

“The Power of Flowers to Move Us”©

Sermon by Rev. Duffy Peet

Delivered at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Bozeman on June 10, 2018

It is an understatement to say that we are living in tumultuous times. Almost daily we hear or read stories of war or threats of war. In many ways, today reminds me of the late 1960's and early 1970's when I was coming of age. Just like back then, there were significant and very important movements taking place. There was the anti-war movement, there was the Civil Rights movement, and there was the hippie movement. Those of you, like myself, who lived through that time in our history may recall what it was like back then. I was in college during the early part of the 1970's and remember the tensions that created and fueled each of the movements I just mentioned.

Today, like back then, there are significant and very important movements occurring. Today the Black Lives Matter movement and the Me Too movement are calling out abusive individuals as well as entrenched and repressive systems of power. And today there is growing sentiment that the use of war and weapons of war, either to make a point or to gain or retain power, is unconscionable and intolerable. There are some definite similarities between what was taking place during my late adolescence and early adulthood and what is occurring in this country today. The protests and movements of today are reminiscent of that earlier time. The corruption within and the disillusionment with our government seems all too familiar. And this country's ongoing involvement in war and the ever-present threats of war give me flashbacks.

There is something that was both present and also very impactful during the period of the 60's and 70's that is missing today. Back then the hippies and the anti-war protesters had a very potent yet delicate symbol of their hope for the future. That symbol was the flower. Those of you who lived during that period may recall how prevalent the word “flower” was in the language of the time. Phrases such as “flower child” or “flower power” were commonly heard or read. And just as we heard in the story that Marie shared with us earlier, back then flowers had a way of popping up in places that seem inhospitable. Flowers, beautiful, delicate flowers, would often show up during confrontations between protestors and armed police or military units. Protestors would present flowers to armed police and military personnel in an attempt to deescalate these often very volatile encounters. Flowers, beautiful, delicate and yet simple flowers had power back then, and they have power still today.

The power that flowers have to move us is at the foundation of our service today. The origin of this service goes back 95 years. It was 95 years ago this past Monday that the very first flower celebration service was held at the Unitarian Church of Prague, Czechoslovakia. The service was the brainchild of the Rev. Dr. Norbert Čapek who was the minister of the congregation. For some time prior to that first flower service Čapek had felt the need for some symbolic ritual that would bind people more closely together. He believed the format had to be one that would not alienate any who had forsaken other religious traditions. The traditional Christian communion service with bread and wine was unacceptable to the members of his congregation because of their strong reaction against the Catholic faith. So he turned to the native beauty of their countryside for elements of a communion which would be genuine to them. On the last Sunday before the summer recess of the Unitarian church in Prague then, all the children and

adults participated in this colorful ritual—a ritual which Dr. Čapek created to give concrete expression to the humanity-affirming principles of our liberal faith. This simple service was the result. It was such a success that it became a yearly ritual which was held every year just before the summer recess of the church.

Čapek's message was uplifting and it was also powerful. In fact, it was so powerful that when the Nazis took control of Prague in 1940, they found his gospel to be a threat. His message of the inherent worth and beauty of every human person was—as Nazi court records show— "...too dangerous to the Reich [for him] to be allowed to live." Dr. Čapek was sent to Dachau, where his life ended the next year during a Nazi "medical experiment."

Yet while his life was snuffed out, his message and the service he created survived. His message and the flower celebration service live on with us here today. For today we not only remember Dr. Čapek's message, we relive it and we re-empower it. Even while it seems there are avalanches of destruction occurring all around us today, we continue to believe in and offer hope for a better day to come.

So how might we, who are gathered here today, harness the power of flowers to make a positive difference in our community and in the world? Here is what I would propose. Imagine yourself at this moment to be a flower. We are, each and every one of us, beautiful, delicate and, at the same time, very powerful beings. We are the Avalanche and the Glacier Lilies of our time. And we can turn a field of chaos and destruction into a field of splendor and vibrant life. We can do this if we have the courage and the tenacity to sprout up and blossom wherever and whenever the forces of oppression and destruction seek to overpower those they encounter. We have the opportunity to be the flower power of our day. May we, like those who came before us, recognize the power of flowers. And may we carry a message of hope and resilience out into a world—a world that needs to know that the destructive forces will not win out in the end. They will be replaced by flowers in the days ahead. That is what the cycle of life shows us again and again.

So it is and blessed be.