

Minister's Message

The spiritual life is like a flower. How you may well ask. Well, the first thing that comes to my heart and mind is that the spiritual life is about opening up, as a flower opens up. That to live spiritually is to open up and to continue opening up day after day, season after season and year after year. Just as the flower opens up to the light, so do we. How many times do we open up and reach for the morning light? Well, an infinite number of times it would seem.

That said we not only open many times we close down and shrivel up many times too. We seemingly close in, shrivel up and fade away many times in our lives only to rise and open once again in a new springtime. The spiritual life is about opening up and closing back in before opening once again, over and over and over again...

The dance goes on...We dance together over and over again, in the garden of delights, the garden of life...

We are all of us like flowers in the garden of life. Each unique and yet similar. Each with something to offer if we grow and flower and be all that were born to be. Yes, a flower looks beautiful when it stands alone. It has its own beauty and own unique qualities, but it only truly becomes all that it is when it grows together with other flowers in the garden. It only truly becomes all that it is when it shares all that it is with all the other flowers in the garden of life.

It is the same with us and our lives. Yes, we are all uniquely beautiful and we all have our own qualities, but we only truly express them and experience them when we come together in love and share them with others, encouraging them to do likewise. The spiritual life is never truly experienced or expressed alone. These things only really come alive in company and communion with others. Each of us have something uniquely beautiful to offer one another, things that only truly flower when we share them with each other.

The spiritual life is not only like a flower, but like a flower garden...The spiritual life comes alive in the garden of life...The garden of delights...

The spiritual life is not experienced alone, it does not exist alone. It only comes alive when we share it with others. No one life is an island. We cannot thrive or survive alone. We are interconnected, much like life in a garden is interconnected.

May you enjoy the garden of life this beautiful springtime.

Love and respect.

Rev Danny

Dates

I will be away at General Assembly meeting and minister's preconference from Friday 11th April until Tuesday 15th April.

Tuesday 22nd April at 11am "Our Common Search for Meaning" Subject yet to be announced" in the schoolroom.

Extra material

From "The Way of Wisdom" by Margaret Silf

We belong, not merely to the created order of things, but in a great web of relationship, and interconnectedness, in which every particle is intimately interwoven with every other, and in which, in some mysterious way, each particle holds and reflects something of the totality. This makes a huge difference to the way we live. Every choice we make, every response we offer, every reaction we reveal has an effect on that web of being. We are made for relationship. The Wisdom of creation insists on it. No single creature can disengage from the dance of creation without jeopardizing the eternal beauty of that dance. We are indeed created to be 'we'. To opt for merely being 'I' is to opt out of the creative process itself. It is only in interrelationship that we have our being and our meaning.

From "Stories of Awe and Abundance" by Jose Hobday

"Every time I saw the flower, I could see it giving its life for me and I could imagine my prayer being carried to God. That was true even when I was elsewhere and was just thinking about the flower. Either way, I had a strong sense my prayer was being heard. My flower and I were in union.

Sometimes it took a few days, sometimes a couple of weeks. When the flower finally died, I would take it outside, say good-bye to it, and thank it for giving its life for me and for delivering my prayer. Then I would bury it so it would have a chance at a new life, and I always hoped it would come back as an even nicer flower.

From "Garden Blessings: Prose, Poems and Prayers Celebrating the Love of Gardening" by June Cotner

"I believe in Gaia the Mother All-tender,
Earth Spirit, maker of gardens,
and in her sons and daughters,

the trees and plants of four seasons.
I believe in the white lilies
and red ranunculus of summer,
and in their seeds.
I believe in the pears and apples of autumn,
the pumpkins, the blue-gray squashes
that nourish our bodies with their meat,
our spirits with their beauty.
I believe in the holly of winter
whose needling leaves and red berries
unite the green of Gaia to the blood of Christ.
I believe in the crocus and tulips of spring
whose petals open like sacred chalices
from which all may drink the joy of the garden."

From "Beauty and the Soul: The Extraordinary Power of Everyday Beauty to Heal Your Life" by Piero Ferrucci

Piero Ferrucci on how to make the experience of beauty more likely and more meaningful.

"How can we find more beauty in our life?

"There is no general answer, no user manual. Beauty happens when it happens. It is a mystery.

"And yet, we may make the experience of beauty more likely and more meaningful. We cannot say which road to take; we all have a different itinerary. But we can say how and in what spirit to travel.

"*Beauty is spontaneous.* Like the shape of clouds, the flowers in the fields, a brilliant idea, a flash of lightning. We cannot say beforehand how it will be, and this is just what makes it special. Beauty comes when it will; it is up to us to be ready for it.

"*We can remove hindrances.* Various blocks can hamper beauty: I don't deserve it, it's a waste of time, there are better things to think about, it is a luxury, I am not capable. It is a question of doing less, not more. Such ideas cost a lot of energy. Less thinking equals more beauty.

"*Attention is nourishing.* Anything we give our interest to grows and develops. Anything we neglect or ignore atrophies. Attention is like a spotlight on a theatre stage. It gives emphasis. The world is what it is, but we provide the accent. We look

for beauty, give it our vital interest, create space for it. Then beauty will proliferate for us.

"*Beauty is ineffable.* It is very hard, if not impossible, to put into words. Compare it with riding a bicycle. When we learn how, we can balance, but how can we describe that feeling? Beauty is difficult to pinpoint, but the more we cultivate it, the more we can find our own way in it.

"*Beauty is everywhere.* We find it in music, poetry, a face. But we also find it in a wilted flower, moss on an old wall, rusted iron, a concert of croaking frogs.

"A woman tells me: 'When I was a child, my grandmother (whom I loved very much) used to get warm, radiant sunlight in her room. I saw the dust particles floating in the air and illuminated by the sun. I was in ecstasy. It was as though I had seen a miracle. At that moment I knew what beauty was.'

"The world is full of beauty, both hidden and manifest. It is enough to be open, look around, be like a child again. And if we will only give it a little attention, we will find it, we will enjoy it, we will be saved by beauty."

"The Opening of Eyes" from "The Dewdrop" by Sam Shapiro

Sam Shapiro reflecting on "The Opening of Eyes" by David Whyte

"It is the vision of far-off things
seen for the silence they hold."

– David Whyte

In an iconic scene from the Hebrew Bible, Moses approaches a mysterious burning thorn-bush and hears the voice of God command him to remove his sandals, telling him he is entering 'holy ground.' Here, Moses learns his life purpose is to free his people from slavery. Throughout the scene, he resists the message and covers his eyes, too frightened to look directly at God. In The Opening of Eyes, David Whyte invokes this image to demonstrate a revelatory moment of clear-eyed seeing: that the sacred is not a celestial being, not a somewhere else, or a sometime else. The experience of holiness is, in fact, the ground that is under our feet, our direct experience right now.

by Sam Shapiro

"The Opening of Eyes"

That day I saw beneath dark clouds
the passing light over the water
and I heard the voice of the world speak out,

I knew then, as I had before
life is no passing memory of what has been
nor the remaining pages in a great book
waiting to be read.

It is the opening of eyes long closed.
It is the vision of far-off things
seen for the silence they hold.
It is the heart after years
of secret conversing
speaking out loud in the clear air.

It is Moses in the desert
fallen to his knees before the lit bush.
It is the man throwing away his shoes
as if to enter heaven
and finding himself astonished,
opened at last,
fallen in love with solid ground.

David Whyte

“Open Eyes” by Victoria Safford

To see, simply to look and see, is an ethical act and intentional choice; to see, with open eyes, as a spiritual practice and thus risk, for it can open you to ways of knowing the world and loving it that will lead to inevitable consequences. The awakened eye is a conscious eye, a wilful eye, and brave, because to see things as they are, each in its own truth, will make you very vulnerable.

Think of yourself as a prism made of glass, reflecting everything exactly as it is, unable to exist dishonestly -- reflecting beauty where there is beauty, violence where there is violence, loveliness, and unexpected joy but there is joy, violation where there is violation.

Here's the front page of the paper; here's that seedy, gossipy conflict at your job; here's a memory, unblurred by wishful thinking; here's a perfect afternoon in spring, and buds now on the trees, and blackbirds in the marsh. Here's the world, just as it is -- now look!

That kind of seeing is a choice, and it is sacred practice.

And then there is refraction -- taking into yourself, as a prism takes in light, the truths of what you see and hear and transforming it somehow, changing its direction, acting on it, rendering it somehow, anew. That again is holy work. The spring day, received, comes out again as gratitude (dispersed into a spectrum); a sorrow, yours or someone else's, fully realized and received, not denied, not covered up, not justified or explained away, ignored -- some sorrow clearly, previously seen is taken in, absorbed and felt, and reemerges, bent now into compassion. To see clearly is an act of will and conscience. It will make you very vulnerable. It is persistent, holy, world transforming work.