

## **5 7 23 You on Creativity** **UUFM—Rev. Rita Capezzi (2161)**

Our Soul Matters theme for the month of May is “Creativity.” So let us explore together now the meaning and promise of creativity—through poetry, through story, through song, through nature, and through our own lived experiences.

Poet and Queen of Punk Patti Smith wrote: “In times of strife, we have our imagination, we have our creative impulse, which are things that are more important than material things. They are the things we should magnify.” Imagination. Creative impulse. Creativity. Those are words that used to scare me a lot, because I had no discernible talents that fell into my understanding of what creativity was—I was not an artist, an actor, a painter or sculptor, not a musician. I am not a poet or the queen of punk.

I’ve learned, fortunately, that my definition was much too narrow. My definition was steeped in a kind of perfectionism and ambition—if I could not make something beautiful that was received as and recognized by others as original or artistic or really really good, well, I was not creative. Without recognition by others within a particular framework of value, I was not creative. Maybe you have felt this way, too.

Now, I recognize creativity as something more than artistic talent, and certainly more than fame or notices in the newspaper. Journalist and author Elizabeth Gilbert wrote: “The universe buries strange jewels deep within us all, and then stands back to see if we can find them. The hunt to uncover those jewels—that’s creative living.”

Let’s take a little time to consider both these definitions. Smith begins with a context of strife—strife as a precondition and a reason to release one’s creativity into the world. Trouble, conflict, discord. Well, our world certainly meets these conditions, doesn’t it? And even in the Fellowship, while “strife” is overstating things, we are living with stress. As things get set to change, in the midst of constant change, we are living with both fear and anticipation, with both a sense of loss and excitement for the new. And within this strife and stress, Smith imagines creativity as something simply “there,” inherent and waiting to be unleashed, something potential and ready to counter the challenging and unpleasant aspects of life. Gilbert positions this inherent, potential something as “jewels” the universe has buried within us all, treasures we have to hunt for, and to hunt for them is to be creative. And those jewels are inherent, available to all of us. Simply a part of being human beings.

I think there is wisdom to both these perspectives—the potential for creativity and the creativity in living as if there is potential. Both Smith and Gilbert call us to live creatively, beyond the making of artistic things, though I think we all know how very good artistic things are. Our challenge, if you need as I did to expand your definition of creativity, is to see creativity as the ground of our human living. We live creatively when we problem-solve, finding solutions to what needs to be fixed. We live creatively when we find meaning within the sorrows of our lives. We live creatively when we remain open to joy. We live creatively when we see an injustice and work with others to remedy it. Creativity is the ground of our

human way of moving through life. Not only are there jewels of beauty and imagination within us, but we are the jewel itself. We are made of creativity, made of imagination and the dreaming always of what could be. Creativity is how we function. And this is not just a metaphor.

I think there is wisdom to both these perspectives—the potential for creativity and the creativity in living as if there is potential. And I think there is more to creativity and human expression than that. In order to pay more attention, to magnify the creative impulse, to seek the buried jewels, we need to remember, to remember, as Joy Harjo’s beautiful poem call us, a poem which inspired those beautiful illustrations in Macey’s story this morning, both words and images potential for inspiring us this morning. Harjo call us to:

Remember you are all people and all people are you.

Remember you are this universe and this universe is you.

Remember all is in motion, is growing, is you.

Harjo calls us to our ancestry, calls us to remember from where we came. And she calls us to more than that. We are each other, she says. We are the universe, she says. We are motion and change, she says. And this is not just a metaphor.

The call to remember puts me to mind of the story Macey read last week. Remember: last week, when we were reminded that a leaf is, that all leaves are, the original solar panel. We could say that the human invention of solar panels is an imitation of natural processes, and there would be truth to that. And we could also say that the invented solar panel and the leaves are echoes of each other, buried jewels that are both inherent as well as creatively brought forth. We human beings, we are not leaves, but we are nature. And it is vital to remembering human creativity that we understand I am not just making a metaphor here. We are not simply like nature, in that we are creative. Rather, we are imbued with creativity because we are nature. We are nature itself, and we move through reality in the ways that all nature does. What does this mean, and why is it important?

In her book, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, cell and evolutionary biologist Ursula Goodenough unfolds scientific knowledge in ways that provide a ground for a religious understanding of life, one that understands our existence and all existence as sacred. In this book, Goodenough demonstrates our human hyper relatedness to everything. She reminds us that “there are only five kinds of macromolecules that collaborate to generate all forms of modern life”: RNA, DNA, proteins, lipids or fats, and polysaccharides or sugars (44). Only five. In all forms of life. We are always more like each other than different from each other. We are, all of us, more like a mouse and a bison and a leaf than we are different from those beings. I find that beautiful and astonishing. You can understand better, maybe, why indigenous peoples refer to everything as relatives.

And these five building blocks of all forms of life, these operate along evolutionary pathways. Goodenough quotes the father of modern evolutionary science, Charles Darwin: “From so simple a beginning, endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.” In all the life forms, the pathways are the same. As in music, so in biology, “bits of the old were woven together with the new to generate the next” (75). Evolution, that which makes the mouse the mouse

and the bison the bison and the leaf the leaf, it makes us, too. It makes all fit and adaptive to each's biological niche, "a beautiful network of feedback and crosstalk to generate not only a viable cell but the best possible cell under the circumstances." All cells, all of us, all of life, made and remade constantly by the same forces. Creativity is the ground of all being, including our being. And this Goodenough calls us to remember. She writes: "now we realize that we are connected to all creatures. Not just in food chains and ecological equilibrium. We share common ancestry" (83).

This, to me, all of this is miraculous and marvelous, how it should be that we are all connected, all the way up and down, all the way across. And that "we" means all of us in this room, all human beings, all living beings, all, connected by five macromolecules and the evolutionary processes that enable us to fill our niche adaptively, creatively. Evolution is about adaptation and fit, not about mere survival or strength. These last are the consequences of evolution, not the causes. The creative realities of evolutionary biology, the creativity inherent in the functioning of all living things, this provided a remarkable ground for a theological perspective, for a life lived religiously.

Our bodies matter—the surprising diversity of their shapes and ways of being. Our bodies link us to all bodies, so much the same and also importantly different. As Unitarian Universalist with attention to this religious naturalism, we need not relegate our bodies as second fiddle to the spirit, that mind-body split that insists we are simply ghosts in a machine, that the material is less sacred than the spiritual. To look at our own bodies and our own inherent creativity is to know our own inherent worth and dignity as beings, without reference to what we do or make in the world. What we do or make in the world, those are not unimportant things. But like strength and survival in evolutionary terms, what each of us does or makes in the world are consequences of our sacred creativity, and never causes of our worth.

Our bodies are more than aches and pains, and living thus I will not discount that. When I hear the creep and groan of two trees rubbing together in the ravine, I hear an echo in my own knees and hips, in the cracks of my neck bones as I stretch. And there are more and different echoes for me to explore. The vision of my own arterial system echoes in the bare branches of the trees. How the ravine has taught me to look at reality, the bittersweetness of saying goodbye to this daily view, this intention of awareness. There are more and different such echoes for you as well. This act of remembering who we are, we all have access to this if we try, this co-creating reality, this making life more vivid, and ourselves, too, by paying attention.

Beloved poet Mary Oliver, her only repeated injunction, her only prayer is paying attention and giving thanks, all the prayer that is ever needed. Praying in this way—giving grateful attention constantly—this provides the understanding that situates us more a part of the natural whole as the consciousness, or part of it, of the universe. Remembering our true interconnectedness means we not only acknowledge the full range of human experience that might not be our own, but that we also allow ourselves to reverberate with the connectedness, to feel the pain and the joy that radiates from others into the world. Remembering our true interconnectedness enables us to experience the pain of others, keeping

us humble and aware. Remembering our true interconnectedness enables us to experience the joy of others so we might renew our flagging spirits and keep us aware, always aware and grateful.

I read now Mary Oliver's beautiful poem, "Snow Geese." May it help us know our own beauty, our own inherent creativity, our inherent and vital place in the wide Universe:

You do not have to be good.  
You do not have to walk on your knees  
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.  
You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.  
Meanwhile the world goes on.  
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain  
are moving across the landscapes,  
over the prairies and the deep trees,  
the mountains and the rivers.  
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,  
are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things.

Spirit of Life, come unto me I pray, reminding me over and over of my place in the family of things, my place as part of nature, manifesting its creativity and wonder. Spirit of Life, come unto us all, we the echoes of fire, of water, of mountain, all the echoes of nature within us and of us, a web of holy relationships. Spirit of Life, Creative Universe, Unfolding Evolution, inspire us to honor and extend the beauty we find in this world. "Creation is messy, inconvenient, and often uncooperative," our politics, our economy, our society. They are all messy, inconvenient, and often uncooperative. What shall we do? How shall we live? I urge you: do not despair. Have faith in the evolutionary forces of life, calling us, calling in so many ways and voices, and always calling. Will you answer?

"Now, open your eyes," open your eyes, now, open your hearts, "and look around you." Look. Look. "You are surrounded by the most astounding miraculous wonder of all: Each other, community, life ongoing caring about life ongoing. So it is. So it shall be, because we do care." Because we are creativity manifest, each of us and all of us together create the world as we wish it to be, turning the world around to make it good for all.

May we move with the rhythms of peace, compassion, and justice. May we open our hearts to all of our neighbors, open our souls to a renewal of faith, open our hands to join together in the work ahead, bringing with you every ounce of creativity that you have, every ounce of creativity that you are, 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*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Oxford University Press, 2023.