

Traditional Easter Flower Communion Service

**A Sermon by the Rev. Terre Balof
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens
April 16, 2006**

On this Sunday when we gather to celebrate the wonder and beauty of life that breaks forth again and again, *despite the circumstances of our lives*, we honor the various beliefs that bring us to this place. We remember that the Angel of Death has made its mark on the human family, and still we are here. We honor the life and teachings of Jesus and once again celebrate the victory of life and love that defy death. Today we celebrate the wonder of the human family as diverse and glorious as the flowers that blanket the earth.

For many of us it is the spring that quickens our pulses, and with renewed enthusiasm we welcome new beginnings, longer days, and the fresh smell of the earth.

Before WWII, a Czech minister Norbert Chapek began a spring ritual in which members of his congregation would bring flowers to celebrate both the beginning of spring and to affirm the beauty, wonder and unique spirit of each human being. The spirit of that message we can affirm enthusiastically and freely. It is hard for us to believe that such a hopeful and positive message would be perceived as negative, yet the Nazis did not want the message of the worth and dignity of every person to spread. Chapek was told that he could not continue the ritual of the flower communion, for it was traitorous. A man of great commitment and integrity, like so many people of faith, he felt that he must speak the truth as he discerned it. So he continued to celebrate with flowers and with the affirmation that all people, no matter their faith or their ethnicity or their heritage-- all people are precious members of the human family. For this, he was imprisoned and died in a concentration camp before the end of WWII. He, like so many others of our faith and other faiths, chose the difficult path of love and commitment.

Today we, too, celebrate, honoring the message of Jesus whose life spoke to the mystery of life that has bound us together as a human family and of the sacredness of

each human life. Jesus chose to associate, not with the mighty and powerful, but with the simple people of his day. They were often the disenfranchised, the powerless, the working people. Yet he saw in each person, inherent worth and dignity. Jesus' life and teachings, the life and teachings of other prophets throughout the ages, Chapek's life and other people who live their beliefs in the world, all these teachers bear witness to the power of love to change the world, if that love has courage. This morning we share the prayer that Norbert Chapek prayed over the flowers in his church. The phrases are from his times and yet they speak a clear message that all members of the human family are called to live in harmony.

PRAYER DEDICATION OF THE FLOWERS, #723 in the hymnal

Let us share responsive reading # 628 as a reflection on the work we have to do to bring renewal into our hearts and lives.

RESPONSIVE READING #628

HOMILY

On this beautiful morning, it seems strange to talk so much of winter and about the part of our inner life that we often wish to hide even from ourselves. Those shadow places are there, a part of our life experience, a part of what makes us who we are. This morning we are invited to welcome in the light, for when we choose to be awake to the whole of who we are, of who we *can be*, we find new possibilities for life.

When I was a teenager, I thought long and hard about how I wanted to live my life. Like so many of us here, I was the one who questioned everything, who asked all those annoying questions about what to believe. Like many of us, I could feel something inside me that wanted to emerge from the limitations, the small expectations that were laid on me by my class and my culture. As I explored the teachings of Jesus and my United Methodist heritage, I sought guidance and role models for the path that seemed authentic for me. One of the books that had a great impact on me was a book entitled *Mr. Blue*. In the book the question was asked, "What would Jesus do?" Yes, though most folks don't know it, those bracelets originated from that little book. Even in high school I decided that living intentionally had significance and meaning. I simply decided that I

would try to live my life and treat people as if the Kingdom of God were a reality on earth. It was clear to me that the whole of life must have meaning. I believe that most folks seek meaning. In spite of the circumstances of our lives, no matter what we have endured or been privileged to receive, we want our lives to have meaning. For many of us, the question is how do we honor and celebrate the incredible wonder of life in the midst of our daily existence? How do we move from language that refers to meaning in our lives to reflect that meaning in the larger world in which we live and work?

Last Thursday evening a few of us gathered to share our thoughts and feelings about the teachings of Jesus, the man Jesus, who is a spiritual teacher for us. We also talked about how the term often used to describe our larger world of meaning is called the, Kingdom of God. As people aware of the political struggles that have helped shape our world, we simply did not think that that term had meaning for us as a definition for human society. Is it not time to think in broader terms about bringing into reality a human community that honors the depth and breadth of the wisdom of the human family? We need language that speaks to our dream for the human family living in harmony and the earth made fair. Dr. King talked about the Beloved Community. Others have talked about Gaia, the Community of Humanity, the Caravan of Creation, the Sacred Unity of Creation, the Dream of God. There are many names that have arisen to help us think beyond the narrow strictures of our lives. Each of us needs to find the words, the symbols that speak to the kind of world we wish to bring into being.

In this time in history when the principalities and powers of the world seek to divide those who would help to build and renew our understanding of human kinship, we must all find ways to affirm the wisdom and beauty that resides within each of us, in each people and nation so that we can create a society in which the wisdom and beauty of EVERY person is honored and respected. When we look at and name the shadows in ourselves, then we begin to model on a personal level how our society needs to examine and name that which needs healing within our society and the world.

The flowers we have gathered to share this morning represent the beauty we find within ourselves and the beauty that resides within every human spirit. We received this ritual from one who understood the difficulty of living within a society that sought to eliminate those who were different, those who thought differently, those who doubted.

We share flowers this morning as symbols to remind us that our lives are abundant, that we have a gift of life to create beauty and meaning. We can ask the question: What would a UU, what will I do with this great and glorious life we have been given? Our flowers also represent the diversity of the human family that we are called to celebrate and to honor. At this time when it is so easy to live in fear that political decisions will bring danger into each of our lives, when we experience anger that emerges from the disagreements of how to care for our families and our society, when we feel that our lives are too rushed and harried—let us take a moment to pause. We are invited to begin again. We are welcomed this morning to emerge into the light of spring. We are welcomed this morning into a new beginning when we are asked to do more than react to the world around us; we are asked to be very intentional about how we will choose to create a Beloved Community. We are invited to join the stream of life, the Caravan of Creation, in which we are called to ask again and again, “What is there for me to do to create a better world?”

It’s a wonderful, beautiful world out there. True, it is not always simple or easy. True, we sometimes make life difficult for ourselves. But this is a new day; it is an Easter morning unlike any other. And we have brought beauty, caring, and compassion to share with one another. Some will receive a flower brought by someone you may not even know, and that is all the better, for generosity to the stranger is a lesson we must learn over and over again. Also, we receive a flower with no expectation that we have to do anything to deserve it. Not one of us has to do a single thing to deserve this simple gift. Simply receive. We receive because each of us is unique in all the world. That is our gift and that is our responsibility. Each of us has something to offer the world and without which the world will be less than it could be. Let us be grateful for those with whom we share the gifts of life.