**The Unitarian Church of Montreal**

**Sunday Service**: **Gardening Joys**

(Flower Communion Sunday)

**June 7, 2020**

**Chalice Lighting**

Camellia Jahanshahi

Hello, my name is Camellia Jahanshahi. It is my absolute pleasure to welcome you this Sunday, June 7, 2020, to our virtual flower communion for the Unitarian Church of Montreal. For our chalice lighting this morning, I offer you these words from Robin Wall Kimmermer, the author of *Braiding Sweetgrass.*

“Until we can grieve for our planet we cannot love it—grieving is a sign of spiritual health. But it is not enough to weep for our lost landscapes; we have to put our hands in the earth to make ourselves whole again. Even a wounded world is feeding us. Even a wounded world holds us, giving us moments of wonder and joy. I choose joy over despair. Not because I have my head in the sand, but because joy is what the earth gives me daily and I must return the gift.”

With those words, I light our chalice and hope that they remind you of the resilience and joy of plants and the earth as we celebrate flower communion today.

So mote it be.

**Gathering Music**

“There Is a Garden from Trouble in Tahiti” by Leonard Bernstein

Sandra Hunt (piano) and Gary Russell (cello)

**Reading**

From *The Garden* by Freeman Patterson

Nancy Lorimer

I’d like to share a few lines with you from the book *The Garden*, written by my friend Freeman Patterson, renowned as a gardener and a garden photographer.

“When the wind blows warmer and the mists whirl through the forest and over the fields, the expectant earth stirs, and with her life energy begins the birthing process. Catkins appear on aspens and birch, sprightly green ferns shove upwards through the mulch of last year’s darkened fronds. In the meadow, a new and vibrant generation of daffodils begins to sway and dance, intent on celebration. Grass grows by itself. Spring days are days when everything seems possible again.”

He says, “I live inside myself more powerfully than I have in months. Because I feel earth’s life’s energy kindling, creating, birthing in me. I am inspired to journey out of doors and to travel inwards simultaneously, because the spring is everywhere. It's gardening time.”

**Song**

“The Sweet June Days”

Eleuthera Diconca-Lippert with Sandra hunt (piano)

**Daffodils at the Unitarian Church of Montreal**

Charlotte Durnford Dionne

Most of the daffodils blooming today have sprung from 175 bulbs, one bulb for each year of our Unitarian Church, planted in 2017. Previously, the family of Gordon Lorimer—husband, grandfather, and one-time UCM treasurer—had planted dozens of bulbs in his memory.

**Reflections on the Garden**

Rev. Diane Rollert, Barbara Goode, and Nancy Lorimer

Rev. Diane: Bienvenue du jardin de l’Eglise Unitarienne de Montréal. Welcome to the garden of the Unitarian Church of Montreal.

Barbara: My name is Barbara Goode.

Nancy: My name is Nancy Lorimer. I've been attached to the church for a very long time.

Barbara: I was getting close to retirement. I felt that I should reconnect with the church. I was very active as a youth; hadn’t done much for years. And the second thing—and the most drawing aspect—was that I live in an apartment, I don't have a balcony, and I really miss nature.

Nancy: That also corresponded to my stage in life as I left my comfortable home and moved to an apartment with a balcony, but that's not really a garden.

Barbara: So Alison called for volunteers. I thought, that's a good answer! That combines two things that I had in my mind.

Nancy: I was drawn to the Garden Committee when I wanted to a memorial for my late husband Gordon, and he loved daffodils. And I approached the Garden Committee. I became part of it. That was amplified when I was part of our 175th anniversary celebration, and we came up with the idea of planting 175 daffodil bulbs. I'm in it solidly now, raking and weeding and doing all of those things, as well as ordering bulbs.

Barbara: In this turbulent, fast-moving era of electronics and the asphalt virtual realities, mention a garden and many of us urbanites of a certain age immediately take on a wistful look. As summer children, our “free roaming” didn't refer to our cell phones, but to exploring on foot or bicycles, to cross territories that were still kissing cousins to the rural lifestyle of our great-grandparents. With a huge sense of adventure, we explored each other's backyards, caught and released fireflies at night, or monitored a bird's nest and snuck into the yet-undeveloped farmers’ fields on the fringes of our manicured streets. Nature and we were one until our evening curfews.

What was it like before the church was built?

Nancy: The site had a gas station on it for many, many years. And the gas station was removed and the ground was sanitized before we bought the site. And it was just a hole in the ground for a few months, and then this beautiful building emerged. And then, what to do with the surroundings?

Barbara: Thanks to the vision of church members as they rebuilt the UCM in 1996, we could also reap those benefits close to home.

Nancy: And it's still evolving—a beautiful space.

How did the garden get started back in 1996?

Barbara: It came up through an innocent question that Jim Douglas posed to the church Planning Committee: “Are you thinking of doing anything about the grounds in the garden?” Then, of course you know, whenever you ask a question, you become the chairperson. So Jim did become the chairperson of the very first committee in ’96. They worked for a year on the garden. Year after year, it was always the perennial problem that they didn't have any young people that would work in the garden. So it's always been senior members of the church who have done a lot of weeding and digging. Maybe it's keeping us all young.

Nancy: The garden was organized along a green plan, i.e. low maintenance, minimal water requirements, and very little in the way of grooming.

Barbara: It was really the first time that the church had had a garden.

Nancy: We have a wonderful lavender garden, lots of thyme, gradually added plants such as monarda and milkweed to attract bees and butterflies. Our guru gardener, Gail Goldin, has done a marvelous job of uncovering mysterious plants. For years, these had disappeared. We added a bike stand to accommodate green travelers.

In the back garden, we have three serviceberry trees donated by Elizabeth Anglin, May Kersten, and the late Ruth di Giovanni, and there's also a serviceberry dedicated to Andy and Jane Hugessen, and a tree in the front garden which memorializes Douglas Clark, and the Tree of Peace in the back garden, the tall white pine, the kind they used to use for ship masts. And the Tree of Peace came with a dedication to First Nations. “It is the living, breathing gift from the children of RE. As its branches shelter us in cool shade, may its presence bring serenity to our garden and inspire our spirit.”

The Hiroshima Gingko Tree

Barbara: Our famous little gingko tree came out of a 2018 initiative that, really, we can trace back to the Social and Environmental Concerns Committee of our church, in collaboration with the United Church here in Westmount. The Hiroshima Green Legacy Project started with Japan. It started with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and it is an effort through offering the seeds of the original gingkos that survived those horrible bombings. People plant seeds; they commit to world peace; they commit to being caregivers for the earth. Our phase one involved four different organizations besides ourselves. The second phase would expand this to other interested communities, and we have little seedlings growing at the Westmount Park church, which are doing fine and are ready to be taken over by foster parents. Something Melanie told me: that she and a friend were walking by, and the friend looked at our Victorian-graveyard look, that metal fencing around the gingko for protection, and they said to her, “Is that somebody famous in your church that you have buried there?” So Melanie said, “No, no, it's a tree.”

What do you love most about the garden?

Barbara: I just like meandering and seeing bees lighting on— seeing the insects that are growing in amongst. Not that I like them when they're crawling down my neck.

Nancy: Oh, it has to be the lavender. I'm absolutely passionate about lavender. I'm in love with growth in the garden; it's exhilarating.

Barbara: We have a chance to get close to the earth, just as I did when I was a little kid. I love watching ants, and I like watching bees, and butterflies, and all the things that are there because the flowers are there and the plants are there. It’s really impressive how a little thing can have so much impact on you. And that's good, because otherwise all we're doing is weeding!

Nancy: There’s a great feel of camaraderie in the garden, lots of good feeling. And it's not all about weeds. At the UCM garden, I get my fingers in the dirt.

The original Garden Committtee:

Jim Douglass, chair

Krystyna Matula

Diana Scott

Rev. Ray Drennan

Rosalind Moquette

Deborah Bounka

Helen Krurtz-Weil

Hannelore Poncelet

The current Garden Committee:

Barbara Goode

Nancy Lorimer

Gail Goldin

Fran Nott

Patricia Philip

Christina Duvander

Voices sing:

Earth was given as a garden, cradle for humanity;

Tree of life and tree of knowledge placed for our discovery.

**Share the Plate**

Caite Clark

Good morning, everybody! Thanks for joining us for virtual worship this morning. My name is Caite Clark; my pronouns are *she*/*her*, and I am a Religious Explorations teacher at the Unitarian Church of Montreal.

This month for Share the Plate, we are donating to the Native Friendship Centre of Montreal. The Native Friendship Centre is an important resource for Indigenous people here on Tiohtià:ke because it helps connect them to vital community services and gives a sense of kinship in an urban centre.

While we’re here, I'd like to acknowledge that this has been a difficult start to June. There are a lot of troubling things going on in the news, and a lot of people are feeling at risk. When we're in a position of privilege, one of the things that we can do to help is to donate. If you are in the position to give this month, I encourage you to check out local organizations in Montreal that support marginalized communities, such as the Native Friendship Centre.

Any gift is welcome.

**Video: Flower Communion**

Rev. Diane and various members of the Worship Team and congregation are seen sharing flowers and enjoying their beauty. The video closes with this text:

“A Blessing for Flowers” by Norbert Čapek (1870 – 1942)

Infinite spirit of Life: We ask thy blessing on these, thy messengers of fellowship and love. May they remind us, amid the diversities, of knowledge and of gifts, to be one in desire and affection and devotion to thy holy will.

May they also remind us of the value of comradeship, of doing and sharing alike. May we cherish friendship as one of thy most precious gifts.

May we not let awareness of another’s talents discourage us or sully our relationship, but may we realize that, whatever we can do, great or small, the efforts of all of us are needed to do thy will in this world.

**Song**

“Colour and Fragrance”

Eleuthera Diconca-Lippert with Sandra Hunt (piano)

**Reflection**

The One Colour We Don’t See

Rev. Diane Rollert

The theme of this month is Joy, a theme we chose nearly a year ago, not knowing what the world would look like today. Normally, this one of the most joyous days in our annual calendar. We arrive at church with flowers in our hands ready to celebrate our annual flower communion.

We tell the story the first flower communion, of Rev. Norbert Čapek, founder of the Unitarian movement in Prague, and his wife Maja, who created and celebrated the first flower communion on June 4, 1922.

The idea the Čapeks had was so simple: They created a ceremony that would be welcoming to the diverse members of their congregation who came from Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish backgrounds. Each congregant would bring a flower to exchange with someone else. The beauty and uniqueness of each blossom was a way to honour the beauty and uniqueness of each person.

That’s all it was. That’s all it’s been for all these years that we’ve observed this tradition. This year, though, we can’t physically exchange flowers. My heart aches to be with you in our building on de Maisonneuve, to revel in the garden (where I usually pick a few extra blossoms, just in case), and to watch as everyone delights in taking a new flower home.

But there is much more that weighs on my heart today than having to miss this ritual. Sadly, today’s turmoil and chaos make Norbert Čapek’s story resonate for me in new ways.

You may remember the tragic ending of his life story. When the Nazis took control of Prague in 1940, they found Dr. Čapek 's gospel of the inherent worth and beauty of every human person to be "too dangerous to the Reich.” He was condemned to death.

Biographer Richard Henry writes that Čapek had “a sun-drenched, pre-Holocaust faith” . . . “that sustained thousands of his compatriots during the darkness of Nazi occupation.” Concentration camp survivors, who knew Čapek at Dachau, said that his faith enabled him to endure his own martyrdom with equanimity and heroism.

Norbert Čapek died at Dachau in October of 1942, holding onto to a faith that had enabled him to create harmony amidst theological diversity in a very polarized time. As I think of his legacy, I can’t help but wonder how he would have responded to what we are witnessing today.

In the past few days, leaders in the Canadian Unitarian Universalist movement have been in intense conversation. Many groups have begun to release statements in support of Black Lives Matter. Groups like Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice, and Unicamp of Ontario have voiced their concern and their support. And they have received their share of critiques. Is there any point, the critics ask, of releasing statements or flying Black Lives Matter flags if we don’t do anything more than offer lip service to a social-justice cause. These are reasonable questions.

But this morning I woke up to a message from Yvette Salinas, a person of colour, a member of our congregation, a lay chaplain, as well as executive director of UniCamp. I hope that she doesn’t mind me quoting her here. She wrote:

“I for one am glad CUSJ has chosen to make a statement regarding Black Lives Matter. It's easy to say that's not enough . . . because it's not . . . but it's a first step. A first step that now requires real action, or at least a plan of action moving forward . . .

“Black UUs and UUs who are Indigenous and People of Colour are listening and watching right now for statements of solidarity. There has been so much trauma lately that statements can help lift spirits, momentarily. I expect they will continue to watch for real action and change, however . . . holding our organizations accountable (as we should be).”

I think of Norbert Čapek, of the sun-drenched faith that has always drawn me in, that usually makes me want to focus on the sunny side of this day, to think only about the mysterious beauty of every flower and the peace and comfort of the garden—which are worth celebrating. But I can’t be all sunshine today. Maybe I need more fire than soft light right now.

So, I offer you this prayer, these words that have been weighing heavily upon my heart over this past week.

Oh, powerful winds of change,

Oh, flowing waters of justice,

George Floyd was murdered

at the hands of a police officer,

crying out for breath for one reason:

Because he was Black.

Ahmaud Arbery died,

shot in the back while jogging

at the hands of an off-duty police officer

for one reason:

Because he was Black.

Breonna Taylor,

Sandra Bland,

Philando Castile,

the list goes on and on,

all died for one reason:

Because they were Black.

We lull ourselves into thinking

it’s just the US,

it’s not us.

Not here,

not in Quebec.

Not in Canada.

But right here, right now,

how many times do we have to explain

race is a social construct?

How many times do we have to say

Black lives matter?

How many times do I tiptoe

around my own fragility

and the fragility of the white people

who are my friends, my family,

my community?

How many times have I gotten a pass

without knowing it?

How many times does my privilege

cloud my vision,

stop my hearing,

make me feel guilty

and still keep me silent?

How many times do

I avoid the words

“white supremacy”

because I’m afraid the listener’s ears will close?

I am not just talking about

the white hood on the klansman,

or the swastika tattooed on the skinhead

or of the politician who speaks

with openly racist words.

I’m talking about us,

in this place, in this time,

where a white woman can point to her skin

and tell a black woman

that in Quebec “we don’t see colour!”

And I awkwardly apologize for the affront

not knowing where to begin to explain

that none of us are colourblind

We see colour, all the time —

just not our own white skin.

We see colour in the way police

profile young Black and Indigenous men.

We see colour in the way police

murder Black and Indigenous people

with no convictions,

no prison terms,

no consequences.

We see colour in the name

at the top of a CV —

“Sounds foreign to me.

Reject!”

We see colour in the way

we clutch our purses on the street,

and on the elevator.

We see colour in the way

we dominate the conversation,

and don’t allow for a pause

of respectful silence,

because we were raised to take up space

in this society.

How many times

does a hand get slapped

until the wounds appear

and won’t heal?

How many times

do we try to tell ourselves

that racism only lives down south

in the United States,

not here in Canada,

not here where we’ve had

a not-so-hidden tradition

of white people dressing up

in brownface and blackface

so they can enjoy themselves,

laugh,

and then wash it off,

with no consequence.

How many times do we ignore the fact

that people of colour are dying

in this pandemic

at alarming rates,

not because they are somehow weaker

but because they are the ones

on the front lines,

in the nursing homes

in the hospitals,

and in the factories,

taking care of us?

How many times do I have to hear

that 170 years of history

is an acceptable excuse

for not standing up now

because in our very white way,

we don’t want to do anything

unless it’s perfect?

We’d rather offer critiques from the sidelines.

We’re so good at that.

How many times

do I have to hear

that all Black and Indigenous

people live lives of impoverishment

and desperation,

when these are proud cultures,

loving communities,

that have much to teach us,

but we prefer not to venture

into places

we’ve never been

and take for granted

the images that news, films,

and television

feed us as a steady diet

to fatten our fear?

But I tell you,

this is a moment of hope.

This is a moment when people

are rising all over the world.

People of all ages and

colours

who are saying

enough is enough,

Black lives matter,

the words filling the street

in bright yellow,

screaming for justice

in Washington D.C.,

and now on our streets of Montreal.

Silence makes us complicit.

Change comes when we rise up together.

Our values are calling to us:

don’t turn your back.

We’re not rising up for some foreign other,

we’re rising up in support

of people in our own families,

in our own congregation,

in our own communities.

Writing from the concentration camp

of Dachau,

days before he died,

Unitarian minister, Norbert Čapek wrote these words:

*It is worthwhile to live*

*and fight courageously*

*for sacred ideals.*

*O blow ye evil winds*

*into my body's fire*

*my soul you'll never unravel.*

Racism, white supremacy,

hurts us all.

Our souls are at stake.

Rise up with me,

not only this week,

not only next week

not only while protestors are in the street,

but for the long haul,

because enough is enough.

Amen.

**Music for Meditation**

“Spiegel im Speigel” by Avro Pärt

Sandra Hunt (piano) and Gary Russell (cello)

**Song**

“Spring Has Now Unwrapped the Flowers”

Eleuthera Diconca-Lippert with Sandra Hunt (piano)

**Closing Words**

“Sojourns in the Parallel World” by Denise Levertov

Barbara Goode

We live our lives of human passions,

cruelties, dreams, concepts,

crimes and the exercise of virtue

in and beside a world devoid

of our preoccupations, free

from apprehension—though affected,

certainly, by our actions. A world

parallel to our own though overlapping.

We call it "Nature"; only reluctantly

admitting ourselves to be "Nature" too.

Whenever we lose track of our own obsessions,

our self-concerns, because we drift for a minute,

an hour even, of pure (almost pure)

response to that insouciant life:

cloud, bird, fox, the flow of light, the dancing

pilgrimage of water, vast stillness

of spellbound ephemerae on a lit windowpane,

animal voices, mineral hum, wind

conversing with rain, ocean with rock, stuttering

of fire to coal—then something tethered

in us, hobbled like a donkey on its patch

of gnawed grass and thistles, breaks free.

No one discovers

just where we've been, when we're caught up

into our own sphere (where we must

return, indeed, to evolve our destinies)

—but we have changed, a little.