual stems and shoots. Especially at this time of year, the prolificity is wondrous. How did all of this abundance come into being, especially after all the ice and snow and cold of this past winter? Who made this colour of green? When did the light become so glorious? Imagine the beauty of the world in the spring.

Imagine the beauty. There is something so compelling about immersing ourselves in beauty. Surrounding ourselves with beautiful objects. Standing before beautiful landscapes. Tending to beautiful gardens. For me, beauty's function (as if it needs a function) is pretty simple. Beauty feeds me. I am drawn to it. Beauty is nourishing and calming and peace-inducing and joy-producing.

Beauty instills in me a feeling of belonging. In the presence of the beautiful, my boundaries soften and I become a part of it, allowing me for a time to let go of self-judging separateness. I become both more mindful and less time conscious. And the fleeting quality of beauty deepens my gratitude and loosens my hold on the permanent. So, beauty is a leveling agent, which simultaneously raises me to a 'higher' level.

Like the man in his garden, we don't need to spend time in beauty in order to control it or to change it, or even to add to it. Rather we need beauty for what it offers to our core beings...a sense of rightness with the world, a feeling that we belong with the beauty of all that is, the knowledge that our brief existence has meaning.

"It's like a prayer," said David Horst about his garden. "The words I speak [the actions I take] don't really change anything, but I know they change me."

Now, I know that this is a very different message than the one told in our story today...that of a young gardener affecting change in a whole city by tending to one garden. That story is a good lesson about how what we do matters, and yet the truth is, it is rare for any of us to realize that kind of effect, no matter how much we pour ourselves into the task. It can seem our efforts have no meaning.

It is said that a reporter once asked the Christian pacifist A. J. Muste (*MUS-tee*) this question: "Do you really think you are going to change the policies of this country by standing...in front of the White House with a candle?" To which the activist replied softly: "Oh I don't do this to change the country. I do this so the country won't change me."<sup>1</sup>

A similar story is told about the famed Vietnam war protestor Abbie Hoffman. When a bystander asked him on the picket line, "Do you think you can change the world?" he answered, "No, but I'm [being] damn sure it can't change me!"<sup>2</sup>

I love these stories for the passionate conviction of these men...their insistence on speaking out against war and violence, apparently without having faith that their actions could affect change. Instead, it seems they were intent on simply being able to stand firm in what they believed, while releasing their hold on the outcome. Their main goal, it seems, was to stay true to themselves.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/practices/naming-the-days/view/16580/a-j-muste-day>

<sup>2</sup> Willis, Gary, *Certain Trumpets: The Nature of Leadership* (Google Books, p. 263)

Now, I tend to flipflop between finding gardening metaphors to be drenched in wisdom and feeling they're dripping with kitsch. And yet...and yet...I believe flowers have much to teach us. About blooming where we're planted. About stretching toward the light. About needing space and nutrients in order to flourish. About coming into being, and then passing away. Flowers have loveliness to tell. For sure.

Look at this bouquet.

Loveliness. Beauty. Flowers, like us, exist within the interconnected web of all existence of which we are a part. Flowers, like us, grow out of a nothingness, come into bloom, have gifts to offer, and eventually die... returning to the great all. Flowers, like us, might live long and prosper, but they might also be interrupted, or damaged, or overlooked. They are a testament to the reality that what is, is.

But still, they instruct us, if at all possible, blossom.

Blossom. If at all possible, blossom. As best you can, blossom. I know it's too simplistic to explain this way, but in order to produce seed for the future, a plant has to blossom. The bloom is what makes the seed. So the blossoming...however brilliant, however brief...matters. The blossoming...with or without public acclaim, without or without curation or critique...matters. To live our lives true to the distinctive blossom that we are, matters. That blossom ensures that what we offer will enter into the stream of all that is, seeding, and re-seeding, into the future.

Look at this bouquet. Your blossoming matters. You bring to this world and to this congregation a new evolution of the seeds that were planted in you. This bouquet would not be possible without your bloom. The beauty of your blossom is magnified by the beauty of the other blooms existing alongside you, blooms that also matter. And, the beauty of this bouquet, created today by all of you, is deepened by the reality that it will only exist in this one moment. There will be other bouquets, but never again one quite like this!

As I reflected on what to say this morning, Dawna Markova's poem, *I Will Not Die an Unlived Life*,<sup>3</sup> kept coming to mind. It ends with these lines:

I choose to risk my significance;  
to live so that which came to me as seed  
goes to the next as blossom  
and that which came to me as blossom,  
goes on as fruit.

I choose to risk my significance...so that, what? Markova is saying, it seems, that when we choose to risk our significance, we then have some significance. If I choose to let go of the seed that I carry so that it will blossom in its own way, if I choose to allow my blossoms to become fruit, and if I let my fruit turn to seed, then I will not die an unlived life. I choose to risk my significance...as a flower, as a fruit, as a seed...by being true to what I am and then letting go...passing it on.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=552>

Hold onto who you are and what matters to you. It is the essence of your beauty. But also remember that none of us were meant to survive.<sup>4</sup> We are the product of seeds planted before us, we contribute to the beauty of all that is, and then we give our seeds to future generations.

You are a unique manifestation of humanity. You are a blossom unlike any other. Your blossom is an important part of the bouquet of life. Blossom, my dear friends, and bask in your beauty. Know that your blossoming means that seeds are being sown. Your blossoms of love and justice, stewardship and reconciliation, creativity and connection, are producing seeds untold...seeds that are already creating the future.

This is the way of things. We come from beauty. Together, a beauty possible only because of our diverse blooms, is created. And to beauty we will return.

So be it.

**BLESSING**     *No Hothouse Flowers*     ~ Lisa Doege

Take the flower you have chosen and hold it in front of you. Offer it a word of thanks for what it is, just as it is. For just like you, these flowers are gifts of beauty. 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. Hear the words of Lisa Doege:

No hot house flowers, these,  
bred for perfection,  
dyed and trimmed,  
and arranged to order,  
clothed in ribbons and bows.

Not these.

No, these are hardy, raw and wild.  
Grown under the sky, they've weathered  
the wind and the rain and the heat.

These drew nutrients from the neighborhood soil and energy from the sun.  
These survived pests and disease.  
These grow where they were planted  
by loving hands,  
or the whim of birds,  
or the caprice of the breeze.  
These have petals washed by dew,  
glowing with the colors of the hills,  
the sea,  
the prairies,

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<sup>4</sup> See Audre Lorde (#587 SLT) <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/147275/a-litany-for-survival>

and the rocks.

Their delicate perfume carries in it the fragrance of earth.

No, not perfect, these.

Only holy, a blessing to

the eye,

and heart,

and soul.

Blessed are you. Blessed is this community.

**\* CLOSING**

~ *Richard S. Gilbert (adapted excerpt)* <sup>5</sup>

[We need to hear what the flowers say...]

For the flowers do indeed have the gift of language:

They transport the human voice on winds of beauty;

They lift the melody of song to our ears;

They paint through the eye and hand of the artist;

Their fragrance binds us to sweet-smelling earth.

May the blessing of the flowers be upon you.

May their beauty beckon to you each morning

And their loveliness lure you each day,

And their tenderness caress you each night.

May their delicate petals make you gentle,

And their eyes make you aware.

May their stems make you sturdy,

And their reaching make you care.

May you move always in beauty. Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/27759.shtml>