

# "BYOG: Flower Communion" June 10, 2012 Reverend Alison Hyder et al

## Invocation: by Alexander Meek, Jr.

This gathering process is a miracle to behold!  
Blades of grass become a magnificent prairie!  
Flowers become beautiful gardens!  
And we human beings gather together and by our togetherness  
become a beloved human community!  
The gathering process is a miracle to behold!

## **READING: from *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker**

Here's the thing, say Shug. The thing I believe. God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it. And sometimes it just manifest itself even if you not looking, or don't know what you looking for...

It? I ast.

Yeah, It. God ain't a he or a she, but a it.

But what do it look like? I ast.

Don't look like nothing, she say. It ain't a picture show. It ain't something you can look at apart from anything else, including yourself. I believe God is everything, say Shug. Everything that is or ever was or ever will be. And when you can feel that, and be happy to feel that, you've found it...

She say, My first step...was trees. Then air. Then birds. The other people. But one day, when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child, which I was, it came to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all. I know that if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed. And I laughed and I cried and I run all around the house. I just knew what it was. In fact, when it happen, you can't miss it.

God love everything you love...and a mess of stuff you don't. But more than anything else, God love admiration...I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field and don't notice it.

People think pleasing God is all God care about. But any fool living can see it always trying to please us back...It always making little surprises and springing them on us just when we least expect.

## **Flower Communion Part 1 - Alison Hyder**

I'd like to invite you each to take a few minutes in silence to contemplate your flowers and see what you might learn from them. How does the color make you feel? How do the petals connect to the stem? What are the leaves like? Do you see anything new, some detail you've never noticed before? What is this different life-form saying to you? Take your time.

Now I invite all the children to come up front here with your flowers. Tell me about your flower? What do you like about it? Is it soft? Does your flower have a nice smell? Not all do, you know. Do you think, maybe, that it has something to teach you? What? Today, these flowers are helping us to learn a really good lesson, and to celebrate our Unitarian Universalist values. Miss Catherine is going to help us understand it.

## **Catherine:**

What is a ritual? Rituals are certain things we always do, usually at the same time. For example, what is something you do every night before you go to bed? These are personal or family rituals. What rituals do we have at church? Chalice Lighting. Saying the Unison Affirmation. Being sung to our classes.

Child Dedications. These are religious rituals. Family rituals bring a family together. Religious rituals bring all of the people in the congregation together.

In 1923 in Prague, Czechoslovakia Rev. Norbert Čapek knew he needed to find a way to bring all the people in his congregation together. This church was the very first Unitarian church in Czechoslovakia. Because it was the very first Unitarian church in Czechoslovakia, none of the people in the congregation had been raised Unitarian. Instead, all of the people of the church came from Protestant, Catholic and Jewish backgrounds.

Rev. Čapek needed a religious ritual which would demonstrate to the congregants that even though they were different, together they all made one church. Then, one day, as Rev. Čapek went for a stroll he noticed a field of flowers. There were many kinds of flowers, and it was a beautiful sight. This gave Rev. Čapek a wonderful idea! He asked all the members of his church to bring a flower with them to church. It could be any type of flower they wanted. Then, during the worship service, everyone came forward and placed their different flowers into a vase. Can each of you place your unique flower in the vase?

Each flower was different, unique and special. Placed in the vase, the individual flowers each contributed to the beauty of one bouquet. Just like each person in the congregation contributes their talents and gifts to make one beautiful church. During the worship service, Rev. Čapek blessed the flowers. Then, at the end of the service, each person was asked to take one flower, different from the one they brought, home with them. This flower represents that we are all brother and sisters on a spiritual journey together.

This religious ritual became very important to Norbert Ape's church. Eventually Maja Čapek, Norbert's wife, brought the ritual to Unitarians in the United States. And now it is an important ritual for Unitarian Universalists all over the world, and in this church.

So now we invite everyone else to bring their flowers up and place them in one of these vases. We'll start with the first rows through the middle aisle, and going back in from the sides in a circle, row by row. You can bring your kids back with you as you go. Thank you.

### Reading David Whyte "Self-Portrait"

It doesn't interest me if there is one God or many gods  
I want to know if you belong or feel  
abandoned.  
If you know despair or can see it in others.  
I want to know  
if you are prepared to live in the world  
with its harsh need  
to change you. If you can look back  
with firm eyes  
saying this is where I stand. I want to know  
if you know  
how to melt into that fierce heat of living  
falling toward  
the center of your longing. I want to know  
if you are willing  
to live, day by day, with the consequence of love  
and the bitter  
unwanted passion of your sure defeat.

I have been told, in *that* fierce embrace, even  
The gods speak of God.

## Homily: Bring Your Own God - Rev. Alison Hyder

Unitarian Universalists have long had a history of welcoming the outsider, people who do not fit into the easy molds of society: people whose beliefs are unorthodox, who ask too many questions, people whose love is frowned upon, even illegal. At times we have been persecuted for our convictions, and almost always derided. Garrison Keillor pokes regular, friendly fun of us on *A Prairie Home Companion*. We even make fun of ourselves.

UUs may not always look different, but underneath, we are a mass of complexity and contradiction. For we do not have a creed to unify us and tell us what to believe. There is no test of faith for membership as a Unitarian Universalist. And so our concepts of God and death and spirituality vary widely - sometimes within the same human being. Every single one of us has to struggle with our own experiences and convictions to discern the truth that will guide our lives. We find inspiration from each other, of course, and from the great traditions of world religions. But ultimately, no one can make meaning for us. There is no authority stronger or more true than the wisdom of our hearts.

We come from different traditions. Some were raised Catholic, others Baptist. We are AME, Jewish, Atheist, Pagan. Bring Your Own God. Allah is welcome here, Oshun, and Jesus. Perhaps you find God in the color purple, a church or a chant. Here we are united by the force of our love and the sacred web of existence that connects us into one life. We recognize the spark of divinity in all living things. And we love it. Who is the God that *you* believe in? And even more importantly, who is the God that you reject? Maybe they're the same thing. Many of us have to lose our God - indeed, have to fight our God - in order to find God again. Our God is too small, our notions of who God is and what God wants are too limiting.

A lot of us were taught about God when we were children. Maybe he was used to keep us in line. Or he (always he) was a sort of magical fairy-tale figure. But then we outgrow him. Our own beliefs turn against us. We feel guilty or depressed, maybe even angry. We want to believe in something bigger, more accepting, but don't know how. We would rather deny ourselves, deny our own needs, than abandon our beliefs. We do not trust the darkness underneath the surface. We do not trust ourselves. We do not want a new name. We are afraid of that power, afraid of the God of renewal, the God within our hearts, our troubled and imperfect hearts. We would rather kill this possibility a-borning than risk change. We don't want to know who we could be - who we really are. What if we discover an anger at God that is so deep that we're afraid it will burn us up? What if we lose our beliefs altogether?

Maybe you don't believe in God because you were given a God who doesn't believe in you, who condemns your best and most loving self, who judges you for your inadequacies, who encourages you to be a victim: a God who makes you fearful, who cuts you off from your creativity. This is not God. This is some false little human idol of fear, masquerading as God. Tear off the mask and kick it out.

Alice Walker wrote,

*It is fatal to love a God who does not love you. A God specifically created to comfort, lead, advise, strengthen, and enlarge the tribal borders of someone else. We have been beggars at the table of a religion that sanctioned our destruction. Our own religions denied, forgotten: our own ancestral connections to All Creation something of which we are ashamed. I maintain that we are empty, lonely, without our pagan-heathen ancestors...*

*All people deserve to worship a God who also worships them. A God that made them, and likes them.... Everyone deserves a God who adores our freedom:*

*... And what is the result of decolonizing the spirit? It is as if one truly does possess a third eye, and this eye opens. One begins to see the world from one's own point of view; to interact with it out of one's own conscience and heart. ... We begin to flow, again, with and into the Universe. And out of this comes the natural activism of wanting to survive, to be happy, to enjoy one another and Life, and to laugh. We begin to distinguish between the need, singly, to throw rocks at whatever is oppressing us, and the creative joy that arises when we bring our collective stones of resistance against injustice together. We begin to see that we must be loved very*

*much by whatever Creation is, to find ourselves on this wonderful Earth. We begin to recognize our sweet, generously appointed place in the makeup of the Cosmos. We begin to feel glad, and grateful to be here.*

Find a God who lets you breathe free. No other God will do.

There is room for us to experiment, to find the God that taps into the deepest, richest part of ourselves and continually asks: *Who are you? What makes you happy? What inspires you with awe, with reverence? What makes you feel most deeply connected to other living beings? What inspires you to serve others? How does your creativity create energy and joy in your life?*

Theologian Mary Daly asks, "Why indeed must God be a noun? Why not a *verb* - the most active and dynamic of all? Hasn't the naming of 'God' as a noun been an act of murdering that dynamic verb? The anthropomorphic symbols for God may be intended to convey personality, but they fail to convey that God is *Be-ing*."

God is being, and becoming. And we are becoming and being with God, in an eternal dance of life.

Whether you find God in the cry of a plover, or in the stillness of prayer, in a baby's tumbling steps or the smell of baking bread - even if you reject the term God altogether as completely un-useful - we are all, together, every day, creating the world. Each one of us has one piece of the puzzle, important and integral to the whole. Bring Your Own God. Together we add to the sum of life. Let us know it, and celebrate it. Celebrate each other. Here and now. That is the only tribute God really wants. That is all we need to know.

## **Flower Communion Part 2:**

Today, we demonstrate and express our divinity through our annual flower communion. This ritual is unique to Unitarian Universalism and it celebrates the beauty and importance of diversity in all its many forms. Let me tell you the story:

The flower communion was created in 1923 by Norbert and Maja Čapek, who founded the Unitarian Church of Czechoslovakia. The Čapeks' church in Prague was in crisis. Europe had never fully recovered from World War I. The forces of hate and despair were seeping throughout the continent. The Čapeks wanted a service that would bind together people from many different religious traditions, and alienate none. So they turned to the beauty of the local countryside for the essence of a festival that would be genuine and meaningful to everyone.

A Communion is an act of sharing. For religious communities, sharing is sacramental, as ordinary objects take on something of the universal mystery and grace. The flowers we have brought here today - from our gardens, clipped from bushes or picked by the side of the road, or bought and paid for - remind us that together we make a beautiful bouquet, each of us different and all of us adding something important, something authentic and fine. None of us exist alone. We have been nurtured by unseen hands, and our strengths and needs vary. Some of us are locals, and some transplants, blown here on a summer wind, but we are all of the earth, growing out of the soil, and it is back to the earth we will return.

Each of us has a gift to offer. By exchanging flowers with each other, we remember that we come together freely. We walk together in our search for truth, willingly disregarding all that might divide us, but instead ready to learn and grow from our differences. When we take home a flower brought by someone else, we celebrate the contributions we all make as members of a religious community.

In the 1940s, while Maja Čapek was lecturing in the United States, Norbert Čapek was imprisoned by the Nazis. Like all of those who advocate religious freedom and tolerance, he was a danger to authority. Čapek was executed in the Dachau concentration camp in 1942. But like all whose love made them truly great, like all of those whose memory we hold dear, Norbert Čapek's legacy lives on in us. Dr. Maja Čapek returned to Czechoslovakia after the war to help the church and the victims of war, and later helped displaced people in Egypt and Palestine. During her retirement, she continued to speak throughout the United States and Europe, gathering support for Czech Unitarians, now living under communism. And she made the flower festival a gift to Unitarians everywhere. Now Unitarian Universalists across the world celebrate the flower communion as an act of hope, and justice, and love.

We each have a lot to learn, from each other and from the earth. How to find sustenance from roots held fast to one place. The importance of balance, of sun and rain and the dark meditative rest of winter. How everything and everyone carries their own particular beauty with them all the time. About modesty and bold, profligate radiance. The mystery of the struggle up into the light, the simplicity of death. Our need to harmonize with the interdependent web of all life that supports and sustains our existence. The sacrifice of love.

The world bestows its gifts upon us. May we keep our eyes and noses and hearts open in grateful wonder.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all of you at First Unitarian Church for allowing me to serve among you and for being such a friendly, affirming, and inspiring congregation.

I've really enjoyed being here this year. So I will take one flower for myself, and another in honor of all the people whose gifts have added to the life of First Unitarian Church and our great religious movement.

As you leave today, I invite each of you To take a flower from one of the vases - a different flower from the one you brought - a gift shared in community. We take these blossoms, just as they come, to symbolize our acceptance of one another - each as varied, and imperfect, and beautiful as these flowers.

**Prayer written by Reverend Norbert Capek for the first Flower Festival:**

*Infinite Spirit of Life, we ask your blessing on these [flowers], your messengers of fellowship and love. May they remind us, amidst diversities of knowledge and gifts, to be one in desire and affection, and devotion to good and beauty. May they also remind us of the value of comradeship, of doing and sharing alike in community with others. May we cherish friendship as one of your most precious gifts. May we not let awareness of another's talents discourage us, or sully our relationship, but may we realize that whatever we can do, great or small, the efforts of all of us are needed to do your work in the world. Let us renew our resolve sincerely to walk together as brothers and sisters, regardless of those barriers that would separate us from one another. In this holy resolve may we be strengthened, knowing that we are one family; that there is one spirit, which unites us all. May this spirit guide us in ways of truth, and wisdom, and love. Amen.*

**CLOSING WORDS: by Rosario Murillo, Nicaraguan poet, professor (and first lady 2008-)**

I'm going to plant a heart in the earth  
water it with love from a vein  
I'm going to praise it with the push of muscle  
and care for it with the sound of all dimensions.  
I'm going to leave a heart in the earth  
so it may grow and flower.  
A heart that throbs with longing;  
that adores everything green;  
that will be strength and nourishment for birds;  
that will be the sap of plants and mountains.