THE FLOWER COMMUNION SERVICE
REV. SCOTT W. ALEXANDER
UNITARIAN CHURCH NORTH
MEQUON, WISCONSIN
SUNDAY, MAY 19, 2024

This morning -- as spring has ***fully and finally*** arrived here in Wisconsin in all its fullness, warmth and glory – we (as a congregation) are going to celebrate the Unitarian Universalist Flower Communion. Every Spring -- and all across the world -- UU congregations set aside a special Sunday (with their youth and children) to re-enact this hopeful and meaningful ritual…and to recommit ourselves to our vision of a world filled with peace, justice and dignity for all. This service (which was originally called ***"The Flower Festival"*** but has since been renamed ***"The Flower Communion"*** was first celebrated 101 years ago, in the Spring of 1923, in Prague, Czechoslovakia…and

celebrates ***"the beauty and worth of every particular human being"*** and the dream of a world where all are treated respect and care. Here is the amazing (and complicated) story of the Flower Communion:

[PICTURE AND CAPTION OF THE REV. NOBERT CAPEK IS PROJECTED UP ON THE SCREEN]



Rev. Norbert Capek

1870-1942

As the storm clouds of World War II gathered over Europe, the Rev. Norbert Capek was the minister of

the Unitarian Church in Prague, Czechoslovakia. The congregation he had founded (which gathered by the thousands for worship each Sunday in a large medieval palace) grew to be the largest Unitarian congregation in the world (over 5,000 members!) and was known -- all over Czechoslovakia -- as a progressive spiritual place where people of differing ethnic backgrounds (and beliefs) could come together in brotherhood, unity tolerance and peace.

[PICTURE AND CAPTION OF THE FRONT DOORWAY OF THE UNITARIAN CHURCH IN PRAGUE TODAY IS PROJECTED UP ON THE SCREEN]



FRONT DOOR OF THE UNITARIAN CHURCH IN PRAGUE 2024

Here is what the front door of that Unitarian Church in Prague, Czechoslovakia – which is still an active (but smaller) congregation -- looks like today.

When World War II broke out – and Hitler's occupying armies marched into seize Czechoslovakia, Capek (who vigorously oppose fascism) was invited by the ***American Unitarian Association*** to escape to safety in the United States - where he has once lived. But Rev. Capek chose to remain in Europe to do what he could to resist Hitler and the fascist ***"Third Reich."*** The Unitarians in Prague – under Dr. Capek's courageous moral leadership – resisted Nazism, and were involved in an underground movement which sought to rescue as many Jews and others who were being arrested by the German authorities. In the Spring of 1941, Norbert and his daughter (who had been repeatedly spied up and questioned by the Gestapo) were arrested. The Nazis confiscated (and burned) his books and sermons, and tried to dissolve the congregation. After being held in a notorious Czech

prison for months, in 1942 Capek was transported to the “forced labor” Dachau Concentration Camp where the authorities stamped his papers with the phrase ***“return unwanted.”*** One historian reports, ***“While at Dachau, it is said that he kept up the spirits of the other prisoners with his humor and relentlessly cheerful spirit. He was like the fire flower blooming among the ashes or hopelessly and despair.”*** But on October 12, 1942 he was killed by his Nazi captors, either by gas or a fatal injection. When news of his death reached the United States, Dr. Fredrick May Eliot, the President of the American Unitarian Association wrote, ***“Another name is added to the list of heroic Unitarian martyrs, by whose death our freedom has been bought. Ours is now the responsibility to see to it that we stand fast in the liberty so gloriously won.”***

[PICTURE AND CAPTION OF THE REV. NOBERT CAPEK IS AGAIN PROJECTED UP ON THE SCREEN]



"What do we fight against? Our fight is against lies, mendacity, deceit, bullying and everything that belittles, enslaves, or would destroy a human being."

In stirring words -- that (sadly) have as much relevance today as they did then -- Capek once said, ***"What do we fight against? Our fight is against lies, mendacity, deceit, bullying and everything that belittles, enslaves, or would destroy a human being."***

Although Dr. Capek's life ended in a terribly tragic and violent way, the legacy of his life and teachings live on in the annual ritual of the Flower Communion…which reminds us that no matter how dark human times become, there is always something we can do on behalf of human life and dignity.

THE RITUAL OF THE FLOWER COMMUNION

It is now time for all of us together to partake of this Flower Communion…which reminds us (as Unitarian Universalists) that it is our great duty to always address our world (and one another) with gentleness, justice, compassion and love. Here is the ***"Prayer of Consecration"*** which Nobert Capek would say in the Prague church each Spring when he would conduct this ritual:

PRAYER OF CONSECRATION:

Infinite spirit of life, we ask thy blessing on these, thy 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 thy holy will. May they also remind us of the value of comradeship, of doing and sharing alike. May we cherish friendship as one of thy 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 thy work in this world.

Now, as Brittany plays the piano, let each of us coming forward to the chancel and selecting a flower different from the one we brought to share this morning. Please select A FLOWER that particularly appeals to you. As you take your chosen flower, please remember to handle it gently and with reverence, for it is a gift which someone else brought here this morning to share with you, as an affirmation of YOUR human worth, dignity and uniqueness. Let our ritual begin…

[CONGRGATION MEMBERS COME FORWAFRD TO SELECT A FLOWER AND RETURN TO THEIR SEATS]

Now…as Brittany once again plays…it is time for us to come forward quietly…row by row…and place our flowers in one of the vases here on our front table…beautiful and diverse arrangements that will adorn this sanctuary for the rest of our service -- and our annual congregational meeting which will follow. When all our flowers are in place, I will share Dr Capek's closing Communion Prayer.

[MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION COME FORWARD AS BRITTANY PLAYS AND PLACE THEIR FLOWERS IN THE VASES ON THE COMMUNION TABLE…THEN REV. ALEXANDER RECITES THE COMMUNION PRAYER]

COMMUNION PRAYER:

Let us be one in spirit and affection as I share Dr Capek's 1923 Flower Communion Prayer:

"In the name of Providence, which implants in the seed the future of the tree and in the hearts of men [and women] the longing for people living in love; in the name of the highest, in whom we move and who

makes the mother [and father], the brother and sister what they are; in the name of sages and great religious leaders, who sacrifices their lives to hasten the coming [of peace and justice] – let us renew our resolution – sincerely to be real brothers and sisters regardless of any kind of [barrier or bar] which estranges [us one from another]. In this holy resolution, may we be strengthened, knowing that we are Gods family, [and] that one spirit—the spirit of love – unites us, and [may we] endeavor for a more perfect and more joyful life. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN -- #1014 "We are Standing on the Side of Love"

Our Flower Communion is now complete…Let us close this service with the moving prayer Dr. Capek wrote just before he was put to death in Dachau:

It is worthwhile to live and fight courageously for sacred ideas.

Oh blow ye evil winds into my body's fire; my soul you'll never unravel.

Even though disappointed a thousand times or fallen in the fight, and everything would worthless seem,

I have lived amidst eternity,

Be grateful my soul.

My life was worth living.

He who was pressed from all sides but remained victorious in spirit, is welcomed into the choir of heroes.

He who overcame the fetters giving wing to the mind, is entering into the golden age of the victorious.

Amen.