



Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens

The Reverend Alison Wilbur Eskildsen, Parish Minister
The Reverend Don Randall, Community Minister

“Changing the Balance”

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Centering Thoughts

Weep not that the world changes – did it keep a stable, changeless state, it were cause indeed to weep. William Cullen Bryant

Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds you plant. Robert Louis Stevenson

For man, autumn is a time of harvest, of gathering together. For nature, it is a time of sowing, of scattering abroad. Edwin Way Teale

Homily

(In response to a telling of the Greek myth about Demeter grief over her daughter Persephone's descent into the Underworld)

The ancient Greek poet, Homer, tells in his “Hymn to Demeter” one particular story of the seasons. Homer claims Persephone, the beautiful young maiden, was taken to the Underworld against her will by Hades.

But others tell a different myth. In one, Persephone is drawn to the underworld on her own. She's a compassionate young woman who hears the cries of the dead and who chooses to go into the Underworld to be their Queen and offer them comfort.

In another, Demeter and Persephone are different aspects of the same person: Demeter as mother, crone, and older goddess; Persephone as child, maiden, and younger goddess. Together they symbolize the life-cycle. When Persephone goes to the underworld and Demeter grieves, they represent death, like the natural world that dies each year. And just as new life is born out of dead, decayed life, the maiden is returned from the land of the dead to that of the living. Demeter is the fertile mother whose love for her daughter brings Persephone back to the world of the living, and in Demeter's joy, the earth becomes fertile once again. Their symbolic life and death roles are shown in their very names. Demeter means variously earth mother, earth goddess, or corn or grain goddess. Persephone means variously bringer of destruction or destroyer of light.

Now is the time for Persephone to say goodbye to her mother and prepare to journey to the Underworld for now is the time of the autumnal equinox. Today is the day we experience light and

dark in near-equal measure. But at precisely 4:44 pm this very afternoon, the wheel of the year will turn and days in the northern hemisphere will include more dark than light.

Eighty degree daytime temperatures may not make us feel like autumn is upon us, but cooler nights hint that the wheel is turning. The vegetable garden in my backyard no longer offers the bounty it once did. When I walk my neighborhood, I see leaves on the ground. The heavy, cloying air of summer has been replaced by lighter, clearer autumn air. The Harvest Moon shone bright this past week, its craters and seas in shades of gray were easy to see.

Demeter and Persephone's story stands witness to the truth we see around us. Persephone's journey underground follows the pattern of black bears descending into winter dens, as well as that of creepy crawlies burrowing into mud, soil, or trees. Even seeds and bulbs rest in dark, fertile earth, awaiting the return of spring. At least one among us is gestating a baby in the darkness of her womb, counting the weeks until her child sees the light of day.

Before winter fully arrives, the earth goddess will paint one last picture for us. She'll transform summer's green landscape a new palette of autumn fire: flame-orange, burnt umber, deep crimson, burnished bronze, sun-kissed gold, wine-dark burgundy, and polished mahogany and ebony. Her painting has begun, but I can't wait for the finished masterpiece.

There is something to love in every season, even winter's barren nakedness, dismal gray skies, and chill winds. Nature teaches me to prepare for whatever change comes. Though not all change comes as a blessing, you and I can certainly try to make it so, for we unwelcome change helps us grow and develop. It is better to bend in ill wind than let it break us.

As the earth tips the balance of light into dark, and the wheel spins towards winter, let us enjoy the Fall season. Notice the beauty and life around you. Celebrate that you are witness to it. Be grateful that we live and know one another. May it be so, in this season and all the seasons of our lives.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What is your personal harvest this year? What seed have you nurtured; object, idea, or change realized?
2. What more can you or UUFA do to honor the generosity of the Earth that sustains us?
3. As a time of greater darkness begins, what introspection or incubation might you begin?

