

A Life Worth Living

June 10, 2012

Unitarian Universalist Church of Winchendon

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On our last Sunday worship service of this church year we come bearing flowers. We come bearing flowers as a testimony to our diversity. We come bearing flowers as a testimony to the undeniable fact that we are all creatures of the earth and indebted to those who came before us and to that which gives us life. We come bearing flowers as a way to remind us that even though we will not be meeting in this sanctuary during our summer break, that we take something of each other with us, and we give something of ourselves to each other.

Perhaps this ritual is like the story about Hansel and Gretel. The two children wandered out of the safety and familiarity of their home and started their journey through the forest of life. When they started off they made a pledge to leave a trail so that they might find their way back home, or someone would search them out. Hansel and Gretel left crumbs. We each bring a flower and take a flower, and if we have forgotten to bring a flower, as some of you may have done today, you still receive one as a reminder of the love and beauty of this congregation. The flowers are a way of saying that we are already anticipating our home coming and we hope and pray that come September, that we will be gathering together again.

Today we also remember one of the martyr's of our faith tradition. The flower celebration itself; the prayer, the blessing of the flowers, the hymn Mother Spirit, Father Spirit, were all created by Norbert Capek. Capek was the Czechoslovakian minister who braved to preach a religion that celebrated freedom and diversity of thought, compassion in the face of totalitarianism, and a deep spiritual life above any dogmatic teaching. Capek experienced, even as a youngster, a strong faith in a power greater than himself and that called him into the world. For preaching this kind of message, Capek was arrested by the Nazi Gestapo, was judged as "unworthy of life" and was gassed to death. He died in the concentration camp in Dachau. The flower celebration that we hold today with such joy and freedom was a very different matter in Capek's church. There in the years leading up to the 2nd World War it was a coded ritual, defying the Nazis' who condemned freedom of speech and diversity of religion, who murdered thousands of people in order to make a superior race of man.

Our second reading today was composed while Capek was already in prison, just a year before his death. Listen to these words again and think about the courage and the faith that Capek had and consider how his words and his life and the manner of his death resonate with us in our little congregation in Central Massachusetts. Think about this powerful message and what you might take with you as we leave each other for the summer break.

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

O 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 wings to his mind
is entering into the golden age of
the victorious

In the months before his death in the concentration camp Norbert Capek wrote that his life was *worth living*. His life was *worth living* because he knew that he was not only living for this moment, but that he lived amidst eternity. Capek had a strong faith in a loving and just God who he called Mother Spirit, Father Spirit. He knew that while his few years on earth were but a drop in the ocean of

time his life, and the life of every being, was *full of meaning*, and was precious.

“Oh blow ye evil winds into my body’s fire, my soul you will never unravel.” He knew that even in the horrors of life, that there is cause for gratitude. “It is worthwhile to live and fight courageously for sacred ideals. Be grateful my soul – *my life’s worth living*.” Capek was grateful because he knew that we are ultimately linked with all that has come before us and all that will follow. I can hear in this prayer the voice of a younger Norbert preaching “This is the boy that calls to the dog that chases the cat that climbs down the tree that grows by the stream that runs through the field that’s under the sky that’s touched with light that shines on the world that God made.”

It was that deep faith that there was *meaning to life* that set Capek on the course that would ultimately lead to his death. He refused to stop preaching freedom of thought. He refused to stop listening to the foreign broadcasts of the news and distributing that news to his congregation even when he knew that just listening to the BBC was considered treason and punishable by death. He refused to be silent. He wrote and sang Mother Spirit Father Spirit as a way of saying that all human beings are valuable and should not be silent in the face of injustice.

“Mother Spirit Father Spirit take our hearts. Take our breath and let our voices sing our parts. Take our hands and let us work to shape our art.” *Life has meaning*, no matter the consequence. When asked about his thoughts about life after death, even

as he was facing the gas chambers and had witnessed so much death, Capek said "if death were the end of everything, then life would be the stupidest of all comedies and would lack all meaning or purpose. . . . How could Providence abandon and betray us when our lips have barely touched the rim of the cup of life?"

What does this story, this horrific and yet inspirational story of one man, leave us with? We are the inheritors of his trust in the Source of Life. We have before us a testimony, not only about the diverse beauty and worth of the flowers, but the diverse beauty and worth of every living being. It takes faith and courage to stand up to violence of any sort. It takes faith and courage to say "this is what I believe and what I trust to be true." It takes faith and courage to say "My life is worth living." And most of all, it takes humility to say "take our hands and let us work to shape our art."

This summer we will not have our weekly worship in this sanctuary. But that does not mean that we will be away from the Mother Spirit Father Spirit that infuses our souls and gives us the faith and the courage to go about our daily lives. This summer, please take with you the story of Norbert Capek and what his life teaches us about courage in the face of adversity. Find another sanctuary; whether it is in your mind, in your flower garden, or in community. And when you find that summer sanctuary remember this prayer of Norbert Capek, the man, who even in

the midst of war, found refuge. I leave you now with his words. Take them to heart
this summer and in them find strength and courage and hope.

In the depths of my soul
There where lies the source of strength,
Where the divine and the human meet,
There, quiet your mind, quiet, quiet.

Outside let lightning reign,
Horrible darkness frighten the world.
But from the depths of your own soul
From that silence will rise again
God's flower.

Return to your self,
Rest in your self,
Live in the depths of your soul
Where the divine and the human meet.
Tune your heart to the eternal
And in the depths of your own soul
Your panting quiets down
Where the divine and the human meet,
There is your refuge.