

# Flower Communion Reflections

First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto  
29 May 2022

## Rev. Lynn Harrison's Reflection - "On Dandelions"

I've come to consider them the first sign of spring.

The golden explosion of dandelions that appear on cue,  
on front lawns and farmer's fields,  
in public parks and by the side of the road.

You may have noticed them yourself a few weeks ago...  
though by now they've mostly gone to seed.

This year, once again, the dandelions were abundant,  
perhaps because people now realize their value to pollinators:  
the bees and butterflies essential to the health of our ecosystem.

These days, we're seeing dandelions take over whole hillsides:  
fields of green transformed into fields of gold.

And that's a beautiful thing.

Yet when I see a dandelion blooming on my own lawn,  
I admit there's still a part of me that feels a little uncomfortable.

Because until recently, I thought of dandelions as weeds,  
pure and simple.

I thought they simply didn't belong in any well-tended garden.

Many people still feel that way about dandelions:  
that they're unwanted guests...  
like so many other unwanted guests in our lives.

I'm reminded of that poem by the 12th Century poet, Rumi,  
who wrote that "being human is a guest house"...and that we should "welcome and  
entertain" all "unexpected visitors...even if they are a crowd of sorrows."

“Be grateful for whoever comes,” he wrote. “Because each [visitor] has been sent as a guide from beyond.”<sup>1</sup>

Admittedly, it is very hard to “welcome in” all the unwanted guests of life...

Whether they’re the physical weeds in the garden, or the metaphorical weeds, of personal challenges, mistakes, losses, hurts and fears.

Vivid and obvious, spread over our personal landscapes, sometimes the weeds of our lives are more numerous than we can count.

Sometimes they linger for long seasons...but like all life, they change and transform in shape and meaning...

And they change us along the way.

As for dandelions, we’ve recently witnessed their cycle of life and death.

When its golden days are done, the dandelion transforms into a puffy cloud of feathery seeds.

When my daughter, Calla, was about five years old, I taught her how to hold the dandelion in front of her mouth and blow the seeds into the air.

She must not have heard the name “dandelion” so every time she spoke of them she called them “wishing weeds.”

It’s a name I find descriptive and helpful.

For in the death and dispersal of the dandelion, there is also the wish for new life.

In the same way, life holds the promise that all our experiences--

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thepoetryexchange.co.uk/the-guest-house-by-rumi>

even those that are painful, unappreciated and not easy to love--  
contain the seeds of understanding and compassion.

Even our hardest losses--  
as maddeningly perennial as they are--  
may become the ground for new life.

For lessons that shape us...and that transform our world.

To paraphrase the ecumenical teacher Richard Rohr in his book  
“Falling Upward”,

“Everything belongs...even the sad, absurd and futile parts [of life].

[In spiritual maturity] we can give our energy to making the painful parts and the  
formally excluded parts belong to the now unified field”<sup>2</sup>...

That is, we can grow into a deeper love for the world as it is,  
and become more deeply inclusive and compassionate.

When it comes to the dandelions...by not pulling up and rejecting them, we’re  
supporting the ongoing health of life’s interconnected web.

We’re banking on those “wishing weeds”...seeing them for the rare and precious gifts  
they are.

It seems to me that we can see the “field of life” that way, too.

Because life isn’t just about our perfect arrangements of cultivated blooms...as lovely  
and beautiful as they can be.

It’s also about the gold that’s found in the imperfect and the undesired...in the  
uncontrolled and the impermanent.

When we consider that our lives are made up of these very things,  
perhaps we grow to appreciate the precious gift of life itself.

---

<sup>2</sup> Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*, (Jossey-Bass, 2011), 114

A few springs ago, I found myself looking over a field of dandelions...with my guitar close at hand.

Now I'd like to share with you a musical version of this reflection.

§

### **Rev. Shawn Newton's Reflection: "In Full Bloom"**

I begin with Joyce Rupp's poignant poem, "A Remnant of Resurrection".

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, long, silent time,  
wondering what soul-shroud of mine  
needs to be unwrapped,  
before I, too, am blooming.

\* \* \*

It's a timeless question.

Maybe one you've wrestled with yourself.

That internal debate on when it's time to toss out fresh flowers  
that are, well, no longer quite so fresh as they once were.

Or when to trim back any plant or flower when it seems past its prime,  
when its drooping or dried out, withered or even worse.

When to discard the remnants of what we only recently thought to be beautiful:  
the "dry, transparent cover,  
[the] cast-off tube of protection [that] once conceal[ed] a fragile bud,  
[the shrivelled, wilted bits that] convey the price of blooming."

In this world where we sometimes celebrate a narrow view of beauty,  
what do we do with something that has already had its day in the sun?

And this question begs a bigger question  
of why we are so quick to toss out  
what seems less beautiful than it once was.

Why do we believe that fading or faded beauty isn't still beautiful?

Of course the obvious place the mind might go in this conversation  
is to the partnered person who in the midst of a mid-life crisis  
decides to find someone new, and hopefully half their own age.

Some of you may recall the joke I've told  
about the 60-year-old man who, when granted one wish by a genie,  
looks over at his wife and then asks for a partner

thirty years younger than he.

In an instant, the genie makes him a ninety-year-old man.

But this isn't a reflection on relationships so much as an invitation to consider why we too often judge the value, the worth, and the beauty of something by what is typically an all-too-narrow slice of time, that relatively brief period when it's at its peak or in its prime.

I wonder what it would mean for us to see beauty not as a fleeting thing, but as something that has more stages than we may have previously considered.

Can we resist the urge to discard something beautiful, something like a flower, when it's done with blooming and see even in the wilting, drooping, browning husk something of its beauty, something of its powerful honesty, something of what Shakespeare called "the rarities of nature's truth?"

In UU memorial services, we often proclaim the words of Edward Searl:

A human life is sacred.  
It is sacred in being born.  
It is sacred in its living.  
And it is sacred in its dying.

So, as we draw to a close our month focused on the theme of beauty, I challenge you to expand your definition of the term— to take something like a flower and to hold off on tossing it out, at least a little longer than you normally would.

To see that to come into full bloom may extend to the point even when the bloom is off.

You may see that beauty lasts longer than we often notice.

You may discover that the fading of glory, that the end of life's story,

is just as essential a part of the journey as everything that comes before.

You may see something of life's deeper beauty,  
and you may just see something of yourself.

So be it.