

Order of Service
Easter Celebration
Sunday, April 12, 2009



Call to Worship and Chalice Lighting

In the season of rebirth
We come together to be reborn in our life potential,
That we may blossom in a thousand colors,
And that we may in the end harvest the fulfillment
That is our heart's desire.
With this intention, we again worship
As this beloved Evergreen Fellowship.

Meditation and Prayer

It is the season of rebirth.
The seed, long dormant, swells and sprouts.
The bulb, cold and quiet all winter, bursts forth with
color.
The waiting time is over.
It's time to embrace our lives again with love.
What will you do with this wild and precious beginning?
Now in silence.

Readings

"The Daffodils," by William Wordsworth

I WANDER'D lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the Milky Way,
They stretch'd in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed -- and gazed -- but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,

And dances with the daffodils.

"Last Night the Rain Spoke to Me," by Mary Oliver

Last night
the rain
spoke to me
slowly, saying,

what joy
to come falling
out of the brisk cloud,
to be happy again

in a new way
on the earth!
That's what it said
as it dropped,

smelling of iron,
and vanished
like a dream of the ocean
into the branches

and the grass below.

Then it was over.

The sky cleared.
I was standing

under a tree.
The tree was a tree
with happy leaves,
and I was myself,

and there were stars in the sky
that were also themselves
at the moment
at which moment

my right hand
was holding my left hand
which was holding the tree
which was filled with stars

and the soft rain -
imagine! imagine!
the long and wondrous journeys
still to be ours.

Sermon *The Daffodils* Rev. Bruce Davis (2365)

The daffodils in the side garden were already starting to bloom this year before we got the dead leaves out from under them. My pilgrimage to India landed right during the weeks that spring-cleaning usually begins, and the daffodils did not wait for my return. Ready or not, here we come.

I admit to enjoying spring-cleaning in the garden. Clearing dead branches, pulling the winter weeds, removing dried grass from the vegetable beds, tying up the raspberries—it's all about clearing the path for new growth. The abundance of this year's garden begins by removing the decaying remains of what was beautiful and abundant in last year's garden.

And yet, spring-cleaning inside the house is a whole other story for me. For six decades I've been something of a hoarder. The more good books are on the shelf, the more sharp tools are in the shed, the more colors of glaze are in the pottery shop, the happier I *seem* to be. Or, at least that's how I've operated in the past. I come home from India a couple of weeks ago with a renewed commitment to get rid of stuff that *seems* meaningful to me but that I never actually use. All that stuff rides my awareness, as if I am carrying it in a huge backpack in my mind. I feel guilt sometimes when I'm not using things that I hang on to year after year. I feel the pressure of storing and taking care of those things, year after year.

The message of the springtime is to let go of what no longer is part of the active life. Prune the deadwood. But some things are harder to let go of than others. Sure, I took my golf clubs to Good Will. In fifteen years I'd used them once, at a driving range. You see, I like the *idea* of golf, but it actually doesn't fit into my life as it is. If, one day, golf becomes a primary passion, I've no doubt that I can buy some decent clubs then.

It's the books that are the biggest problem for me. Those of you who have been in my study can see that all the shelves are full, and there are boxes of books circling, waiting for a place to land. The other day, Mary asked me about some of the books on the shelf in our family room. To tell the truth, the row of books she is referring to have sat there collecting dust for more than thirty years. In her life with me, Mary has never seen me even open one of these books. They are fairytale books, some in German that belonged to my grandmother. Many are illustrated by Arthur Rackham and other of the great artists of children's books. The power of the books in my life is simply that they are there. Being there, I think of fantasy writing and illustration, and have a moment of pleasure. I also get some pleasure out of *having* those books, in some abstract way, as if just being their owner confers me some benefit. Sort of like money lying stagnant in a bank. And so, year after year, there they sit, gathering dust. When we move to a smaller place in the future, there

will be no room for them, I'm sure. So, will I whisk them out of sight, out of mind this spring? Leaving space for something current? Who knows!?

Obviously, it's not just the books that are my problem. The list is as long as my arm of things that I keep around on the possibility that I might need or want them sometime. This is the real work of *clearing the path* for new possibilities, the letting go of what has become familiar. How long do I need to keep an old stuffed animal of my daughter's around? How many shovels do I really need? Does it make sense to have a radial arm saw, a table saw, and a circular saw in an era when my woodworking time has diminished to almost nothing?

Some of this, what we might call "hoarding," has to do with my self-image. Knowing I have woodworking tools, I am a woodworker. Knowing I have a pottery shop, I am a creative person. Knowing I have a shelf of illustrated fairytale books, I remind myself that I love children and I love stories. Knowing I have several shelves of poetry, I'm a *wannabe* poet.

Dear Bruce, are you listening? Let it go! Let it go.

One of the primary precepts of the Voluntary Simplicity Movement is to take what you don't need and give it to those who do need it. I talked with Cecile Andrews, author of *The Circle of Simplicity*, and she's agreed to visit Evergreen next fall. I'm particularly delighted because a number of you have indicated interest in forming a Simplicity Study Circle right here.

In the world of "stuff," my wife Mary is my guru. The more I listen to her, the more I get rid of things that no longer fit in my life, and the lighter I feel about it all. She pushes me to tell the truth to myself about what I am and what I am not actually using in my life. This truth-telling, from myself to myself, has become a core spiritual practice for me.

Sometimes it takes a nudge for us to deal with things that we need to let go of, that are no longer part of our life. Sometimes our very situation forces us to let go of the old and make way for the new. I'm lucky that *Mary*, who loves me, is at times the catalyst for my process of letting go of stuff. However, the instigator of such transformation is not always so compassionate or patient.

We know many people, in our families and in our fellowship, who have been profoundly affected by the current recession. When you lose your job it is not

by your choice, and you are usually in a world of hurt. Even to be cut back in hours or salary is a painful event for a family. Those who are living on savings and investments may be left with only a fraction of their former value. Those who can no longer pay the mortgage are moving to new dwellings. These are not changes that we *ask* for or even want, and a great deal of suffering may be associated with them. Former lucrative employment is often replaced by jobs that barely get us by.

Nor do we ask for health changes. One day we feel fit and vital, and the next day we are in hospital with a condition that may plague us for the rest of our lives. Nor do we ask for the painful separations and divorces that affect many marriages in our time.

Hit hard by the suffering, whatever its cause, we must pick ourselves up again if our life is to go on. We must, in time, re-interpret the change that has devastated our life as a new beginning. It's not easy to rise up from the ashes at all, much less become the mythical phoenix in its new incarnation. Yet, this is our work.

This law of life has been embodied by the Hindus as the great deva, Shiva. Shiva is not called "the change agent," to borrow a euphemism from modern corporate culture. Shiva is nothing less than the destroyer. The power or Shakti of Shiva is often symbolized in the deva, Kali, who is ceremonially shown with her bloody knife drawn, a freshly cut head in one hand, and a necklace of heads around her neck. It is Kali's role to be sure that the path is completely clear and that what comes next will form freely.

The story of Easter in the Christian Scripture is at the very center of the Christian tradition. The death of Jesus happens graphically and with finality, as if he also is one of Mother Kali's victims. In the Passion story of Jesus' death, he goes through the same emotions in the face of loss that each of us does. He feels fear and despondency. "May not this cup pass to another?" he cries out to God in the story. He feels anger and impotence in the face of a fate that he cannot understand. He shouts out from the cross, "*Lemba, lemba, Sabachanti!*" "God, why have you forsaken me."

And yet, finally, Jesus accepts his impending death: "Not my will be done, but thine." And with acceptance, forgiveness: "Father, forgive them, for they know

not what they do.” The narrative tells us that out of the suffering and the death, there arises the new life, for Jesus and for his followers.

After crucifixion, resurrection.

The *literal* truth of this passion narrative is of little consequence. What moves us to understand and accept our own lives in new ways is the *literary* potential of the narrative. As we face the challenges and losses in our life, how can we move through fear and anger into acceptance? How, in a literary sense, can we accept the cross upon which *we* suffer? And then, as we release what has gone before—opening to what is now possible in our lives, listening for that new, life-giving call, whatever it may be—might we not also, in a literary sense, be witness to our own resurrection?

When I was in India there was an ancient rite of spring called “Holi” that happened on the day that I drove north into the Himalayas. It was the first full-moon of the spring season. In every town and village children and adults were dancing in the streets, throwing colored powders and liquid dye everywhere. My white turtleneck will be forever pink in splotches, and my sun hat is rimmed with day-glow green. I was told by many, mostly Hindus, that this was their Easter, their ritual of new beginnings.

As the ritual is practiced, it’s like Mardi Gras—color and joy and craziness on all sides. It reminded me of *our* cultural practices of Easter: the pastel-colored candy, the brightly died eggs, the Easter Bonnet with pink ribbons. It reminded me also of our practice of flower communion, delighting in the variety of the spring blooms. But the actual story of Holi is again that deeper movement of death and resurrection that accompanies the transition from winter to spring.

Many ages ago, according to the narrative, there was a powerful but arrogant king. His wife had died, leaving him one son, and *he* was cared for by the king’s only sister, named Holika. Now Holika had been given a power by the gods, that if she were to be thrown into fire a shawl of protection would come around her so that she would not be burned.

When his son was ten years old, the king asked him to pledge his undying love and faith. But the boy refused. “I can only pledge myself to the divine, and you are not divine.”

This enraged Holika and the king greatly. Months later the king asked again for his son's pledge of fealty and again was rejected. So furious was the king that he ordered that his son be destroyed by fire. Knowing of her boon from the gods, the king asked his sister to grab and hold the son and walk into a blazing pyre built by his attendants.

"Let the boy burn," thought Holika. "I will be protected from the flames."

Seeing this taking place, the gods were appalled. The child, who treasured the divine, would be lost, and the arrogance of the king and his sister would be rewarded. This could not be.

When the tongues of flame licked at Holika's skin, it caught fire. The gods had turned her shawl of protection into a death shroud. But the boy was protected and soon became king, bringing a new beginning, a new era of peace and prosperity to his people.

The passing of the old and the rebirth of the new. Death and resurrection. It's as ancient an archetype as human consciousness itself. What has gone before becomes compost, if you will, for the emergence of the new beginning.

Surely it can mean death with finality, as with the extinction of a species or the death of a loved one. This archetype doesn't try to sugar-coat the reality of the loss that often initiates transformation. But death may be a metaphor here, as well. Perhaps it is time that I die to a career, as I died to the practice of medicine almost ten years ago. It took canceling my medical license for me to tell myself the truth that the old was done and the new was begun. Perhaps the death comes when I stop seeing a longtime friend, who had pushed me toward a life I did not want. Not seeing that person opens time that I can spend with others who encourage personal and spiritual growth that is right for me now.

The death in this archetypal dance often comes from outside ourselves. A loved one may leave, a job may end, a financial nest-egg may wither. But the new beginning and new life that arise from the ashes will most often arise from within ourselves. Not over night. But in time, as we integrate the loss, readying ourselves for something new. What am I called to now? What is real or important for me now? What options are present that I'd not recognized before?

This is the core of the message of Easter and of spring. Surely we grieve what has been taken from us by the winter movements of our lives. But the daffodils are blooming again! The sun is shining. We are drawn outside again by the warmth, the fragrance, and the birdsong. Life begins again, now. Ready or not, here we come!

And so I ask you, as *your* winter passes and spring opens before us: What will you do with your one wild and precious life now?

Amen.