

Bringing Life into Bloom:

All-Ages Worship Service

Rev. Roger Jones
Flower Communion Sunday
Unitarian Universalist Society
June 2, 2013

Hymns:

#38, Morning Has Broken; #2, The Sweet June
Days; #175 We Celebrate the Web of Life

Service Included:

Religious Education Volunteer Appreciation

Minister's Homily

Flower Communion (Flower Exchange Ritual)

Grasshopper Grounds-keeping Volunteers'
10 Year Anniversary Celebration

Pastoral Prayer

Homily

Writing in his journal in 1859, Henry David Thoreau says that "the mystery of the life of plants" is like the mystery of our own human lives. He cautions the scientist against trying to explain their growth "according to mechanical laws" or the way engineers might explain the machines that they make. There is a magic ingredient, to go along with air and sun, earth, water and nutrients. There is one part miracle to every living thing, he says. The force of life. A force we can feel and recognize, but cannot create or control.

For my birthday I received a planter from our Religious Education staff person, Miranda. To ensure its longevity I left it in her office, and it has flourished. But when she departed for two months in Ghana, a post-it note appeared on the planter: *Roger, remember to water me.*

I am not reliable around green things. I have nearly killed off a cactus—a small one I got last Christmas. I remember when I was little, in school, planting seeds in Dixie cups with dirt an inch deep. Watching the sprouts, helping them along; it was fun. Then, a few years later, a friend of the family

helped me plant a garden in the back yard: green beans, tomatoes, onions. Delicious, for one or two summers.

But my horticultural karma was all downhill from there. In high school I mowed grass for a few neighbors and friends of my mom. One family had a large yard around their large house. They asked me to pull or cut out the weeds growing close to the house. This was before the days of the weed-whacker, which would have been fun to use. Using my bare hands—not fun. So I drizzled gasoline on the weeds near the outside walls, all the way around. Killed all their weeds. Filled the house with fumes, I found out later.

To the good fortune of the plant kingdom, in my adult life I've never had a yard or a garden, nearly always lived in an apartment. Here in the church's community garden, which we call UURTHSONG, a few summers ago at lunchtime I helped myself to a few meals of tomatoes and chard, but I haven't dared to plant a garden plot.

I know many of you garden, with lovely flowers and gorgeous vegetables. You have citrus and plum and fig trees and so many other kinds. Some of you are Master Gardeners. Some of you sell plants for a living, or you work in landscaping and grounds-keeping.

Some of you volunteer with plants, like our member Jerry, who spends many a weekday tending the flowerbeds and flowerpots here at the church. Some of you, like Nancy and Gail, give tours at the Effie Yeaw Nature Center on the American River Parkway, among other outdoor places. Annie and other USS Waterbugs tend our thirsty trees and bushes year after year.

As I noted, my experience with plants is questionable, so I can't be sure what it's like for people who put hour after hour into the lives of growing green things. But this is what it *might* be like. Planting, tending, watering, weeding, harvesting, transplanting... it involves a mix of your own physical power, and the patience to wait and see what happens. It calls for intention and effort, and then for *humility*.

One cannot bring plants into bloom, or force them to bear fruit. You have to learn enough to know when and where to plant them, how much water and fertilizer to give, how much to weed, when to prune or plow over, and of course you need to know what not to do.

You do your part, waiting, watching, tending. You wait on the force of life. You wait on a miracle, an everyday ordinary miracle. Seeing a vine crawl, blossoms yielding fruit, colors calling for bees and other pollinating insects. Miracles happen a lot. But we can't make them happen. We can't make life happen.

I wonder if this is a helpful way to think about our spirituality. There are new and modern resources for spiritual growth, and there are ancient practices. We can draw on all of them, of course.

Yet the main ingredient is paying attention. Watching ourselves, noticing reactions, sensations, desires. Observing the world around us—the plants, the people, the traffic, the sunlight. Gently tending to the needs around us.

Preparing ourselves.

Perhaps we can think of spiritual growth from the perspective of a faithful gardener. Not a prizewinning perfectionist whose work is on the cover of a magazine. There's nothing wrong with that, but I bet most of us aren't up to that much effort in spiritual practice (or in gardening).

I'm thinking of a gardener like a humble companion, a curious visitor. As a humble gardener tending our own growth, we remember to check in with ourselves, on a regular basis. We notice the world around us. We tend our gardens. We wait in humility, and we remember to practice patience. We don't worry about explaining too much, about figuring ourselves out, as if we were machines, predictable and controllable. We don't try to fix, only to encourage, nurture, water and feed.

We can't make plants grow, but we can help them, and watch the miracle happen. We can't force ourselves to grow spiritually—and we certainly can't make somebody else grow. But we can be present and attentive. Be intentional. Notice what might help, or ask. Practice a bit more patience.

Then, we can enjoy the results. We give thanks for what we are able to harvest, thanks for the results of our waiting and watching.

Give thanks for the ground of our being. And celebrate every ordinary miracle.

So may it be. Blessed be. Amen.

The Flower Communion

Speaking about enjoyment of the results of our work, the Unitarian Flower Communion is about sharing and enjoying flowers with others. Many of you brought fresh flowers and placed them up here in these vases. All of you will be invited to take a flower with you which someone else has given. Even if you didn't know to bring a flower today, we have plenty to go around. Don't be shy. Also called the Flower Celebration, this ritual was created 90 years ago in Prague, by a Czech minister and his wife, Norbert and Maja Capek. Born a Roman Catholic, he became a Baptist at age 18, and soon entered the ministry.

Norbert and the family came to the United States in 1914 and stayed for seven years. They joined the Unitarian church in Orange, New Jersey. In the 1920s the family returned home and built a Unitarian church in Prague. The church grew to have 3,000 members, and it helped other ones to start. Because Capek had many former Catholics, Protestants and Jews in this liberal movement, he wanted to create a ritual in which all members could participate without any reservations, in order to bind the members closer together in spirit and fellowship. They created the Flower Communion and began celebrating it every year on the first Sunday of June.

During the Nazi occupation, the Capek family became activists, and Norbert spoke out from the pulpit. In 1941, the Gestapo arrested Norbert and his daughter, Zora, who was 29. She was sentenced to a forced labor camp, and her father was executed in the Dachau concentration camp. After the war, Maja Capek moved to the United States, and she brought the Flower Communion with her. She introduced it at our church in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Today on the first Sunday in June, we will celebrate this ritual.

Grasshopper Groundskeepers Appreciation

Rev. Roger Jones, Sunday, June 2, 2013

[last names omitted for the online/printed version]

Once upon a time in the history of this congregation, there was a budget shortfall. Imagine that! It was 10 years ago. As members conversed in the congregational budget meeting, David and Clair conceived a plan. The church could avoid paying \$1,200 per month for lawn mowing and cleanup - if a volunteer group could answer the call to do the work.

These two began calling members and friends on the phone. They recruited five teams to be scheduled on a rotating basis, with four or five people on a team. This meant that each team would work less than once each month mowing and trimming.

Despite a few pitfalls, they persisted. Over the years, as many as 85 men and women have been part of these teams, keeping the campus tidy and saving the church lots of money. These happy and sweaty volunteers call themselves The Grasshoppers. In the early years, Carol made a logo for tee shirts.

Also involved back then... were Velma (of blessed memory), Aggie and Sally. Around the same time, Annie began the Waterbugs; these are the volunteers who water many of the plants on campus. In past years, the

Grasshoppers and Waterbugs have been thanked with dinners hosted by volunteers, or catered, or held as potlucks. Nancy wrote a Grasshopper song to the tune of the Davy Crockett theme song. We'll sing it after the service, out on the patio.

Please, everyone, join us after church for a slice of grasshopper cake. Don't worry--it's not made out of grasshoppers.

Now we honor those men and women who've been Grasshoppers for the full 10 years. These people were on the original teams, and they are still serving.

They are:

Jeff Dave Fred Pete Dick Clair

Delmar—He keeps the machinery operating.

John—He is the coordinator.

Sally— She is Scheduler in Chief.

After the service, you all can enjoy cake, look at our tractor, and give your thanks to our Grasshoppers. AND, yes, you CAN find out what it would mean to join a Grasshopper team or be a Waterbug. Maybe you'll even sign up.

I believe that our oldest Grasshoppers are nearly 90, and our youngest Grasshopper is nearly 60. So think about it. We invite you to be part of this ministry. It's a ministry of caring for our church grounds while making friends, building community and, of course... saving money, for important things, like dessert.

Blessed be.

Pastoral Prayer

Last names of living people are omitted for the online version of this but spoken aloud.

Please join me now for a time of contemplation in community. You are invited to settle your bodies in your chair, feel your feet on the floor. Relax your eyes, or close them if you wish. Notice your breathing. A few times in this prayer I will invite you to speak the names of people, places or events on your heart, whether you whisper them to yourself or call them out so others may hear what you say.

Spirit of Life and Love, we give thanks for the gift of life, and this new day.

In this new month, let us greet each day with curiosity and practice patience with ourselves and with others. The sweet June days have come to us in this region with hot sun and gentle breezes. In other places, powerful winds or heavy rains have devastated neighborhoods and taken many lives. To those grieving and struggling in the wake of disaster, we send our prayers of care. We give thanks to those tending their needs with food, shelter, medical care and monetary help.

Let us remember the fragility of life on this planet, which we share with our human kin and other forms of life. Help us tend our home with care. We send prayers for peace around the globe, and out into our own cities and neighborhoods.

In this congregation, we extend our condolences to those living with loss. In early May, Delmar and Joan lost their son Scott, at age 49. He used to help his father maintain

our mowing equipment. We give thanks for him and hold his family in our care.

At this time we may have other names on our hearts of those we have lost recently and those lost some time ago. Now into the space of our sanctuary, let us call out the names of those we mourn and remember. [Names spoken aloud.]

May their memory be a blessing.

We lift up those dealing with financial or health problems, chronic pain, loneliness, or uncertainty about the road ahead. There are people on our hearts who need good wishes, prayers, or gestures of care. Ruth is frail and receiving care at home. We send our love to Ruth. At this time we say the names of others we know, whether whispering to ourselves or speaking their names and needs aloud in the space of our sanctuary. [Names.]

May they feel encouraged in their struggles. May we find the courage to reach out and the grace to give the simple gift of listening.

We recognize, also, that life has its joyful milestones. Many of the younger people in our lives are celebrating commencements at all kinds of schools and at various levels. Let us mention aloud those who are graduating at this time. [Names.]

As our voices rise with joy, let us also remember those young people who struggle with school, those who face high barriers to achievement, those who are beset with addictions or other dangers to their well-being. May they find encouragement and healing. Let them all know: they are loved and worthy of love.

Others among us may be recognizing different celebrations and reasons for gratitude. Let us speak the names or events that give us good cheer into the space of our sanctuary at this time. [Names.] May another's good news give to all of us cause for joy.

Spirit of Life and of Love, give us hearts full of gratitude, kindness and courage for the living of our days.

In the name of all that is holy and all that is human, blessed be. Amen