

# *Sweet Things*

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

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*Apple Bee © 2023 Rod E.S.Q.*

We're almost halfway into spring, and we've now had evidence that it's really happening! With flowers, come bees, butterflies, and other pollinators, which we're able to see in our church gardens. Some of you may have personal gardens, or window-sill flower troughs, or maybe you've noticed the urban landscaping that is being tended to on public spaces.

April has been a time for daffodils, and those are now wilting, as a generation of flowers comes, and then goes. On the eve of the month of May, we can begin to see the tulip blooms. And eventually, these too will vanish like a vapour.

As the wisdom of the cliché goes, if we don't take the time to stop and smell the roses, even when we're busy or preoccupied, we may not get a chance to smell them at all.

And May also brings in the main birding season at our nearby national park in Point Pelee. Sure, there's a window of space and time to get there, but it won't last forever, so it's worth taking some time now to go see them soon, if that's your thing.

It is worth keeping these kinds of opportunities in mind. A couple weeks ago, I mentioned the "Overview Effect", which mission specialist Christina Koch – from the planned crew of the Artemis II mission to orbit the moon – recently outlined on the Late Show with Stephen Colbert. The *Overview Effect* is that sense of mixed insignificance and awe, vulnerability and magnificence, that astronauts experience when

looking at the planet, and much of what's dear to us, all contained in that blue space just outside the spacecraft's window.

But recognizing that we can't all go into space – in fact, most of us still don't, and likely will never, have that opportunity – we can nonetheless find other ways to experience that kind of sense awe. Some folks may go on long walks around the world, looking for the meaning of life, as in the story of Tom Turcich (which we heard a couple weeks ago), while some of us might simply go on a ride or a walk around the neighbourhood. Some of us, may simply manage to look outside our window.

And when we do, if we are able to look, or smell, or hear, with the right mindset, we may just find some sweet things. Some of these are literally sweet, like the smell of the roses, or daffodils, or tulips. And flowers in turn often produce literally sweet fruits, like apples, oranges, berries, and many of those things that our bodies have learned to seek, over time and space.

The continuum of living chemistry, that has been on our planet for 27% of the life of the universe, has led to our species' evolving to need and crave sweet things – particularly the life-sustaining energy in sugar.

Now, sugar is a complicated thing, both in its chemistry and in its implications for human health. For one thing, there are many kinds of it. Some of them, like glucose and fructose, give us energy and taste good. Together, they make sucrose – the table sugar that we may be most familiar with. The milk-generated sugar, lactose, is fundamental for us in our early youth, though many of us can't handle it well as we grow up.

There are other sugars with different energy outputs and sweetnesses. Some may help us manage our energy intake, some may have... digestive consequences.

I'll spare you the rest of the chemistry lesson, and I won't go into the whole deal with artificial sweeteners today, but the fact is that the sweetness receptors in our bodies are no accident. They are there as a primary lifeline. Even folks who follow low-sugar diets, by need or by choice, will still use some level of sugar to survive. And for that reason, we have learned that *sweet* equals *good*, especially since, for most of the life our species, it was also relatively difficult to find in abundance.

Now that we live in the future, it is abundantly easy to have too much of everything that's good for us – which is to say, that it is easy for good things to be bad for us. Sugar is everywhere, and so prevalent that we find it without even looking for it. Without having to forage for it during the right season, it is easy to overdose on it at any given time.

I am no nutritionist or dietitian, and it would probably be unwise to take health advice from me, though it is not a controversial claim in the food world that a balanced diet is key to our wellbeing. For whatever apparent contradictions there may be around increasingly-frequent claims about nutrition, seeking a balance in our food intake has prevailed as the most steadfast dietary prescription. Precisely what that balance means is for each of you to figure out, ideally with the support of people who know what they're talking about.

And fruit is one of those foods that often offers that balance. It is hard to overdose on sugar if we're getting it primarily from fruit. For one thing, whole fruits contain a lot of other things, like water, fibre, vitamins, minerals – all things that are good for us (and which encourage us to avoid excess).

And... there's something more. The fruit that comes from the ground; that is facilitated by the pollen carried around by bees, birds, and butterflies; that is grown as fruits of shared labour; that is brought to us by workers in the field, on the road, and in the store; that store the energy of the sun in miraculous chemistry; that is part of the continuum of living chemistry of which we are also taking part; it is a conduit of communion with so many of the things that are greater than ourselves.

A simple act like taking a piece of fruit can be a practice of physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing.

On Easter, I mentioned a so-called “loophole” by which folks who engage in any kind of Lenten “fast” (or other disciplined spiritual practice) may take a break from it on Sundays – a feast day. Of course, it isn’t so much a loophole, as an intentional observation of sabbath time, by which we allow ourselves to find respite and balance in our lives.

By the same token, we talked about how we can flip this dynamic around, and observe “fasting” or other disciplined spiritual practices, even in ordinary time, so that we may continue to find balance by paying attention to our diverse needs of toil and leisure.

Balance is such a simple concept that it seems almost silly to talk about it on a Sunday morning. Simple, though not easy – it requires practice and intentionality. There are inherent and apparent contradictions in it – do this, but *also* do that, which is an entirely different thing... but not too much, because what’s good is also bad. Live in the moment, but also plan ahead.

And so, my friends, it is not a contradiction to plan ahead to live in the moment – at least some of the time. Paradoxical perhaps, but also a truth of our reality.

My friends, we need not travel to space in order to appreciate our space, and our time. Because sweet things are at hand when we know what spaces to look in. And now is a time when flowers, bees, birds, and the fruit that they bring, are at hand.

My friends, the sun will set tonight, yet today it is risen. Even through the clouds, we may share this day under the sun.

So may we be,  
In balance with the sweet things in life,  
Amen

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*Suggested Hymns:*

**Opening Hymn #76 For Flowers That Bloom about Our Feet**

Words: Anonymous, c. 1904, alt.

Music: Severus Gastorius, c. 1675, adapt.

WAS GOTT THUT

**Hymn #132 Bright Those Jewels**

~)| Words: Hosea Ballou II, 1796-1852

Music: Medieval French melody, harmony by Richard Redhead, 1820-1901

ORIENTIS PARTIBUS

**Closing #77 Seek Not Afar for Beauty**

~)| Words: Minot Judson Savage, 1841-1918

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

COOLINGE