

“Planting the Seeds”
Wendy Dennis, Lay Leader
Unitarian Universalist Church of Wakefield
April 26, 2009

OPENING WORDS – #430
(from the Song of Solomon 2)

For now the winter is past,
The rain is over and gone.
The flowers appear on the earth;
The time of singing has come.
The fig tree puts forth its figs,
and the vines are in blossom;
They give forth fragrance.

READING/CONTEMPLATION

I'd like to share with you this short reading that Jeff brought to my attention and then take a few moments to contemplate in silence.

The reading is by Winston O. Abbott , from the book “Sing With the Wind”

Where I have searched – I have always found an answer – as once I found a single yellow blossom – not in the sunlit fields – but in the deeply shaded woods – a single unfamiliar yellow flower – perhaps destined never to be seen by other eyes – five rounded golden petals – with shiny oval leaves upon a slender stalk.

I reached down to claim it as my own but some strange force restrained me – something that I could not understand – was this solitary flower seeded by some bird in flight? – or was there another purpose for its existence in this sheltered and secluded place?

That afternoon I did not know – but days have come and gone and now I do – and because I left it blossoming where it had struggled upward from the forest floor – I can claim its beauty for my own – for it has become a part of me – for I have searched and I have found my answer.

Let us now take a few moments in silence to, perhaps, realize an answer we have found in our path through life.

1st READING

This next reading is excerpted from a Flower Communion Homily written by Rev Gail Seavey of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashville.

Johnny Appleseed spent his whole life as a blessing on seeds and flowers, a blessing on the fruits and the people who ate of their sweetness.

Seeds were such a blessing to people that religious teachers have long used seeds to talk about sacred blessings. Quaker George Fox called God manifest in the human mind a seed, with Goodness as its fruit. Our own great teacher who lived at the same time as Johnny Appleseed, William Ellery Channing, said that the divine dimension is a seed in each person. The purpose of religion is to help cultivate that seed. Another great teacher, Henry David Thoreau, learned from both Fox and Channing to look for seeds everywhere he walked. He learned to see how seeds were connected to everything. The birds, the squirrels and insects dispersed the seeds planting new forests and ably as the farmer. They pollinated the flowers, allowing the fruits to develop and grow. He began to understand that human nature and the rest of nature planted seeds, cultivated flowers and

grew fruits of sweet goodness, in the same way. "I have great faith in a seed," he concluded. "Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders." (from *Faith In A Seed*)

By studying the planting of seeds within nature and human nature, our religious teachers discovered that We are all One – we are a part of the interconnected web of all existence. They learned that blessing that Oneness showed them to love all existence as brothers and sisters – people, plants, animals, the stars and the earth – whose surface Thoreau reminded us, is "the cuticle of one living creature" (also from *Faith in a seed*)

We are all One. There is no such thing as a flower or a person standing alone. There are only relationships. Those can be loving or unloving relationships. The fruits of loving relationships taste good and sweet. We plant seeds of loving relationships by caring for each other. Johnny Appleseed cared for people, animals, trees and the earth by planting the seeds of sweet fruit. Parents care for their children by feeding them healthy food. Citizens care for their community by lobbying to pass laws that increase their recycling from 20% of solid waste to 80%. We cultivate those loving relationships by nurturing each other. Children nurture the earth, their family and the world community when they water vegetables in the Community garden... The Leaders of this church nurture the church community and the greater community when they teach others how to lead. We are all one. We are all connected. We can all plant seeds of loving relationships by caring and nurturing each other, animal and vegetable families, church and community, gardens and wild places, mountains of coal, streams of water and windy skies.

I invite you to consider what seeds of loving relationships you will plant in the days ahead. Plant a seed and I am prepared to expect wonders.

So ends the reading

2nd READING

The following story was told by Rev. Grace H. Simons of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Stanislaus County, California in her sermon called UU Spirituality and Purpose.

She says:

Here's another story that was told. Once upon a time, there was a woman who wanted peace in the world and peace in her heart and all sorts of good things, but she was very frustrated. The world seemed to be falling apart. She would read the papers and get depressed. (You can relate, right?) One day she decided to go shopping. (I'm not sure how that fits in, but it's part of the story.)

She went into a mall and picked a store at random. When she walked in, she was surprised to see Jesus behind the counter. She knew it was Jesus because he looked just like the pictures. But it seemed so unlikely! Finally, she got up her nerve and asked, "Excuse me, but are you Jesus?" "Yes, I am." "Do you work here?" "No, I own the place."

The woman took a breath. "What do you sell in here?" "Oh, just about anything. What do you want?" "Well, I don't really know."

Jesus looked at her kindly and said, "Well, feel free to wander up and down the aisles and make a list of what you want. Then come back and I'll see what I can do for you."

So the woman did just that. Walking up and down the aisles, she found peace on earth, no more war, no hunger or poverty, peace in families, no more drug abuse, clean air and water, careful use of resources, equality for people of all colors, abilities, sexual preference - so many wonderful things!

She wrote furiously and returned to the counter with a long list. Jesus took the list and skimmed through it. Then he looked up at her and smiled. "No problem."

He bent down behind the counter and rummaged around for quite a while. Then he stood up and laid out an assortment of packets. "What are these?" the woman asked. Jesus replied, "Seed packets."

"You mean I don't get the finished product?" "No. This is a place of dreams. You come in and see what it looks like, and I give you the seeds. You go home and plant the seeds. You nurture them and help them to grow and someone else reaps the benefits."

So ends the reading.

HOMILY: Planting the Seeds

I'd like to start this homily with another story. It is also from Rev. Grace H. Simons' sermon, UU Spirituality and Purpose. Actually, I am going to start a few paragraphs before the story.

Rev Simons writes: Lots of people find awe and wonder in nature. John Muir, the Transcendentalists, Aldo Leopold, Annie Dillard, and Mary Oliver, along with many others, have written of their experiences in wild places and of the impact those experiences had for them. A lot of UUs are nature mystics at heart, though they don't necessarily admit to it. [But,] something we find in the outdoors offers a sense that we are connected to the grandeur of the world itself.

The idea of finding the sacred in nature is an ancient one. Jewish and Christian Scriptures often refer to the natural world. Psalm 121 reminds us to lift our eyes, to look to the mountains for help. The prophet Micah calls on the mountains as a court that can make judgments of righteousness. Matthew and Luke record Jesus' advice to "Consider the lilies, how they grow."

With a somewhat different perspective, an old Jewish story tells that the child of a rabbi once loved to wander through the woods. After a while, the rabbi began to worry about how far the child went, about danger from animals, fallen trees or other hazards. One day he took the child aside and said, "I notice that you go to the forest each day. Why do you spend so much time in the woods?" "I go there to find God." "Well," said the rabbi, "that is a very good thing. I am glad you are searching for God. But don't you know that God is the same everywhere?" "Yes," the child replied, "but I'm not."

So, today we have heard songs and stories about spring and nature, about seeds as a metaphor for direct action in our own lives and as actions to benefit those who come after us, and of how nature can teach us that we change over time and in response to our environment, and that, as our earlier anthem and sermon hymn words state, springtime will "come again."

And, springtime has come again! I am personally enjoying this Spring because, for the first time in years, I have a plot of land for gardening. The neighbor of a friend of mine is ill and can no longer do much physical work, so I am doing the work and we will share the bounty.

I hope that there will be a generous bounty. However, I have not gardened for a while and also, one never knows what weather the growing season will bring. But, already, I am experiencing the miracle of seeds.

Think about it. You put tiny little seeds in the ground and, in a week or so, you have all these little new plants popping up. I know it happens all the time all over the world, but still, when it is in your own little space and you planted the seed, it is quite something to contemplate. Like the little boy who wanders in the woods in search of God, I feel different in my garden.

Of course, most plant life survives nicely with no human intervention, which is another miracle in itself. In the small corner of the world that is my new garden, there are annuals coming up such as chard, arugula, and lettuce that have seeded themselves from last year.

The flip side, of course, is that there are a lot of other plants starting to make their home in my garden that are not specifically invited by most people. I have a tote bag that says on it “So many weeds. So little time.” Although, as an herbalist, I love many of what most folks call weeds and will invite them to have a modest place in my garden, --- something that, without vigilance, I will deeply regret come August!

Although, even the seeds we cultivate can get out of hand. I don’t have the source, but I did come across a funny anecdote about zucchini taking over a garden. Perhaps one lesson from gardening is “Be careful what you wish for!”

But certainly, a big lesson from gardening is stewardship. Sometimes good stewardship is just leaving things as they are, like the man in the first story who, years later realized that, because he did not pick the flower, he can claim the beauty of the flower for his own - “for it has become a part of me.”

But, stewardship is usually more proactive, with one definition being: **“The careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one’s care.” (Webster online)**

While Earth Day reminds us that Climate Change issues challenge us on a global level, we can certainly heed the words of Wendell Berry, who cautions that we should not assume that big problems need big solutions. If each of us take care with our individual plots of land and make individual changes in our personal lives, then the cumulative effect will go a long way to solving the big problems.

But the lessons of stewardship go beyond the literal garden. We plant seeds all of the time, as Gail Seavey describes in her flower communion homily. She says, “By studying the planting of seeds within nature and human nature, our religious teachers discovered that We are all One – we are a part of the interconnected web of all existence..There is no such thing as a flower or a person standing alone. There are only relationships... We plant seeds of loving relationships by caring for each other. ...We cultivate those loving relationships by nurturing each other.”

But, the story of the woman seeking peace in the world and all sorts of good things reminds us that our actions are not always just for ourselves and in our time --- but often for future generations. One way to put it is that we need to plant annuals AND perennials in our gardens and in our lives. I know I am going to be enjoying rhubarb out of my garden that I didn’t have to plant!

I think the lesson to remember is that everything we do plants a seed. Whether it grows or not is sometimes up to us, and sometimes beyond our control. But, whether it is from a loving place or not IS up to us, and whether we learn from our seeds or the seeds of others is also up to us.

Planting the Seeds. It is what we do each day of our lives, whether we see ourselves as gardeners or not. And, every seed planted has the possibility of effecting, not just our small plot in the world, but all the world around us and for generations to come. Plant carefully, but also joyously as we sing the earth’s great splendor, whose beauty around us glows.

CLOSING WORDS #693

And now, may we have faith in life to do wise planting that the generations to come may reap even more abundantly than we. May we be bold in bringing to fruition the golden dreams of human kinship and justice. This we ask that the fields of promise become fields of reality.

-- V. Emil Gudmundson