

## “From Bud to Blossom”

A Reflection by Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull  
Unitarian Universalist Church in Meriden  
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“In time daffodils...” “In time of silver rain...” In this time of spring, both are plentiful. As we worship together this morning, a festival of daffodils is underway. It seems also that a festival of rain is underway. Yet rain or shine, the daffodils are reaching skyward, as if in praise of being fully alive.

Barely weeks ago, we could visit Hubbard Park or our own backyard or the street on which we live and spot delicate arcs of yellow and gold, tiny petals clinging to one another, atop the growing green of stems. Day by day, hour by hour, they arched their backs, until stretching with all their might they opened; and in the slow dance of spring, they blossomed.

“Will spring ever come?” I have asked myself year after year in what feels like the never-ending month of March. Perhaps we’re asking that today, as even late April is having a hard time letting go of March in a reluctant journey to warmth and sunshine. In all due time, at the sometimes leisurely pace of Mama Nature, we behold the glory of yellow and gold in full blossom. They “touch the earth”. They “reach the sky”.

So it is with you our children, our youngsters; and so it is with you, who find yourselves on the threshold of mid-life, and you who are duly seasoned with a half century of springs and more. From bud to blossom, we touch the earth and reach the sky.

We come from the earth, for in body and spirit, we are not apart *from* what we call nature. We are part *of* nature.

Okay, neither you or I began as a seed. We began as what? [Responses] ...an egg, a fertilized egg, a zygote, a fetus, and on into that moment when we just have to stretch, we have to blink, we have to burst free.

As newborns, we have already come so far, steadily growing from fertilized egg to baby ready to pop out. Yet we sometimes refer to infants as buds. “What a little rosebud,” we say, especially of a baby girl, though why not equally so a baby boy? Each of you, each of us, was once what my late friend, Phoebe Hoss, called an “Original Mystery”. Whenever I dedicate a child—a baby or a toddler or even a somewhat older child—I offer Phoebe’s gift of poetry, which she wrote when her granddaughter, Stella, was born. With some drops of water, an ancient symbol of consecration, and a rose, symbol of the unfolding of a beautiful life, I dedicate a child in the name of God and the name of Love, then offer Phoebe’s words as prayer:

You, you dear few  
 solid pounds of bone,  
 muscle, luscious  
 rose-petal flesh; you  
 with your thrusting,  
 quivering, questing arms  
 and legs; you with your  
 wordless, watching  
 eyes; you—you  
 creature of no  
 knowing—are somehow, somewhere within  
 your being imbibing  
 the kaleidoscope of ours.

Phoebe's granddaughter was not a child of color. If the child I'm dedicating is a child of color, I refer to the texture rather than the hue of rose-petals:

You, you dear few  
 solid pounds of bone,  
 muscle, luscious  
 soft as rose-petal flesh; ...

Then I continue with Phoebe's words of intuitive wisdom:

Somewhere  
 in you some pristine  
 core, some invisible  
 sponge, is soaking  
 up smiles, frowns, bits  
 and pieces of ourselves—  
 fragments we've carefully  
 ordered over the years, the  
 bright we know, the shadows  
 we don't—and ordering them  
 anew, ordering them as  
 what your eyes  
 will see, your ears hear,  
 your tongue speak;  
 ordering them, finally,  
 as uniquely you.

..."finally, as uniquely you." No two children are alike, even those we name as identical twins. Each child holds that prospect of arranging all that our senses offer—what we see, what we hear, what we speak—as an ever-maturing creation. Even as we are in the community of family, of extended family, or of an extended family of faith, we blossom, you blossom, into a unique you.

With each dedication, I ask the child's parents and sometimes godparents to promise that they will raise this child in the way of love and mindful living both for himself or herself and for humankind.

Over the years of my ministry I have cherished leading this rite of passage. This morning, I'm wondering how the first child I dedicated has blossomed. It was twenty years ago when Collin's parents asked if I would dedicate their three-year-old son. It was my first dedication, and I was thrilled. Collin was a high-energy presence in the religious education program at All Souls, New York City, and old enough to make some decisions about how this would go. The most obvious decision he made was what to wear. Do you suppose he showed up in an adorable little suit and shirt and tie? [Responses] What kind of outfit do you imagine him choosing? [Responses] Collin was dressed as a fireman—fortunately, without the hose!!

As my own daughters were growing up, how they loved their “dress-up box”, especially hats. We sometimes refer to an adult as “wearing many hats” if she or he fills many different roles—mother, teacher, psychologist, committee chair of whatever. In this church, there are many folks who wear “many hats”. Some of you are here this morning. As kids, we have a chance to “try on” different hats, to try on different roles—fireman, policeperson, detective, rocket scientist, chef, teacher, trapeze artist, and on and on. As you who are children are unwrapping the gift of who you are, the petals of who you are, those petals take on different hues and sometimes different shapes before they reach full blossom. And even full blossoms will appear somewhat different from day to day.

What we try to do in this congregation is celebrate who you are, where you are, and how you choose to be at different points in your blossoming. Today, we celebrate through the presentation of awards to three of you—Angelique, JT, and Katie—for you have explored this faith, Unitarian Universalism in enough depth to explain it to someone else and through the shared values of Scouting and what you learn in our religious education program. When we met earlier this morning, you asked me lots of questions about what it's like to be a minister and to be a female minister and more. The work you have done and the questions you have asked and the conversations you have entered into are all a part of your blossoming as people of faith, caring, and exploration.

“Touch the earth, reach the sky;  
children ask the reason why?”

Keep asking, keep asking. Questions are sacred. You, each of you, whatever your age, in whatever stage of bud to blossom you find yourselves, keep asking. Continue in that relentless search for truth and meaning. Never cease to explore, to imagine, to try on different hats; for season after season, you will continue, in some form, to recycle the passage of bud to blossom, bud to blossom. Become who you are, and do so again and again and again.

Amen

**Sources:**

e.e. cummings, "In Time of Daffodils"

Phoebe Hoss, "Original Mystery" (with permission of the poet)

Langston Hughes, "In Time of Silver Rain",

*Touch the Earth, Reach the Sky*, Words and music: Grace Lewis-McLaren, in *Singing the Living Tradition*, Beacon Press, Boston, Unitarian Universalist Association, 1993, 301.