

Celebrating Spring  
Sunday, March 24, 2024  
Tri-County Unitarian Universalists  
Summerfield, FL  
Unitarian Universalist congregation of Lake County  
Eustis, FL  
Rev. Cynthia Snavelly

John Soos wrote,  
"To be of the Earth is to know  
the restlessness of being a seed  
the darkness of being planted  
the struggle toward the light  
the pain of growth into the light  
the joy of bursting and bearing fruit  
the love of being food for someone  
the scattering of your seeds  
the decay of the seasons  
the mystery of death and  
the miracle of birth."

My father loved his strawberries and his fruit trees. He had a quarter acre garden, most of which was strawberries but also included a row of raspberry bushes. Around the rest of my parents' acre of land he had apple trees of multiple varieties and over time a white and a yellow peach, an apricot, a pear, a plum, a cherry. Most of the trees bore well, and we ate well from them. But we never got any cherries from the cherry tree. Inevitably, the birds would eat all the cherries before they were ready to be picked by human hands.

At my father's funeral we sang a Christian hymn by Natalie Sleeth. The first verse is, "In the bulb there is a flower; in the seed, an apple tree; in cocoons, a hidden promise: butterflies will soon be free! In the cold and snow of winter there's a spring that waits to be, unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see."

My father's body is in the ground now. No green burial so it may be centuries until his body decays into the ground, but I expect that he would enjoy being food for a tree. He loved his garden and his trees.

I remember a poem by May Sarton about her mother.

"An Observation"

"True gardeners cannot bear a glove  
Between the sure touch and the tender root,  
Must let their hands grow knotted as they move  
With a rough sensitivity about  
Under the earth, between the rock and shoot,  
Never to bruise or wound the hidden fruit.  
And so I watched my mother's hands grow scarred,  
She who could heal the wounded plant or friend  
With the same vulnerable yet rigorous love;

I minded once to see her beauty gnarled,  
But now her truth is given me to live,  
As I learn for myself we must be hard  
To move among the tender with an open hand,  
And to stay sensitive up to the end  
Pay with some toughness for a gentle world.”

We may most feel our connection with nature on a hike in the woods or up a mountain, but it is often in our parents’ gardens that we learn our responsibility to nature. Plants need to be watered. Weeds need to be pulled. Fruit needs to be picked.

I could not find the quote, but I have read that Malcolm X begged his mother for a little patch of land for his own garden and that she gave it to him. He was proud to put his peas on the family table, and when he had trimmed his rows and everything in his garden patch was just so he would lay between the rows and dream all kinds of things.

I remember the warmth of just turned ground, the sweetness of a strawberry just off the vine, sitting in the crotch of an old apple tree in the corn field behind my parents’ house, walking down country roads with a plethora of orange day lilies growing wild in the gullies along the side. I was not separate from these things but one with them.

The Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh used the word interbeing. He said that as we meditate we realize that nothing and no one is a separate being. In his book Living Buddha, Living Christ he wrote, “The Buddhist term is *vipasyana* (insight or looking deeply). ‘Looking deeply’ means observing something or someone with so much concentration that the distinction between observer and observed disappears. The result is insight into the true nature of the object. When we look into the heart of a flower, we see clouds, sunshine, minerals, time, the earth and everything else in the cosmos in it. Without clouds there could be no rain, and there would be no flower. Without time, the flower could not bloom. In fact, the flower is made entirely of non-flower elements; it has no independent, individual existence. It ‘inter-is’ with everything else in the universe...When we see the nature of interbeing, barriers between ourselves and others are dissolved, and peace, love, and understanding are possible.”

The flower is connected to all. I am connected to all. I have often said that my holy word is “connection,” which is not so different from interbeing. And I, with Thich Nhat Hanh, believe that when we experience that connection peace, love and understanding become more possible.

Poet and bioregional advocate Gary Lawless asks us these questions; “When the animals come to us, asking for our help, will we know what they are saying? When the plants speak to us in their delicate, beautiful language, will we be able to answer them? When the planet herself sings to us in our dreams, will we be able to wake ourselves, and act?”

If we experience deep within ourselves our connection to the animals, the plants and the planet the answer will be “yes.”

A final meditation by Wendell Berry.  
“Sowing the seed, my hand is one with the earth.  
Wanting the seed to grow, my mind is one with the light.  
Hoing the crop, my hands are one with the rain.  
Having cared for the plants, my mind is one with the air.  
Hungry and trusting, my mind is one with the earth.

Eating the fruit, my body is one with the earth.”

We are one with the earth. May we rejoice in that blessing.