

The History of Flower Communion

Homily by Reverend Laurel Gray

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I find it comforting when things are old, especially traditions and practices that are well-worn because they are so loved. And flower communion is one such ritual, something that has existed for over a hundred years.

I know there has been a lot of fear and anxiety in our nation, especially as we lead up to the presidential election. In these moments it can be hard to hold faith in collective change. So, I find it helpful to remember the stories of people who lived from their center, who had the courage to stand alone in their truth, and whose actions created untold ripples of love and influence.

We celebrate flower communion because of one such person. He was a Unitarian minister named Norbert Čapek and he lived in Czechoslovakia around the turn of the last century. In 1923 he created a ritual for his congregation, hoping to give his congregants a way to celebrate the inherent worth of all people.

Then, 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, as Nazi records show, "too dangerous to the Reich [for him] to be allowed to live." He was arrested and transported to the Dachau concentration camp, where he was killed the following year. So, while flower communion is beautiful and joyful, it represents a powerful idea.

Flower communion was brought to the United States by Čapek's wife, Maja. The ritual we perform today honors the inherent worth of all human beings and the sacredness of diversity—a belief that has the power to crack the foundation of systemic oppression. Because systemic oppression is moral exclusion, the idea that some people are more human than others makes violence against other people possible.

But we are Universalists, which is the opposite of moral exclusion—our conviction, like Čapek's, is that no one's humanity is ever conditional and there is no way to be cast out of the circle of humanity. And we are people of a covenant, so this is not only a belief, but a promise. We

promise to treat all people with inherent worth and dignity. We promise to never lead with cruelty or exclusion, but to always draw the circle wider.

Our flower communion ritual is a celebration of diversity and humanity. But we don't just bring flowers and sit in our pews and call it a day. This is a communion service—a moment for creating common union between separate parts, for bringing ourselves together, for creating an abundance of color and courage. We all bring our different flowers towards the front of the sanctuary to make a beautiful archway. And as we leave, we find a new flower to take with us.

Here's what I know. In finding our own well of spirit and courage and in living a life that holds the balance between our individual realities and our collective flourishing, we call each other into the place of love and courage.

Even when the world feels unsteady, we can trust ourselves to grow, to adapt, and to change. And we can trust each other to meet us in the place of flowering, the place of hope, the place of courage.

May we begin this year grounded in the knowledge that we are not alone, and that we will find our way.

Now, let us begin our flower communion ritual.

Source:

Reginald Zottoli, "The Flower Communion: A Service of Celebration for Religious Liberals," <https://www.uua.org/files/documents/zottolireginald/flowercommunion.pdf>