

5 14 23 Creating the Future

UUFM—Rev. Rita Capezzi

Our Soul Matters theme for the month of May is “Creativity.” Today we explore together—through story and song, through science and parable, and through our own lived experiences—the promise of creativity.

I don’t know if you can see what is in front of the pulpit this morning. Can you see? Sometimes a plant, sometimes a vase of flowers, today it’s a single flower and something that looks like a big rock. It is a big rock. A rock full of fossilized shells and plants. It’s my rock, a rock I picked up out of Red Bank Creek, a stream flowing into the Allegheny River in northwestern Pennsylvania. My fossil rock—I hauled it out of that creek when I was 12, and I’ve hauled it around ever since. It’s kind of heavy—you can come up later and see for yourself, if you like—and I wanted it, want it still, for the fossils that pock its surface. The shells and plants signs of biological life long over, but the rock endures and remains and takes on new life, especially in the stories I choose to tell about it. More about rock later. A little more about the flower now.

Like you, I feel sure, I am so happy this morning for the green—green everywhere, evidence of the lushness and growth of a spring long awaited. Everything finally green, and the seeds for it all planted long ago. Sometimes, seeds flowing through the fractal patterns of natural growth, organized though seemingly random. Other times planted by human hands in purposeful ways, but jumping the row or the fence and going their own way. Several years ago, I came across a cartoon with two people digging together in a garden. It read something like this: “‘I’m expecting flowers next year.’ ‘How do you know you will get them?’ ‘Because I am planting seeds.’” Purposeful human planting for a particular outcome. Creating the future which we want.

In a time of climate crisis, we are perhaps more aware than usual about what we need to plant and why. More native varieties. More food for the native pollinators. More swale and berm to prevent erosion and poisonous runoff. More prairie, even as an aid to the growth of standard food crop. We plant all this and more, to protect the land, to promote the plants, to save the planet. And also, to save ourselves, because caring for the earth is to care for ourselves, for we are nature. Philosopher Alan Watt laments that “civilized human beings are alarmingly ignorant of the fact that they are continuous with [our] natural surroundings. It is as necessary to have air, water, plants, insects, birds, fish, and mammals as it is to have brains, hearts, lungs, and stomachs. The former are our external organs in the same way that the latter are our internal organs.” And Watt goes on to say, “The sun, the earth, and the forests are just as much features of [our] own body as [our] brain.”

Within this context, the insistent reminder that we *are* nature—not above or beyond it—is more than a metaphor when we evoke the great Pachamama, great womb birthing all life. And we often evoke our Mother Earth in terms of that warm and verdant surface of the world, full of various life forms and beauty. Full of flowers. And the image of growth and beauty and care, this suits our notion of the gentle arms of loving mothers—all and any of the loving people mothering us—with their warmth and tenderness. We all need this in some fashion, to be the center of a mother’s

story, ever-hopeful for a future of imagination and adventure, of the becoming of self and the emergence of new actors and makers in the world. “May we reflect with gratitude on the wide spectrum of mothering that happens in our lives and in our communities.” “For all the communities that mother and for all who depend on the Great Mother,” today, “you are held — and beloved.”

On the American calendar, today is the day we set aside to commemorate those who have mothered us, to celebrate them with brunches and bouquets of flowers and fanciful cards and other tokens of our esteem. Or at least to bring them into our minds, if they are not here physically anymore. Mother’s Day has roots, however, in social activism of the late-19th and early-20th Centuries. Unitarian and writer of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” Julia Ward Howe wanted a day set aside for mothers to protest war, specifically The Civil War. In 1870, she published “The Mother’s Day Proclamation,” hoping to spark a world-wide movement of mothers for peace. And Anna Jarvis, herself a woman who elected not to have children, and though she lived to lament the commercialization of Mother’s Day, Anna Jarvis started the celebration in 1908 with a service at her Episcopal church commemorating her mother, Ann Jarvis. Ann Jarvis, a mother of eleven though only four survived infancy, she well understood the hardships of motherhood. Ann had been the organizer of work groups of mothers to aid struggling and impoverished mothers. For the efforts of peace and mutual aid, Julia, Ann, Anna, all these women were planting seeds, creating the world they want to live in, calling together mothers and honoring mothers as a way to make the world better than it is. Does it make an ultimate difference? Yes. Did their efforts stop war or end poverty? No. But their examples of planting demonstrate our interdependence, the call to resist devastation and to cultivate good whenever and wherever good possible.

We do a disservice to Pachamama, to the Great Mother, though, if we think only of the soft skin of her garden, green with plants and abundant with beauty. We do a disservice to those who mother or organize for and with mothers of all varieties, because looking at only the verdant surface denies the solid and rocky core beneath. To conceive of mothering only as tenderness is to ignore the stony and solid realities of what it takes, and on what scale, to create life and enable transformation. Out of wombs, we have all emerged. Out of wombs, all of us. And wombs are not a place of sweetness and light. Wombs are the place of energies and forces ripping away and dividing and of destroying possibilities as genes are turned on and off, as we become what we must in order to survive the perils of birth and the perils of living in this world as human beings. We are all of us created within wombs, within cauldrons of roiling change. For the Earth is also a great fiery cauldron, as is the universe itself.

The emerging universe was and is a womb, giving birth to all that is—“What is central to the origination of Earth life is the history of the universe—the cosmic dynamics that have yielded our galaxy, our star, our planet, and the atoms that form living beings.” (12) Subatomic particles and the simplest elements collided, gaseous clouds forming and condensing and exploding, stars coalescing and then shattering—the birth-and-death star cycles (15) happening even now, somewhere in our expansive universe, even as we sit on a green earth seemingly stable and merely cyclical. Yet on and within the planet, tectonic plates drift and crash into one another, though on a scale and following a season we can barely imagine let alone experience. (16) We trust science that it is true, our earth a rock as well as a garden.

Now, why is this important? Because transformation requires not only planting but explosion. It requires not only growth but stirring. Transformation requires force and fire and effort. That can seem heavy, but it is also creative and beautiful. What does that cauldron of transformation look like here, at the Fellowship? “Creativity is our ability to dream things up and make them happen.”

It is certainly great to have a bunch of independent thinkers in a room together, and I know we are all that. It is better, though, to have a room full of makers who will find a way to act together for a common purpose. Each’s ideas adding in but all subordinate to the processes of making a way together. I have a Peanuts cartoon on my bulletin board, given by one of you independent thinkers. It says, “There is no greater burden than great potential.” Oh, that sounds heavy as a rock, doesn’t it. But imagine the bubbling, rather than the burden, the rising up in the fiery cauldron of all the bubbles of thought and possibility, brewing and bubbling up, light and airy, delightful even if heavy, because joining together.

I am grateful for all the making evident in this Fellowship—for the community that companioned Jane Schostag as she made her journey, and the people who will pull together to provide a beautiful celebration of life to honor our beloved pillar. I am grateful for the team effort continuously making Sunday morning good for the long-haulers and welcoming for the new-comers. And the Rummage Sale, the Rummage Sale is a perfect example of potential bubbling up, of seeds planted and beauty rendered in the cultivation. Yes—there was the desire to generate some additional income, sure. Yes—there was the desire to clean out spaces that have been accumulating stuff for three years. Yes—there was the desire to return to something like normality after the pandemic. We are still adjusting, still counting our losses, still reckoning the costs. Yes—let’s remember the effort to garner volunteers—that sign up sheet that remained so blank for several weeks. And then the emails and calls to every imaginable person in the Fellowship, the effort of a few that yielded so many. So many willing to say, “Yes, I can do that.” The pulling together in one common effort, the sign of life, of planting, of a birth, something there now not there before. Work, hard work, beautiful work, community-creating, community-revealing, community-sustaining work. Solid. Good. Heavy as this rock, evidence of effort and transformation, pebbled with the past, foundation for possibility.

What else is brewing in the congregation—what is stirring that can be brought to birth in good time? What are you brewing? What do you want to see happen? What will you do to make it so? How can our dreams become realities? What are you planting because you want the future to look a certain way? What audacious hope does one of you hold for this community, vibrating within you and able to stir others into action? Now is always the time not planting and dreaming together.

Being alive means living in a mysterious universe. “The Mystery of why there is anything at all, instead of nothing. The Mystery of where the laws of physics came from. The Mystery of why the universe seems so strange.” (18) All we know is that life emerged, both fiery and green, and for that we can be grateful. But it doesn’t have to be a mystery what we want to do with our lives—especially collectively as part of a religious community. In such mysterious creativity, we, too, can participate, be part of the emergence that we desire, plant the seeds for the flowers we wish to see.

So let me offer a blessing upon this community of doers and makers, may you look around and be reminded of all that you have done and all that you are doing, all that you carry forward, dreaming our dream into existence, planting the flowers you wish to cultivate:

Blessed are those who make us laugh,
Blessed are those who make messes,
Blessed are those who make do,
Blessed are those who make love,
Blessed are those who make coffee and tea,
You who make with hands and hearts and minds,
Who make out of breath and bones and blood human lives,
Blessed are you, you all, the makers.
Blessed is the making.

As you dream and plant together, let love guide us. Complicated love. Hard-working love. Creative love. The love embodied within a life-giving and life-sustaining crucible. Yes, let us always be led by love. But let us allow peace to try us, too. Let the seemingly peaceful trouble us that we might renew our ability to dream dreams and make them happen. Let us be troubled enough that we might speak with bravest fire, dreaming and making the dream reality. And let us also act, firing the cauldron of creativity, each for our own re-creation and for that of this beloved Fellowship, as you remember, today and every day, that you are loved, you are worthy, you are welcome, and you are needed. May you feel it so. May it be so. And may we say together "Amen."

Goodenough, Ursula. *The Sacred Depths of Nature: How Life Has Emerged and Evolved*. 2nd Ed. Oxford University Press, 2023.