

Resolute Joy: A Beltane Celebration
Sunday, May 1, 2022
Tri-County Unitarian Universalists
Summerfield, FL
Rev. Cynthia A. Snively

Whistle Stop: Extracts from [A Simple Beltane Ritual - Sage Goddess](#)

Flowers, a fire, your lover, springtime. What gives you joy? And are you resolute in recognizing and honoring it?

Sometimes we concentrate on what went wrong or on our business and we don't give that same type of attention to what brings us happiness and joy. And they can be such simple things. I got into my apartment when I moved before my furniture was delivered. Having a bed to sleep in brings me joy. My favorite foods- roasted butternut squash, blueberries, bread bring me joy. Watching the movement of tree branches in a wind, finding shapes in clouds with a child, sitting around a campfire with friends doing nothing. All of these things bring me joy.

The English Orthodox rabbi, philosopher, theologian, and author Jonathan Sacks said, "Make space in your life for the things that matter, for family and friends, love and generosity, fun and joy. Without this, you will burn out in mid-career and wonder where your life went." Most of us are done with careers but we can still be wondering where life is going. I have heard many of you say you are too busy. At this point in life, you are supposed to be busy with the things you love. If you have bridge, swimming, a get together with friends and a chance to do a kind deed all in one day maybe that is too much at 72 or 85 Pick which ones you will do and rejoice that you have all of those opportunities.

I titled this sermon Resolute Joy. Can you really resolve to be joyful? I have described myself more than once as a person who is not inclined to heights or depths in emotion. I could win a million-dollar lottery and respond by saying, "how nice." But at the same time, I could lose my job or have my car blow up and respond with, "ok. now what?" You may never see me jumping up and down or turning cartwheels but the very calmness of my emotions brings me joy.

Many of you know by now that the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh is one of my favorite spiritual teachers. Mitchell Ratner of the Stillwater Mindful Practice Center in Takoma Park, Md wrote this two years ago, "Thay's (Thich Nhat Hanh's) teachings on suffering and joy seem especially relevant now, as the covid-19 virus, and the efforts to 'flatten the curve' bring dislocation and hardships into all our lives, and stories of individual and collective anguish fill the news media and our minds. Thay begins his book, *Being Peace*, with encouragement not to be pulled under by our difficulties:

'Life is filled with suffering, but it is also filled with many wonders, like the blue sky, the sunshine, the eyes of a baby. To suffer is not enough. We must also be in touch with the wonders of life. They are within us and all around us, everywhere, any time.'

"I was reminded this week that Thay's recommendation to be 'in touch with the wonders of life' was directed to himself as well as to his students. During the recently completed *In the Footsteps of Thich Nhat Hanh* online retreat, Jack Kornfield reflected on a poignant teaching he received from Thay:

“I had an experience being with a small group of teachers who had gathered to study the dharma with him. He was teaching about smiling and bringing joy into meditation. At times I had imagined that this was a little bit lightweight, to sit and smile the half-smile of the Buddha, when there is so much suffering in the world, of hunger, continuing warfare, racism, poverty and all the things that we know. I thought it was a little bit like pasting a smiley-face on top of something deeper that our hearts need to open to, if we are to be liberated in this moment and at this time—if we are to open the great heart of compassion.

“As he was teaching joy and smiling I had the strange experience of feeling sadder and more filled with tears and grief than I could have imagined or expected. I couldn’t understand it. Was it something in my own history I was touching, of my own trauma and pain? When I sat next to him at lunch I asked him quite frankly, ‘Thay, when you were sitting there and teaching smiling and joy, I became very sad and felt a lot of grief. But I don’t understand, was it mine or was it yours?’

“He sat quietly for a moment and then looked back and he said, ‘Oh I have so much grief for what I have seen. That is why I teach joy,’” [Suffering, Joy, and Thich Nhat Hanh | \(stillwatermpc.org\)](#).

Reading this reminded me of a part of a poem by the Lebanese-American poet Kahlil Gibran, “Your joy is your sorrow unmasked.

And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears.

And how else can it be?

The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain.

Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter’s oven?

And is not the lute that soothes your spirit, the very wood that was hollowed with knives?

When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy.

When you are sorrowful look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight.”

Last Sunday as I was driving back from the installation service for the Gainesville minister, I heard an interview with the Catholic priest Father Boyle on the show Kelly Corrigan Wonders. The Kelly Corrigan website introduces the interview this way, “If you haven’t heard of Father Greg Boyle, let us introduce you: a Jesuit priest who has a touch of Santa Claus in his affect, Greg Boyle has collaborated with thousands of former gang members to build thriving businesses and communities of radical acceptance in East LA. He is a man who is sure that love is the answer to every question and has lived a life that offers him daily proof.” The quote from Father Boyle that opens the session is, “If it is true that the traumatized are more likely to cause trauma and damaged people cause damage, then it is equally true, has to be, that a cherished person is gonna be able to find their way to the **joy** there is in cherishing themselves and others,” [Take 2 - Father Greg Boyle on Character, Change and Kindness Dosing — kellycorrigan](#).

Corrigan says, “There’s all this awesome research coming out about awe. To be in a state of awe used to refer to the divine but now could refer to the Grand Canyon or a person holding the door for someone. These little acts can be a guide that makes us more cooperative, makes us more ripe to sacrifice. I feel like you’re a person who’s using awe to keep your hope sturdy and intact in the face of trauma.”

Boyle responds, “The thing that gets us into trouble is if your goal is to be happy then you are not as sturdy as you think. Don’t settle for happiness when you’re being offered joy. So joy is really a totally different thing. Joy doesn’t really ask for return. It’s just out there. It’s loving, being loving. Trouble comes when it’s about success...That’s what gets us into trouble because we think it’s about the measurable and the evidence-based outcome as we always talk about. No, it isn’t. It’s just about dosing and loving and what happens when you cherish people...,” [” Take 2 - Father Greg Boyle on Character, Change and Kindness Dosing — kellycorrigan.](#)

Boyle has seen gang members come out of gangs and stay out forever. He has also presided over many, many funerals for gang members who did not get out. He could not have stayed in this work for 37 years now if his goal had been happiness rather than joy.

It is interesting how themes emerge all around us when we start looking for them. At the interim ministers’ retreat I took part in this week part of Nickole Brown’s poem “Against Despair” was read at one of the worship services. It begins,
“Reader, meet the two women who sunk
everything they had into taking in broken
animals—the gimpy and oozing
critters, the ugly, lopsided, tail-less
pets, urine-soaked and drooling, zested
with fleas, the matted and discarded
scrapheaps left growling and bucking, pissing
on everything, the good-riddance left roped
to a chain-link fence.

“No, I take that back.
Instead I want you to be

“them: I want you crazy
enough to try to fix them—to feed
and brush and bathe and dip and sweetmilk
those beasts whole; I want you to try,
to always try, despite the odds,”

Much later in the poem a young goat these women have been caring for dies. The poem says,
“There really wasn’t a thing you could
do, but admit it: if you knew,
if you really could say he would not have died
last night but would certainly die
tomorrow, you’d force yourself

“out of bed and do what it is you do:...

“This is your job. It’s what
you do; it’s what needs to be
done,” [January 2018 Nickole Brown \(thrushpoetryjournal.com\).](#)

I remember the piece by Thandeka in the back of our hymnal that ends, "From within this world my despair is transformed to hope, and I begin anew the legacy of caring." And back to Thich Nhat Hanh, "I have so much grief for what I have seen. That is why I teach joy."

At Beltane the lovers, the god and the goddess, are reunited, but they have been separated for all of the winter season and we know they will be separated again this coming winter. The joy is greater because they have been and will be apart. "The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain."

Let us pray, We give thanks for the joy that comes with caring. May we embrace ourselves and one another, cherishing each one and in that cherishing knowing great joy. So Mote it Be.