

# Summer Delights

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Many years ago, before I met and married my husband Jamie, I spent several weeks one summer travelling through Northern BC with a partner I probably should have broken up with months earlier. We were nearing the end of our trip, spending a couple days in a little town called Stewart-Hyder - Stewart is in Canada, and Hyder is in the US, in Alaska. It's a meeting point of our two countries, a little sidetrip off of Highway 37A, also known as Glacier Highway for the many spectacular glaciers that you can see from the road. We were walking back to the Inn we were staying in, having a disagreement about one of the several things we disagreed about at the time, when coming around the corner right in front of our inn we happened upon a rainbow hanging unusually low in the sky. It was the brightest rainbow I had ever seen, and so close it truly felt like I could reach out and touch it.

Immediately I started to cry - tears of joy and delight for this unexpected gift from the meeting of the sun and the rain.

I imagine some of you saw countless rainbows at the Pride Parade last weekend – Rainbows are symbols of diversity and inclusion because they speak to us of unexpected gifts - of how magical it can be when we bring people together across the spectrum of gender identity or sexual orientation, and we find in our commonality and our differences so many delightful surprises.

In our time for all ages today, we talked about happiness - Layla's happiness. But we also know that happiness is not delight, and delight is not happiness. They're not quite the same thing.

Delight is not exactly happiness because delight can happen even in the midst of great sadness - even in the midst of anguish.

It happens when we give ourselves over to some quality of sensory experience that surges into us. It may be something we see, like the rainbow I saw in the sky on the US border, or for those for whom sight is not available, it could be something we hear - the delight of hearing a melody again that we had half forgotten, one that reminds us of someone we love, the delight of a great beat, the delight of birdsong. A food that you didn't expect to enjoy as much as you did brings a particular kind of delight - that surprise of "ooo, this is good."

I wanted to speak about delight to open our summer together because summer is often a season of delights - a season when we make more time and space for things like dipping into cool water, drinking lemonade, picking berries.

But like so many things in this time of polycrisis or metacrisis - when there are so many interlocking crises, from climate change to rising fascism to unprecedented levels of homelessness to drug poisoning - summer is changing.

As some of you may remember, before I went to seminary, I was a climate justice activist. Now in my ministry I combine climate justice work with work on spiritual growth, our third principle as Unitarian Universalists. I host workshops on preparing mentally, spiritually and physically for climate change.

In these workshops, we make space for grief and lamentation. One theme I often hear from participants is a particular grief that arises now in summer, as this season of easy delight and comfort changes to one where heat waves can be deadly, and wildfire smoke can make being outdoors intolerable for many people.

We often think of the winter as a tough season for unhoused people, but increasingly summer is the season that is more difficult to survive, as the Climate Atlas predicts that the number of heat waves will quadruple in Toronto between now and 2050.

One of the biggest sources of vulnerability to extreme heat is social isolation...not having a "heat buddy" who checks in on you when the temperature soars. A key question for all of us will be: how do we build solidarity, build the kind of community connections that make us all more resilient to extreme weather?

And what kind of unexpected delights might this connection across difference offer to us, if we become more attentive to the magic of turning crisis into an opportunity to connect and to love more deeply?

Delight so often has an element of surprise, a quality of redirection. Redirection from the mundane and the ordinary to a sudden clarity of vision, a sudden sharpening of focus. The sweet taste in the mouth, the coldness on the skin, the melody in our ears, they can crystallize a quality of presence that is often elusive. May Sarton says, "the capacity for delight is the gift of paying attention."

In the reading from Annie Dillard that I offered before this homily, Annie Dillard says about her walks through nature that, although she follows the same path every day, the

amount of delight she experiences varies dramatically. I'll read it again "The literature of illumination reveals this above all: although illumination comes to those who wait for it, it is always, even to the most practiced and adept, a gift and a total surprise. I return from one walk knowing where the killdeer nests in the field by the creek and the hour the laurel blooms.

I return from the same walk a day later scarcely knowing my own name. Litanies hum in my ears; my tongue flaps in my mouth. Ailnon, alleluia!

I cannot cause light; the most I can do is try to put myself in the path of its beam. It is possible, in deep space, to sail on solar wind. Light, be it particle or wave, has force: you rig a giant sail and go. The secret is to sail on solar wind. Hone and spread your spirit till you yourself are a sail, whetted, translucent, broadside to the merest puff."

That's what she has learned after years of walking in her sacred place, called Tinker Creek - how to be open to delight, to simply let it take over when it appears.

<https://www.dailygood.org/story/1452/annie-dillard-on-seeing-annie-dillard/>

I would never counsel anyone to try to force delight. Sometimes we are in a grief that truly needs our attention more. We can witness ourselves honestly if summer is changing from a season when delight felt natural and easy to one in which we experience more grief and anxiety. When wildfires and their accompanying smoke sweep our country and bring to our screens and our thoughts and our hearts the reality of an uncertain and scary future, we need to be willing to take moments to allow this grief, this fear, to come into our shared time together.

As UUs, we have been practicing this for years with our welcoming of joys and sorrows together - we are ahead of the curve when it comes to understanding the need to grow spiritually to meet the challenge of living in a wider society and a culture that does not conform to our deepest values and aspirations.

But the great beauty of delight is that the more you open yourself to it, the more you are also capable of grieving well. Your spirit is as broad as a sail, able to navigate the waves of grief, delight, anger, regret, fear, joy - without being toppled by any of them.

You pay careful attention to the wind, to the currents, and you sail onward to wherever your life is calling you to go.

One thing I've learned being a parent is that all the things that we think of as delightful to children, actually are. Things like bubbles, balloon animals, kites, rainbows, puppies, kittens & bunnies, roasting marshmallows, dandelion clocks, sprinklers to run in on hot summer days - all of these things appeal to a child's capacity for openness to experience, to be suffused with sensation. It's why we so often call it "child-like wonder" or why we so closely associate delight with children - it is why when we are with children we have much to teach, but also much to learn.

We live in a broken world. But as [Jack Gilbert](#) says, "to make injustice the only measure of our attention is to praise the devil." Delight is a north star as we navigate the waters of life. Delight is not frivolous. Delight is the point.