

# “A Remnant of Resurrection”

## Flower Communion Sunday

Rev. Shawn Newton

First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto

6 June 2021

### Meditation

Our meditation reading on this Flower Communion Sunday is the poem “A Remnant of Resurrection” by Joyce Rupp.

the time for daffodils has come  
bunches of six, ten, or twelve,  
with tightly wrapped buds,  
arrive from warmer lands.

like sentinels of invitation  
they keep my wintered heart  
leaning into Spring.

the directions say to cut  
at least a half inch off the stem,  
then place in water and  
wait for the surprise.

behold, in the early hour of dawn,  
I see resurrection on my kitchen table,  
every yellowed daffodil hurraing the morning,  
stretching outward in the etched-glass vase.

but what captures my attention  
is one small, thin remnant,  
voluntarily discarded,  
beneath the smiling daffodils.

this dry, transparent cover,  
a cast-off tube of protection

once concealing a fragile bud,  
conveys the price of blooming.

I pick up this remnant of resurrection and hold it for a long, silent time,  
wondering what soul-shroud of mine needs to be unwrapped,  
before I, too, am blooming.

## Homily

In recent days and weeks,  
as Covid case counts have dropped  
and vaccine rates steadily risen,  
I've begun, at last, to feel a deep sense of relief.

With every Facebook post by someone announcing  
they've just gotten their first shot or their second jab,  
I've found myself exhaling, just a little bit more,  
catching a deeper breath, in some ways,  
than has felt possible for more than a year.

That's not to say that we're out of the woods.  
We're not, as Dr. Tam and so many others routinely remind us.

With still-emerging variants-of-concern  
and with the vast majority of people on the planet yet to be vaccinated,  
we have quite some distance still to go.

But there is light now.  
Glimmers of hope on the horizon.  
And the felt-possibility that we may finally be nearing  
the beginning of what will become our new normal.

In the coming weeks, many of us will come out from our caves  
with more confidence than we've felt since all of this began,  
blinking against the bright light of day.

Maybe you've seen the recent viral video of the chewing gum commercial.  
Scraggly looking people, wearing gym shorts and bathrobes,  
and who've obviously not had a proper haircut since last year,  
emerge in droves from their houses and apartment buildings

to celebrate the end of the pandemic.

They spill into parks, as Celine Dion belts out a power ballad.

And then people, in their delight and pent-up desire for connection,  
begin kissing perfect strangers—  
hence the need for that breath-freshening gum.

It's a funny commercial, and certainly worthy of a laugh.

But it's gone viral, I believe,  
because it speaks to a feeling so many can identify with—  
that feeling of being oh-so-ready to come back to life.

Of course, it must be said,  
many people's work hasn't afforded them the privilege of the cave.

And, whether it's felt like it or not,  
the experience we have lived through and are still living through  
has been and very much is, in fact, our life.

There is no refund for this time. No trade-in. No do-over.

This long chapter of time  
is as much a part of the story of who we are as any other.

But, here at this point,  
as we sense a shift towards the end,  
the sense of being revived, renewed, revitalized is real.

That's why, I think, Joyce Rupp's poem "A Remnant of Resurrection"  
spoke to me in thinking about today's Flower Communion service.

Though we are actually on the cusp of summer,  
it is only now that our "wintered heart[s]" are, at last, "leaning into Spring."

And like those daffodils, trimmed and placed in fresh water,  
we now look to "the early hour of dawn,"  
stretching towards the sun, to "hurrah" the morning.

And, then, as the best poets do, Rupp invites us deeper—

into complication, and into truth.

She writes:

but what captures my attention  
is one small, thin remnant,  
voluntarily discarded,  
beneath the smiling daffodils.

this dry, transparent cover,  
a cast-off tube of protection  
once concealing a fragile bud,  
conveys the price of blooming.

I pick up this remnant of resurrection and hold it for a long, silent time,  
wondering what soul-shroud of mine needs to be unwrapped,  
before I, too, am blooming.

It takes a poetic eye to spot the beauty of the dried-out bit of casing,  
once green and now faded, that held the bud safe before it flowered.

And to recognize in it the price paid for our ability to blossom.

As you look towards to rising sun, I wonder  
what soul-shroud of yours is in need of unwrapping?

What confines do you need to burst beyond,  
if you are to be about your blooming?

These are not idle questions.

This experience has changed us—  
and in ways we will likely be unpacking for the rest of our lives.

And it has changed and continues to change the world around us.  
In ways that are confounding,  
and in ways that hold out new hope.

Many of us are better acquainted now with vulnerability,  
and mindful in a deeper way of life's fragility.

And we have gathered up griefs that may not even yet be clear to us.

There is an unfolding loss of innocence or naïveté  
that is a source of sorrow.

But, if we are awake, and if we are determined,  
we will find the strength to hold all of this  
in a way that leads us to deeper living—  
and that, strangely enough,  
can become a source of joy,  
as we are moved to treasure life for the great gift that it is.

The Lebanese poet Kahlil Gibran got at this tension  
that sits at the heart of human life.

He said:

Your joy is your sorrow unmasked.

And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises  
was oftentimes filled with your tears.

And how else can it be?

The deeper that sorrow carves into your being,  
the more joy you can contain.

Is not the cup that holds your wine  
the very cup that was burned in the potter's oven?

And is not the lute that soothes your spirit,  
the very wood that was hollowed with knives?

When you are joyous, look deep into your heart  
and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow  
that is giving you joy.

When you are sorrowful look again in your heart,  
and you shall see that in truth you are weeping

for that which has been your delight.

Some of you say, "Joy is greater than sorrow,"  
and others say, "Nay, sorrow is the greater."

But I say unto you, they are inseparable.

Together they come,  
and when one sits alone with you at your board,  
remember that the other is asleep upon your bed.

Verily you are suspended like scales  
between your sorrow and your joy.

It's not an easy place to be—suspended there between joy and sorrow,  
caught all our lives between what can break our hearts  
and what can break open our hearts  
to their deepest purpose on this earth.

But to be there—to be suspended there  
and to know that you are there—  
is the hidden blessing to be found in this.

It is life's very hardest of bargains.

That hidden blessing is found  
when we know how unpredictable and precarious life can be  
and begin to cherish how precious is each day we are given.

That hidden blessing is found  
when we look upon the gifts in our life,  
and know things could so easily be otherwise.

That hidden blessing is found when we look to our losses—  
to the loss of loved ones who are now gone—  
and know that our grief is the tax we gladly pay to have loved.

And, that hidden blessing is found  
when we look to ourselves and sense the stirring of life,  
a renewal of hope,  
where once was only pain, or dread, or fear.

When that blessing is truly found,  
the only thing that makes sense  
is for our hearts to sing hurrah to the morning,  
with all of its bittersweet beauty.

Like only he could, the poet e. e. cummings  
wrote what I would call the definitive words to that song of praise:

i thank You God for most this amazing  
day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees  
and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything  
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today,  
and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth  
day of life and love and wings: and of the gay  
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing  
breathing any-lifted from the no  
of all nothing-human merely being  
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and  
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

I am always moved by the depths of gratitude and joy in cummings's words.

My heart is full just hearing him say:  
"I who have died am alive again today."

May the same be true for us all this morning,  
and in the promise of this more-hopeful season now upon us.

May we, in our blooming, unfurl our hearts  
to hold "all that is our lives,"  
and make our days upon the earth glad, come what may.

Blessed Be.