

“Spring Fever”

A Two-Part Reflection by Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull

Unitarian Universalist Church in Meriden

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First Reflection

“Spring is like a perhaps hand”. Amen. Whatever the enigmatic e.e. cummings might have meant by this phrase, it rings so true in this spring, when “perhaps” signals possibility, hope, and doubt melded. This morning might we hold a chalice full of possibility, a communal heart laced with hope, and honest witness tinged with doubt. A particular strain of spring fever permeates our time, a fluctuating fever but never quite normal, whatever normal might be.

Yesterday in Washington, DC hundreds of thousands marched bearing witness to the harsh realities of climate change, the stark need for justice with the national backdrop of a shameful lack of it, and a counterpoint not to the doubt but to the temptation to despair in those among us who have ears to hear and eyes to see. Some of you were there or in other cities, marching, witnessing. I wonder how many are in this sanctuary this morning...

Then again some of us were at Meriden’s Annual Daffodil Festival, ingesting, strolling, taking in the panoply of smells, tastes, sights, and high decibel bands. Some of us also were flipping grilled cheese sandwiches, serving up tomato soup, and squeezing fresh limes for those thirst-quenching lime rickeys. Once again, this congregation had a booth, but this year with an expanded menu. I wonder how many “worker survivors” are in this sanctuary this morning... Several who were there yesterday are there also today.

And yes, there were the daffodils—sunshine yellow, distinctly aromatic—gracing the byways of everything else that was simply for sale. The daffodils were there, stretching languidly into the sun. The words of Judith Campbell and e.e. cummings echo:

I will say thank you “for the leaping greenly spirits of trees”**

And...for the mud-splashed, dirty faced daffodils—spotty from recent heavy rains,
Still golden, still smiling, and still standing
Despite the storms that battered them.”

What choices we have.

“I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve (or save) the world and a desire to enjoy (or savor) the world. This makes it hard to plan the day.”

Those words of E. B. White resonate through all the mornings of our days and surely the mornings of this weekend.

Continually I'm humbled by the fact that I can't be in two places at once. We need one another—some on the march, some serving up cuisine whose ingredients were perhaps the freshest that anyone could consume in an environment that was otherwise not innocent of carbon footprints. I like to believe that we can act to improve the world **and** enjoy the world, maybe on the same day.

Spring fever rises in us variably as we witness, wonder, revive, renew, resist, sing, and weep. "Spring Is Weeping Tonight," writes Stuart Gravatt.

Not summer's narcissist, calling
attention to herself with booms
and flashes, nor winter's frozen
fury, piling white on white. A shimmering
sheen of rain, instead, an incessant
shower that lulls
and saddens, like a woman somewhere
in the world, her face in her hands.

Always so much to weep for – the friend
who is dying; the lover who left;
a river that made the news,
poisoned forever by something
leaking; the unnamed
species extinct this hour.

Intimately and ultimately, personally and politically, in the deepest spaces of our hearts and the farthest reaches of our planet, spring weeps. Relentless rain, sweat dripping down the backs of marchers and festival workers, tears dripping down the cheeks of those of us left behind after the passing of a loved one, tears repressed by those of us not yet ready to give vent to whatever keeps us from blossoming—all mark this season in which we reside.

I call to you--you sun--you trees--you people--and you valiant daffodils
I call to you, believers and skeptics, hopeful and disillusioned...
Doing our best,
Walking the walk...finding our way,
And getting back up when we fall.

We need this call. How we need this call—the sun, the trees, the daffodils, and each of us here and now this morning—who we are, just as we are.

Second Reflection

“April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.”

Okay, let’s stop right there. Enough already. If nothing else, why neglect the cruelty of the other 11 months? I believe that there is equal opportunity in the calendar if not elsewhere for cruelty. I do not believe there is equal opportunity to understand T.S. Elliot’s “The Wasteland”. I number myself among those who trip their way into its enigmatic verses and rely on lots of footnotes, a form of detour from the narrative that Elliot also favored, though I need footnotes for the footnotes.

But back to the time at hand and a short stroll from the glory of daffodils to those now bounteously blooming lilacs. How I revel in their beauty and aroma. On our back porch two lilac bushes are about to burst into bloom, a Mother’s Day gift from my husband Dan the first spring of our arrival here.

Lilacs hold history for us and a story that blooms alongside those on our back porch. It was another home and another spring—how many springs ago I can’t remember. What I do remember is that the previous autumn, Dan had pruned our backyard lilac bushes to what looked like underground. I was mortified. He knew that lilacs were my favorite flower. I inhale them so intensely, it’s amazing I don’t drain the scent right out of them. In the name of long-term horticultural health, it felt like my soul mate had executed my soul flower.

We made it through the winter. So did the roots of the lilacs.

One April morning Dan hollered, “Jan, come on out and take a look at this!” I stepped out the back door into the yard. There, flush with the ground was a hearty lilac blossom—no leaves, no branches, just a full-blown aromatic blossom.

Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.

Really? How dead was the land? How dull were the roots? Memory, yes; desire, yes; gratitude, yes.

In time of silver rain the earth puts forth new life again...

Yes, Langston Hughes, yes!

in Just-
 spring when the world is mud-
 luscious

....when the world is puddle-wonderful

Yes, Edward Estlin Cummings, yes!

Yet, the tears of spring, the indifference of a season of resurrection to loss and grief, the rising temperatures of a planet we are rendering so fragile for life, the rising inequality of the rich and the poor, the winter-cold shoulder given by the powerful to the most powerless, the trampling on the tresses of our mother earth, the irreverence for life are with us.

Will we one year greet a “Silent Spring,” warned about so eloquently just 55 years ago by Rachel Carson? How vilified she was by the powerful. How catalytic she was for the so-called environmental movement and for that first Earth Day, observed 47 years ago and every year since on April 22.

The poets of spring tell the variable tales of earth and the life it holds and the hopes and fears of this season we inhabit. Spring fever is spring feverish.

Shall we weep? Yes. Shall we laugh and sing? Yes. Shall we grieve? Yes. Shall we notice and glory in the season at hand? I hope so.

The credibility of our faith is in our works. And the credibility of our works is in our faith. In this spring of renewal and resistance may truth march on. May beauty continue to blossom. May hope rise like the sun. And may we never cease to bear witness to that which through all imaginable intimidation, “[grows] like a flower, [and bursts] from the earth again, forever deathless, faithful, coming into life again like April.”

So may it be and Amen.

Sources:

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