Call to Worship  author unknown

May we be reminded here of our highest aspirations,
And inspired to bring our gifts of love and service to the altar of humanity.

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings,
But connected, in mystery an miracle, to the universe,
To this community and to each other. - Singing the Living Tradition # 434

Antiphonal Reading  by ~ Kenneth L. Patton

WE ARRIVE OUT OF MANY SINGULAR ROOMS

We arrive out of many singular rooms, walking over the branching streets.

We come to be assured that brother and sisters surround us, to restore their images on our eyes.

We enlarge our voices in common speaking and singing.

We try again that solitude found in the midst of those who with us seek their hidden reckonings.

Our eyes reclaim the remembered faces; their voices stir the surrounding air.

The warmth of their hands assures us, and the gladness of our spoken names.

This is the reason of cities, of homes, of assemblies in the houses of worship.

It is good to be with one another.
Reading:

The Tuft of Flowers

I went to turn the grass once after one Who mowed it in the dew before the sun.

The dew was gone that made his blade so keen Before I came to view the levelled scene.

I looked for him behind an isle of trees; I listened for his whetstone on the breeze.

But he had gone his way, the grass all mown, And I must be, as he had been,—alone,

As all must be,' I said within my heart, Whether they work together or apart.'

But as I said it, swift there passed me by On noiseless wing a 'wilderred butterfly,

Seeking with memories grown dim o'er night Some resting flower of yesterday's delight.

And once I marked his flight go round and round, As where some flower lay withering on the ground.

And then he flew as far as eye could see,
And then on tremulous wing came back to me.

I thought of questions that have no reply,
And would have turned to toss the grass to dry;

But he turned first, and led my eye to look
At a tall tuft of flowers beside a brook,

A leaping tongue of bloom the scythe had spared
Beside a reedy brook the scythe had bared.

I left my place to know them by their name,
Finding them butterfly weed when I came.

The mower in the dew had loved them thus,
By leaving them to flourish, not for us,

Nor yet to draw one thought of ours to him.
But from sheer morning gladness at the brim.

The butterfly and I had lit upon,
Nevertheless, a message from the dawn,

That made me hear the wakening birds around,
And hear his long scythe whispering to the ground,

And feel a spirit kindred to my own;
So that henceforth I worked no more alone;

But glad with him, I worked as with his aid,
And weary, sought at noon with him the shade;
And dreaming, as it were, held brotherly speech
With one whose thought I had not hoped to reach.

Men work together,' I told him from the heart,
Whether they work together or apart.'

*by Robert Frost*
Thought for Contemplation: “Whoever you are, whatever you are, wherever you are on your journey, we bid you welcome.” – Richard Gilbert

“Connected in Mystery and Miracle”

The Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson

First Parish in Northborough

June 14, 2015

Reading: The Tuft of Flowers, by Robert Frost

Last spring I was in a lawyer’s office in Manhattan waiting to complete the transactions closing my mother’s estate. The man in a suit sitting alongside me crossed his legs, and at that moment, we both looked down. His pants leg has risen up a bit, revealing brightly patterned socks. I smiled. He smiled back-

“My happy socks,” he explained.

“I wanted to wear my happy socks.”

He looked over at me. I crossed my legs, and voila’ my brightly patterned yellow socks with doggies on them emerged. He grinned. I grinned.

“Yes, happy socks, I said.” And then we returned to business, important business for sure, but it felt different now- human. We had connected...with happy socks, transacting business in a serious, down town Manhattan
lawyer’s office. It felt subversive. I still smile thinking about it.

Happy color. *De colores.* We in New England are often shy about color. So much of the year our landscapes are in browns and grays and whites. But not now. Not in the spring, when the lilacs and the rhododendrons, the tulips and the irises, the flowering peach and the apple trees, the forsythia and the azaleas, and the peonies wow us with their color. We can get a little giddy. It is not just our socks that can get happy, it is our yard, our world, and our hearts.

Amazing how a little sun and a little color can bring some comfort to us when we are disheartened. You don’t have to earn them or deserve them: the sun, the rain, the flowers, they come to all, the good and the not so good, the righteous and the unrighteous, the happy and the sad, to everyone, it is freely given. I take comfort in that.

Some might think it unjust, that everyone gets to share equally in the sun and rain and the beauty of the natural world, no losses suffered by those who misbehave. Rewards all around. I find it comforting.

Some of it is deeply personal. I need to know that even when I am not behaving well, not feeling generous,
or gracious, the goodness of life freely given will not be damaged or diminished, or disappeared by my shortcomings. When you or I are feeling alone and disconnected, exhausted or depressed and do not care if we wake up, or if the world goes on, the sun still rises and the grass still grows and the birds come out and sing. And all that will happen, day in and day out whether we care, or notice, or not. So that on the day that we are ready once again to re-enter the world, it is all there with open arms, fully furnished, and waiting to embrace and include me or you or anyone else who has stepped out for an hour or a day or a week, or more.

When I look at all the flowers gathered here, from gardens or road sides, shops, window boxes or indoor pots, with the incredible variety of color and form, I think first of the beauty and the wonder of it—how each is beautiful on its own, and yet there is a beauty that comes from our having brought them all together from our many singular rooms, that is a different felicitous beauty. Somehow, as separately as we all made our choices, it all comes together, bouquets of beauty, a common reality created.

Surely it is true, as Robert Frost observes, that we each live separate and individual lives coming out of our
own individual experiences and we each have our own unique and individual thoughts. We are in some profound way, existentially alone, as all must be.

But then we come and bring together our bounded, singular, alone and separate selves. In Frost’s poem, the awareness is of an unintentional, but recognizable connection, between people who do not know each other or even meet, but who are bound by their humanness and sensibilities— the love of beauty and the capacity to be touched by it.

We do not have to wait for the flukes of happenstance though, to experience connection, and the truth that we work together, whether together or apart. We create intentional connections. We do it here, on the small scale of this congregation, where we know that the success of the whole depends upon the recognition that we are connected in mystery and miracle. And we do it on the larger scale. We Unitarian Universalists are part of an association of congregations, an association, the UUA, of over a thousand congregations like ours, who work sometimes it seems, alone, but who in truth, work together, whether together or apart.

I felt it at Selma, walking with over 700 Unitarian Universalists recommitting ourselves to racial justice. I
felt it when I spent a couple of hours this week meeting with Toby Smith Ropeik, a lay member of First Parish in Concord, who will be our Ministerial Settlement Representative, helping our search committee navigate the search process.

It was brought home to be by my friend and colleague Rev. Linda Hart who told this story about what it means to be a part of this larger bouquet of Unitarian Universalist connections. As she told it:

It was in the 1970’s and her grandparents were moving from Atlanta to New Orleans and had stopped overnight in Meridian, Mississippi.

After dinner, her grandfather complained of indigestion and went into the bathroom of their hotel room, suffered a massive heart attack and died. The word came to her mother late in the evening. The hotel had moved her grandmother into another room, but she was alone and family was 10 hours or more away. It would be a long lonely night for her.

Linda continues:

My mom pulled out her UUA directory and looked through until she found a fellowship that was
nearby. She called the president of the fellowship and explained that her mother had just lost her husband and was alone in a hotel room and that it would be late the following morning before family could be there. Without hesitation, the woman said she would go to the hotel and sit with my grandmother until family arrived. And she did. She remained there until my Uncle John arrived the following day.

Linda says, “It still lifts up for me the kind of connections there are between us.”

And so it does, for us as well. The connections are symbolized in our flower communion, in which we each bring what we have to offer, and go home with gifts from someone else. And with Linda Hart’s mother, we know that we clutch these precious flowers because we have put in and invested the time to create community and connection.

My friends, may the flowers fragile when we hold them in our hands, call us to honor and cherish the fragile and precious connections we weave with one another.

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1 Rev. Linda Hart, story shared October 6, 2007 with permission to share it.
When the flower fades, as flowers do, get yourself some happy socks, or some bright touch of color that will remind you always of your connections in mystery and miracle to the universe, to this community, and to each other.

May it be so. Amen and Blessed Be.

Closing Hymn # 402  From You I Receive

Closing Words
Be ours a religion which, like sunshine
Goes everywhere;
Its temple all space;
Its shrine the good heart;
Its creed all truth;
Its ritual works of love;
Its profession of faith, divine living.

    Theodore Parker

Benediction
Extinguishing the Chalice
Postlude
Flower distribution