

MARCH 2024

MONTHLY MUSINGS FROM UUMFE

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Welcome to Monthly Musings from UUMFE

This month we continue to explore Religious Naturalism. We turn our attention to the eco-virtue of courage which is defined as the capacity for confidence. It is readily expanded to eco-courage - the germ of creative activism, a commitment to resist the degradation of the sacred. (Sacred Depths of Nature by Ursula Goodenough, page 202.)

March 21 is Spring Equinox, and March 22 is World Water Day.

Join us on March 21, 2024 to honor World Water Day with guest speakers Rev. Dr. Clyde Grubbs and Rev. Karen Van Fossan: "Water is Life". Details at uumfe.org.

We invite you to visit our website for an overview of these Monthly Musings. And this Google folder is where you can find other issues in Google Doc and PDF formats

March: Courage and Spring Equinox



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST
MINISTRY FOR EARTH

Respect Life. Restore Earth. Renew Spirit.

Service and Sermon Prompt:

“When we speak of courage, as opposed to reflexive acts of self-defense or defense of kin, we are speaking of the capacity to hold a large idea, a large passion, as being more important than one’s own safety. So – the mountain climber is courageous because conquering the mountain trumps her fear of falling; Martin Luther was courageous because his religious conviction trumped his fear of papal authority. Courage, I believe, is essential to human creativity: the passion to break new ground, solve a problem, write a poem, is fueled by courage and defeated by fearfulness.”

(Ursula Goodenough chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgiclfindmkaj/<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/233197254.pdf>)

What large idea or passion are we holding for Earth and all her inhabitants, especially Water, as we celebrate World Water Day (March 22, 2024)?

How does courage lead us to creativity as we love Earth and all beings?

“The root of the word courage is cor – the Latin word for heart. In one of its earliest forms, the word courage meant “to speak one’s mind by telling all one’s heart. Courage is a heart word. Be brave. Love hard.” Brené Brown

How do you speak your mind by telling your heart? We protect what we love. How do you protect Earth and all beings from your heart?

For an excellent overview of a religious naturalist orientation, we recommend Rev. David Schwartz’s sermon: [Are you Religious Naturalist Without Knowing It?](#) He is Lead Minister at Unitarian Universalist Church of Boulder, Colorado.

Chalice Lighting

“Courage is the capacity for tempered confidence, enabling creativity and leadership. It is readily expanded to eco-courage - the germ of creative activism, a commitment to resist the degradation of the sacred.”

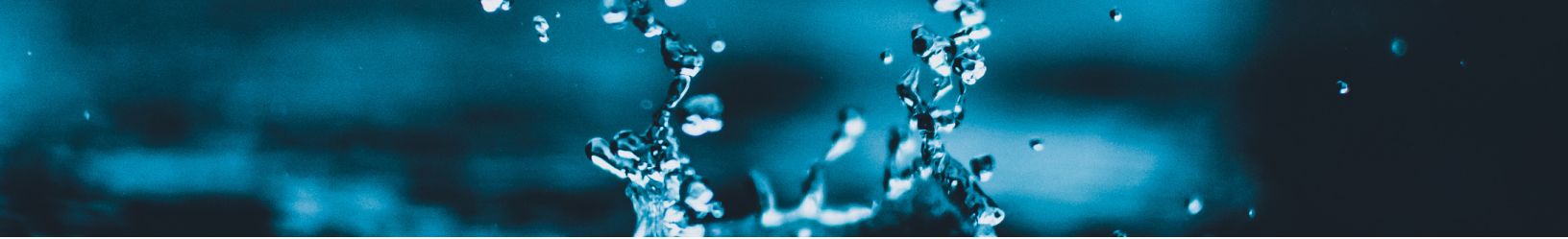
We light this chalice to illuminate the way to courage, and to honor the sacred.

(Sacred Depths of Nature by Ursula Goodenough, pages 202-203.)

OPENING WORDS

Unitarian Universalist minister, Rev. Adam Robersmith, says, “...our [Unitarian Universalist] theology tells us to choose faith and hope and deep, abiding love over fear—to act from the knowledge that we will save what is of great worth and sacredness to us. Let us refuse to be made immobile by fear and despair, instead choosing one more faithful action in every moment.” Come now into worship.

(Justice on Earth: People of Faith Working at the Intersections of Race, Class, and Environment page 54.)



Readings

“... Eco-virtues are not just about how we think and feel. They represent the wellsprings of our eco-centric action. To say that I care about my ideals is to say that I feel an obligation toward them, a responsibility. Taking responsibility, like acting on outrage, requires courage: it entails engagement and strong character and a sense of honor, and it yields both respect and self-respect...The more one cares, the more one is vulnerable to feelings of violation and despair. But passive despair is neither a moral response nor an ecomoral response, as voiced by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.:

“We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there is such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action.”

(Sacred Depths of Nature by Ursula Goodenough, page 203.)

“We don’t have to be Pollyanna-ish or fatalistic. We can just be human. We can be messy, imperfect, contradictory, broken. We can learn the difference between hopelessness and helplessness. Because what if we’ve been doing the equation backward? What if hope isn’t what leads to action? What if courage leads to action and hope is what comes next?”

(Mary Annaïse Heglar in All We Can Save: Truth, Courage, and Solutions for the Climate Crisis, page 282.)

Fearless by Tim Seibles - read by the author

Time for All Ages

We Are Water Protectors by Carole Lindstrom, illustrated by Michaela Goade. [Video is here.](#)

This story was included in our September 2023 edition for Water Communion, and we think it fits here for Courage and World Water Day, too. This time, we include an [activity sheet for all ages.](#)



Summary:

Water is the first medicine. We come from water. It nourished us inside our mother’s body as it nourishes us here on Mother Earth. Water is sacred. The river’s rhythm runs through our veins.

The Black Snake (oil pipeline) spoils the water and wrecks everything in its path. Take courage, we must keep the Black Snake away from the villages and the water. To stand for the water, the land. To stand as one against the Black Snake. We fight for the ones who cannot fight for themselves. Water has its own spirit. Water is alive. Water remembers our ancestors who came before us. We stand with our songs and drums. We are still here. Our spirits have not been broken. We are water protectors.

Earth Steward and Water Protector Pledge:

I will do my best to honor Mother Earth and all its living beings, including the water and land. I will always remember to treat the Earth as I would like to be treated. I will treat the winged ones, the crawling ones, the four-legged, the two-legged, the plants, trees, rivers, lakes, the Earth with kindness and respect. I pledge to make this world a better place by being a steward of the Earth and a protector of the water.

(Found in the activity sheet above.)



Music

- [Water is Life by Dr. Lyla June Johnston](#) (Join UU Ministry for Earth for an online gathering with Lyla June on May 22, 2024. Details on our website.)
- [We're Rising Up from the GreenFaith Song Library](#)
- [Love Now](#) (Piepiey & Kids Choir Version)

Meditation and Ritual

Have a large bowl of water on the altar or chancel table.

Use Water is Life music video to start.

Script: I invite you to close your eyes or lower your gaze. Enter into a time of silence and begin to consider all the ways in which water nourishes you. Give thanks for water and this life.

(Pause)

When you touch the water, you touch the world. I invite you to come forward, as you are able and willing, to touch water and offer it a prayer of thanks.

(Have ushers take smaller bowls of water to anyone who is not able to come forward.)

Closing Words

Again in the words of Rev. Adam Robersmith, “...our [Unitarian Universalist] theology tells us to choose faith and hope and deep, abiding love over fear—to act from the knowledge that we will save what is of great worth and sacredness to us. Let us refuse to be made immobile by fear and despair, instead choosing one more faithful action in every moment.”

Go in peace and with courage.



Spring Equinox

A separate service can be dedicated to this important time of year. Or you can blend courage and Spring Equinox together.

Introduction: What Is the Spring Equinox? (Source: Farmer's Almanac.) In the Northern Hemisphere, the spring equinox (also called the March equinox or vernal equinox across the globe) occurs when the Sun crosses the celestial equator going south to north. It's called the "celestial" equator because it's an imaginary line in the sky above the Earth's equator. Imagine standing on the equator; the Sun would pass directly overhead on its way north. On the March equinox, the Northern Hemisphere and Southern Hemisphere receive roughly equal amounts of sunlight; neither hemisphere is tilted more toward or away from the Sun than the other.

Readings

"An Earth Song" by Langston Hughes

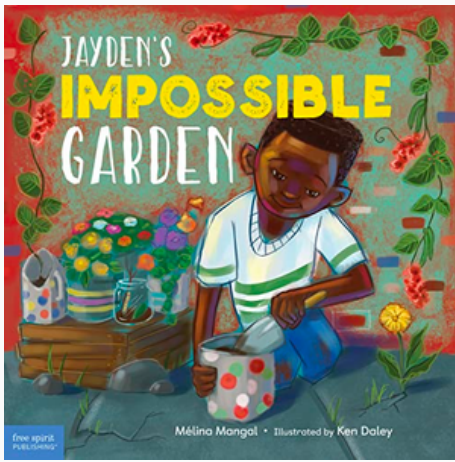
It's an earth song,—
And I've been waiting long for an earth song.
It's a spring song,—
And I've been waiting long for a spring song.
 Strong as the shoots of a new plant
 Strong as the bursting of new buds
 Strong as the coming of the first child from
its mother's womb.
It's an earth song,
A body song,
A spring song,
I have been waiting long for this spring song.

(Found in *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry* edited by Camille T. Dungy, page 342.)

"Earth, I thank you" by Anne Spencer

Earth, I thank you
for the pleasure of your
 language
You've had a hard time
 bringing it to me
 from the ground
to grunt thru the noun
 To all the way
feeling seeing smelling
 touching
 --awareness
 I am here!

(Found in *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry* edited by Camille T. Dungy, page 325.)



Time for All Ages

Jayden's Impossible Garden, written by Méline Mangal, illustrated by Ken Daley (Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing, 2021) Jayden's courage to connect with others and confidence in nature makes an "impossible" city garden bloom with life.

Guided Meditation and Ritual

Gather ahead of time: Seed trays filled with soil, bowl of flower seeds, watering can filled with water.

Take a few moments to gather yourself and become present where you are.

Leave the business and demands of your day outside this sacred space.

Close your eyes or lower your gaze and focus your attention inwards.

Notice the natural rhythm of your breath as it flows in and out.

With each breath, allow yourself to relax a little more.

As you breathe in, imagine light flowing in with your breath and spreading throughout your entire body.

Breathe out any worries.

Focus on your heart and allow the breath to open up that part of you a little more.

Breathe out any tension or resistance that you find there.

Now imagine yourself as a tiny plant seed, nestled into the damp ground.

You are tiny yet full of potential.

Consider this for a moment.

Get yourself nice and cozy in the earth; enjoy the feeling of being surrounded by Mother Earth with everything you need.

Experience the knowledge that you are capable of growing big and strong from your tiny seed.

Experience the knowing of who you are, where you come from, and what you will become.

It's time to use your energy to sprout.

Sense the light around you, enticing you out of your dark soil.

Take the leap and sprout out into the light. Burst into the open air.

Sense the freshness and brightness that surrounds you.

Feel the sense of space around you. Bathe in the light.

Now feel the roots that grow beneath you.

You are growing roots that spread deep down into the earth, searching for nourishment. They make you strong and provide the foundation for your growth. These strong roots communicate and network around you. You are part of a community.

As you breathe, allow yourself to grow larger, branching out.

Sense your beauty. Smell your freshness. Experience your earthiness and strength in connection to Mother Earth. Return your focus to your breath, enjoying the flow as you breathe in and out gently.



Cont.

When you feel ready to return to the world, gently place your hands over your eyes and open your eyes behind your palms. Take your hands away from your eyes when you are ready to view the world again.

Return to this day with the wisdom of the seed in your heart. And remember this community is here to nourish you so you can continue to blossom and grow and so the world can reap your gifts.

Up front here, we have containers full of rich, organic potting soil. We have seeds for beautiful flowers - zinnias, daisies, cosmos, bachelor buttons. In a moment, I'll invite you forward to plant two seeds. One for yourself - something that is yearning to come even more alive. And one for this congregation - a seed of potential and impact. Take a moment and set your thoughts and intentions, then please, plant your seeds.

After everyone has come forward:

We bless these seeds, with energy, possibility, and intention.

Sprinkle water on them. You can include this video somewhere in the ritual:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-Z1etoGp0Q&t=14s>

Small Group Ministry Prompts

Choose Spring Equinox or courage as your focus, or combine the two as you see fit.

For Spring Equinox, lead the meditation and ritual above allowing people to share what intentions they will plant for the season ahead.

For courage, watch the story, [We Are Water Protectors](#) and use the [activity sheet for all ages](#) as prompts for sharing.

OR

Courage is the capacity to hold a large idea, a large passion, as being more important than one's own safety. What large idea or passion are you holding for Earth and all her inhabitants, especially Water, as we celebrate World Water Day (March 22, 2024)?

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How do you speak your mind by telling your heart? We protect what we love. How do you protect Earth and all beings from your heart?

This month's team: Anything not attributed here is written by Rev. Kelly Dignan, Co-Director of UU Ministry for Earth. Colleen Hamilton, MA Ed, PhD; Director of Religious Education, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Sunnyvale (CA). Rev. David Schwartz, Lead Minister, Unitarian Universalist Church of Boulder.

Please let us know how you're using these resources by completing this form: <https://forms.gle/JA6d3nmEqgT5BGK46>

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