

**3<sup>rd</sup> July 2022 – ‘Flower Communion’**

**Led by Rev Kate Whyman**

**GATHERING MUSIC** ‘Come back as a flower’, Stevie Wonder and Syreeta Wright

<https://youtu.be/1aHuYNqrfyU>

## **WELCOME**

Welcome everyone to our service this morning. Welcome to you all, whether you are here in person or online today. Our theme for this month of July is FRIENDSHIP, and I’m particularly delighted to welcome our friends from the Plymouth Baha’i Community who are with us here in Plymouth, and to Brighton Unitarians who are joining us online, as well as to anyone joining us for the first time. A warm welcome to you all.

The British novelist and playwright Frances Hodgson Burnett wrote, “If you look the right way, you can see that the whole world is a garden.” And that’s the way we’re going to be looking on this summer morning, because this service is going to take the form of a FLOWER COMMUNION, a service originally designed by Rev Norbert Capek for his Unitarian congregation in Prague in 1923, and which has become a popular service in Unitarian churches all over the world to this day. We will be using some of Capek’s own words, taking part in the flower communion ritual which he devised, and hearing a little about his life and legacy.

## **CHALICE LIGHTING**

But let’s begin by lighting our chalice candle, as is our custom, as a symbol of our free religious faith. And if you’re joining us online you might like to light your own candle with me.

We are a welcoming people of diverse beliefs who commit to nourishing the spirit, broadening the mind, nurturing the earth, and building community. May this flame we kindle remind us to strive, today and every day, to love beyond belief.

*Please hold on to your flowers for a little longer while we sing*

## **1st HYMN 13 (P) Bring flowers to our altar**

Bring flowers to our altar to show nature's beauty  
The harvest of goodness in earth, sky and sea.  
Bring light to our altar to guide every nation  
From hatred to love and to humanity.

Bring a dove to our altar its wings ever flying  
In permanent quest for the peace all may share.  
Bring bread to our altar the hungry supplying  
And feeding the poor who depend on our care.

Bring hope to our altar in your gentle dreaming  
Of all the good things that will make your heart glad.  
Bring love to our altar, a bright witness beaming  
To all who are burdened, or lonely or sad.

Bring work to our altar to help every nation  
And celebrate all that's already achieved.  
Come yourself to our altar in true dedication  
To all the ideals we in common believe.

*Welsh Traditional Melody, words © Lena Cockroft*

## **MEDITATION ON YOUR FLOWER**

The central ritual of the Flower Communion is the sharing – not of bread and wine – but of flowers. But first we begin with a meditation.

Most of you have brought a flower to this service, or you were able to pick one up when you came in. (If you don't have a physical flower with you, you might like to picture one in your imagination during this meditation – any flower of your choice.)

So begin by taking time to simply be with your flower, to hold it and to observe it. This flower is part of creation – like you. It has grown, it has blossomed and it will also die, like each one of us. It's unique, as are you, and it has beauty to offer and things to teach to those open to

learn, as you also do. Take a moment to observe your flower's colour, its shape, its fragrance, its form. And you might like to look more closely, at its nuances and extraordinary details – the tiny hairs on its leaves, perhaps, the variation of colour on its petals, its stamens. What are the characteristics of your flower? Is it tall, strong, bold? Is it pale, delicate, shy? Does it grow alone or in company with others? Does this flower remind you of anyone – yourself maybe, or someone you love? Consider how you have come to be holding this particular flower. What has brought you and this flower together on this day, in this moment.

And now, having spent some time, with your flower, I'm going to invite you to give it away. As the music begins, and when you are ready, please come forward and place your flower in the vase on the table at the front of the church here and also in Brighton.

If you are on Zoom I invite you to hold up your flower so others can see it, and write its name in the chat.

**MUSIC – during the music please bring your flower and place it in the vase**

***BLESSING of the flowers, Norbert Capek***

Infinite Spirit of Life, we ask for your blessing on these, your messengers of fellowship and love. May they remind us, amid diversities of knowledge and of gifts, to be one in desire and affection, and devotion to your holy will. May they also remind us of the value of comradeship, of doing and sharing alike. May we cherish friendship as one of your most precious gifts. May we not let awareness of another's talents discourage us, or sully our relationship, but may we realize that, whatever we can do, great or small, the efforts of all of us are needed to do your work in this world. Amen

In the spirit of friendship and comradeship, of doing and sharing alike, I invite our friend Arezoo to share words from the Baha'i tradition.

**READING: from the Baha'i tradition read by our friend Arezoo**

“Consider the flowers of a garden. Though differing in kind, colour, form and shape, yet, inasmuch as they are refreshed by the waters of one spring, revived by the breath of one wind, invigorated by the rays of one sun, this diversity increaseth their charm and addeth unto their beauty. How unpleasing to the eye if all the flowers and plants, the leaves and blossoms, the fruit, the branches and the trees of that garden were all of the same shape and colour! Diversity of hues, form and shape enricheth and adorneth the garden, and heighteneth the effect thereof. In like manner, when diverse shades of thought, temperament and character, are brought together under the power and influence of one central agency, the beauty and glory of human perfection will be revealed and made manifest. Naught but the celestial potency of the Word of God, which ruleth and transcendeth the realities of all things, is capable of harmonizing the divergent thoughts, sentiments, ideas and convictions of the children of men.”

(Bahá'u'lláh, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh)

**2nd HYMN: 43 (G) Universal Spirit** – words and music by Norbert Capek, translated from the Czech by Rev Richard Boeke and arranged by David Dawson. A thoroughly Unitarian hymn!

Mother Spirit, Father Spirit,

where are you?

In the skysong, in the forest,

sounds your cry.

What to give you, what to call you,

what am I?

Many drops are in the ocean,

deep and wide.

Sunlight bounces off the ripples

to the sky.

What to give you, what to call you,

who am I?

I am empty, time flies from me;

what is time?  
Dreams eternal, fears infernal  
haunt my heart.  
What to give you, what to call you,  
O, my God.

Mother Spirit, Father Spirit,  
take our hearts.  
Take our breath and let our voices  
sing our parts.  
Take our hands and let us work to  
shape our art.

## **SILENCE**

### **INTERLUDE – Down by the Salley Gardens**

#### **ADDRESS**

Rev Dr Norbert Capek was a preacher and a thinker, and someone who truly stood up for what he believed in. He lived in a time when believing in – and practising – freedom of thought and religion was considered dangerous by others. Perhaps it still is. He was born in what was then Bohemia in 1870. He and his wife Maia had fled to the USA in 1914 with their eight children as a result of their non-conformist views. But they returned to the recently independent Czechoslovakia in 1921 and there they founded a Unitarian congregation in Prague that grew and grew – at one time there were reportedly as many as 8000 Unitarians around the country, all linked in one way or another to Capek's congregation. (Imagine!) Though he was apparently small of stature physically, Capek nonetheless became acclaimed as one of the nation's leading orators. He wrote more than 90 hymns, often composing the music as well as the words, as in the one we sang earlier.

For some time he had felt the need for a kind of symbolic ritual that would help bind people more closely together. The format had to be one that wouldn't alienate any who had forsaken other religious traditions – as many in his congregation had done. And so he held the first Flower Communion Service.

When it became clear in 1939 that the Nazis were about to invade Czechoslovakia, Capek's friends urged him to leave the country. His by now wide reputation as a religious liberal, his activities as a hymn-writer, newspaper editor, preacher, teacher and lecturer put him in a dangerous position. He refused to go, though his wife, Maia, who was also ordained as a Unitarian minister, did leave at the last moment to embark on a lecture tour to the United States to raise funds for refugees in Europe. She took the flower service with her. Capek himself, however, refused to go and stayed to continue his work, which became increasingly risky.

Rev Eric Shirvell Price wrote that: 'Because of the monotheistic beliefs of the Unitarians, Capek was able to accept into membership a number of Jews, who would otherwise have been rounded up by the Gestapo. This gave them precious time in which to plan their escape from the country. When after two years this merciful plan was discovered Capek was arrested along with his daughter Zora for the "crime" of listening to the BBC on the radio. He was also accused of "high treason" and several of his sermons were cited as evidence of this. Eventually Capek was sent to Dachau concentration camp, and Zora to a labour camp.'

But even in Dachau Capek worked hard to lift the spirits of everyone around him. A friend wrote of him that he was like a flower himself 'blooming among the ashes of hopelessness and despair.' And though almost a year after his arrest, Capek's name appears among prisoners sent on October 12, 1942 to Hartheim Castle, near Linz in Austria, where he died of poison gas, those who knew him said his spirit was never crushed. Before he died he wrote: "It is worthwhile to live and fight courageously for sacred ideals. Even though disappointed 1000 times or fallen in the fight and when everything would seem worthless," he wrote, 'I have lived amidst eternity. Be grateful my soul, my life was worth living.'

'Be grateful my soul, my life was worth living.' Wonderful words with which to end a life, and also to carry with us in our lives.

Capek chose flowers for his communion service for their obvious beauty, for their incredible diversity and for nature's capacity to transcend division between faiths and opinions. I think he hoped that his congregation – which included fugitives from other faiths and refugees from other lands – would recognize these qualities and possibilities in themselves and in each other. I think he hoped the service would help them to value more fully each other's unique gifts and contributions to their community and to the wider world. I know that he said

this: “May we realise that whatever we can do, large or small, the efforts of all of us are needed to do work in the world. Just like the flower we too are each special and beautiful in our own way.”

In our precious Unitarian free faith – where we recognize and celebrate both our humanity and our divinity, as well as our complete interdependence with the whole of creation – Capek surely also hoped that flowers would not be seen merely as symbols. Rather that they – like us - like all life – are graced with the presence of a divine spark that we might call spirit; and that when we hold a flower in our hands we know at some level we are holding the whole universe – for it is creation, made of the same sunlight and moonlight, stardust and atmosphere, oceans and earth as are we. He surely hoped that we might learn to hold all life – including each other – with the kind of awed reverence we might hold a newborn child, not only for what it might offer us, or teach us, or for the ways it might bring us joy, but above all for its own intrinsic worth, got its own unique manifestation of the divine, for being simply, yet fully itself. Beyond comparison and beyond belief.

May it be so.

### **TAKING A FLOWER**

It is time now for us to share in final part of the Flower Communion – the receiving. I ask you each in turn to approach the communion vase quietly – reverently perhaps – with a sense of how important it is for each of us to address our world and one another with gentleness, justice, and love. I ask that you choose a flower – a different one from the one you brought -- that appeals to you. When you sit down with your chosen flower its particular shape and beauty-- remember to handle it carefully. It is not only a gift that someone else has brought to you, it is a gift from the universe and deserves your kindest touch.

Those of you on Zoom do please hold up your flowers so that each other can see them and choose one to take with you in your imagination, in your hearts. Feel free to share your choices in the chat box.

Thos of us here, let’s now share quietly in this Unitarian ritual of oneness, diversity and reverence.

**3<sup>rd</sup> HYMN 208 (P)** When are heart is in a holy place

*When our heart is in a holy place,  
when our heart is in a holy place,  
we are blessed with love and amazing grace,  
when our heart is in a holy place.*

When we trust the wisdom in each of us,  
every colour every creed and kind,  
and when we see our faces in each others eyes,  
then our heart is in a holy place.

*When our heart is in a holy place,  
when our heart is in a holy place,  
we are blessed with love and amazing grace,  
when our heart is in a holy place.*

When we tell our story from deep inside,  
and we listen with a loving mind,  
and we hear our voices in each other's words,  
then our heart is in a holy place.

*When our heart is in a holy place,  
when our heart is in a holy place,  
we are blessed with love and amazing grace,  
when our heart is in a holy place.*

When we share the silence of sacred space,  
and the God of our hearts stirs within,  
and we feel the power of each other's faith,  
then our heart is in a holy place.

*When our heart is in a holy place,  
when our heart is in a holy place,  
we are blessed with love and amazing grace,  
when our heart is in a holy place.*

*Words and music, Joyce Poley, arranged by Lorne Kellett © Songstyle Music (SOCAN)*



## **CLOSING WORDS** Lynn Ungar

What a gathering—the purple  
tongues of iris licking out  
at spikes of lupine, the orange  
crepe skirts of poppies lifting  
over buttercup and daisy.

Who can be grim  
in the face of such abundance?

There is nothing to compare,  
no need for beauty to compete.

The voluptuous rhododendron  
and the plain grass  
are equally filled with themselves,  
equally declare the miracles  
of color and form.

This is what community looks like—  
this vibrant jostle, stem by stem  
declaring the marvelous joining.

This is the face of communion,  
the incarnation once more  
gracefully resurrected from winter.

Hold these things together  
in your sight—purple, crimson,  
magenta, blue. You will  
be feasting on this long after  
the flowers are gone.

*Extinguish chalice*

**CLOSING MUSIC** 'Blooming Heather', Kate Rusby

<https://youtu.be/IVycY5jlyAo>

**NOTICES**