

Thank You for the Music

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

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21 June, 2020



Norbert Čapek was a Unitarian minister in what was then Czechoslovakia, where he defied German occupation during World War II. That is also where he began the Unitarian ritual that is the Flower Ceremony, which has now been adopted by Unitarians and Universalists across Europe, North America, and beyond. He also wrote the original Czech lyrics to a hymn we sing around this time of year *Color and Fragrance*.

The Flower Ceremony or Flower Festival began as an exercise of inclusion – anyone who shows up for it can take part in it, regardless of whether or not they are card-carrying members of the faith, and regardless of whether you have brought or shared flowers – everyone gets to leave with a token of the beauty that flowers offer.

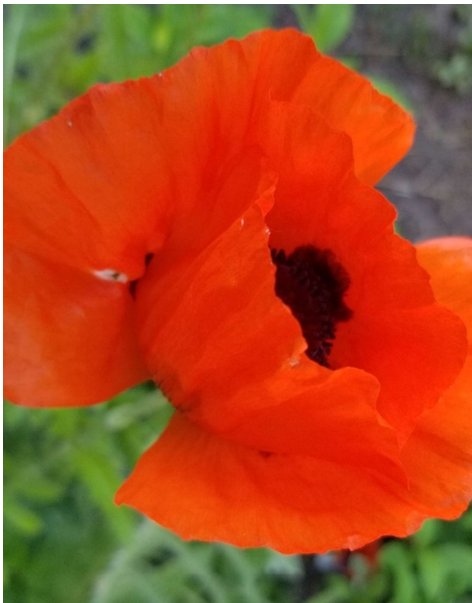
Beauty is one of those concepts that is prevalent, sought after, idolized, and somehow, still underrated. It is underrated, not because it's not

desirable, but because we don't often consider just how powerful it really can be.

And when I speak of honouring beauty, I don't mean an idealized form, or an unattainable body that's commercialized, commodified, and objectified, but rather, the ability to see an incredible worth and dignity accessible to all of us, that inspires us and brings us a deeper sense of appreciation for all that can be good, wholesome, and pleasant.

And yes, tastes can differ. I often say that my favourite flower is the dandelion – and I suspect some of you might differ from that preference. In fact, my own taste can change depending on the season – in the wintertime, my favourite flower is the poinsettia.

But differences in taste aside, we can see a deeper value in the presence of flowers – as cradles of life, as connections among plants and animals, with insects that pollinate them, and fruit that feeds us. Flowers offer colour and fragrance, they herald new life, they allow us to express many dimensions of love.



Along with beauty, another underrated power is the impact that art can make. Art expresses connection and points out where there is disconnection. It glorifies beauty – in all its forms – and exposes where it is lacking. It allows us to feel “all the feels”, to communicate what is missing in simple transfer of knowledge, and often, inspire change.

A member of the UU Congregation of Phoenix, Elena Perez, observes that music specifically, and art in general, is perhaps one of the most powerful forces for us, especially at times like these. She quotes a recent meme that's circulated online, which goes like this: *“As you binge watch your thirteenth entire series or read a book or sleep to music, remember.*

Remember that in the darkest days, when everything stopped, you turned to artists.”

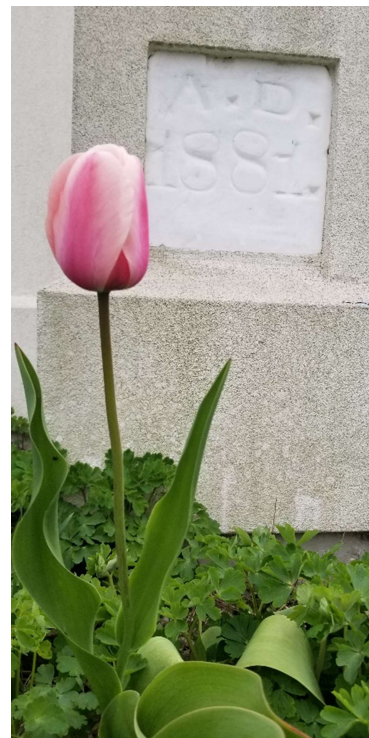
The latest cover of TIME Magazine, for June 15, 2020, shows a painting by artist Titus Kaphar. The cover shows what Kaphar calls a merger between painting and sculpture – a picture of a Black woman holding the silhouette of her missing child. The silhouette is physically cut out of the canvas, and illustrates poignantly the loss that many Black parents feel when their child is murdered as a result of systematic racism. We have heard this story before, in this painting – we see it and we feel it at another level.

In this way, art, by appreciating beauty and exposing where it’s missing, can tell a fuller story, a more powerful story, that cuts through the numbness of the numbers. And the numbers *are* important – it is important to have facts when seeking solutions to problems.

Yet, as statistics mount, be they infection case counts and death counts in the pandemic, or case counts on racist interactions and deaths, it can be easy to forget the human part of the story beyond the scope of the problem.

And when we experience the deeper reality of others’ life experience, we can make better sense of our relationship to the interconnected web of our shared existence, as well as a better sense of the action, and the mission that is required of us. Along with that, we can feel the passion that may inspire us to maintain and create more wholesome connections. And every once in a while, we may find comfort, and a reminder that beauty – and our appreciation of it – is essential.

And so, my friends, in days like today, we share flowers – to remind us that the appreciation of



beauty and the nurturing of art are powerful forces in the search for connection and action. And when we share in the presence of the flowers around us at this time of year, we are exercising the practice of a deeper power than can shape the world

May we make it so,
In Solidarity,
Amen

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Suggested Hymns

Opening Hymn #65 The Sweet June Days

~)-| W: Samuel Longfellow, 1819-1892

M: English melody, arr. by Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1872-1958,
used by perm. of Oxford University Press

Tune FOREST GREEN

Meditation Hymn #78 Color and Fragrance

~)-| Words: Norbert F. Čapek, 1870-1942

~)-| trans. by Paul and Anita Munk, © 1992 UUA

~)-| English version by Grace Ulp, 1926-

~)-| Music: Norbert F. Čapek, 1870-1942

Tune O BARVY VUNE

#64 Oh, Give Us Pleasure in the Flowers Today

Words: Robert Frost, 1875-1963

Music: Cyril V. Taylor, b. 1907, © Hope Publishing Co.

Tune COOLING