

MAY 2024

# MONTHLY MUSINGS FROM UUMFE

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## Overview

May 22, 2024 is the UN's International Day of Biodiversity. How does homogeneity threaten the future of our planet? Diversity is strength! What are we practicing, in our everyday lives, that embodies our commitment to biodiversity and treating all life as intrinsically valuable?

You can find past issues of Monthly Musings on our website. And this Google folder is where you can find them in Google Doc and PDF formats.

We provide these resources at no charge! Would you consider a donation to sustain our ongoing work? Donate here. Learn about sharing your congregation's offering plate here.

May 2024

## Materials for International Day of Biological Diversity



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST  
MINISTRY FOR EARTH

*Respect Life. Restore Earth. Renew Spirit.*

## Service and Sermon Prompts

Research endangered species in your area. Listen to this short NPR interview of Camille T. Dungy, author of Soil: The Story of a Black Mother's Garden. She says, "I do not tire of repeating the names of the many lives I am learning to love." What lives are we loving? How could we show love for those lives? Naming, art, prayers, song, other? Lead the Council of All Beings Ritual.

## Time for All Ages

Seeds of Change: Planting a Path to Peace by Jen Cullerton Johnson, illustrated by Sonia Lynn Sadler (New York: Lee and Low Books, 2010)

Faced with many injustices, Kenyan Wangari Maathai inspires indigenous people to bring natural abundance and variety back to their homeland in this richly illustrated biography. Millions of trees are planted. Birds and animals return to the forests. Wangari's home is green again. This story fits well with the statement made by David Cooper on February 13, at the 2024 Convention on Biological Diversity.

## Chalice Lighting

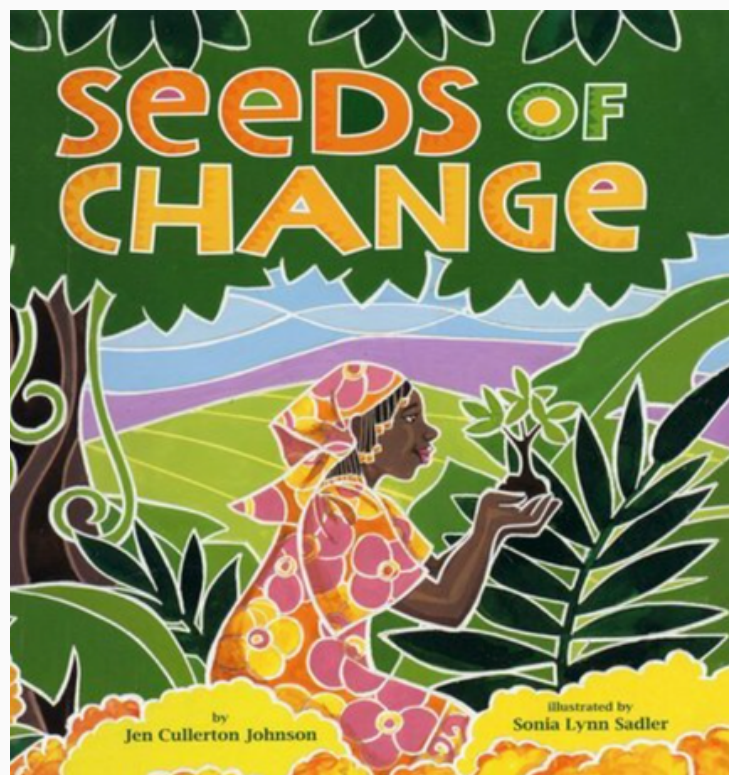
Biodiversity Chalice Lighting –  
Stephani Pescitelli

We light this chalice in honor of the Web of Life.

We honor this sacred ecosystem of ecosystems we call home.

We honor all of our diverse animal, plant, fungal, and insect relatives, and the land, water, and air we all share.

May we remember that all life is worthy, all life connected, all life is sacred.





# Reading

## Characteristics of Life by Camille T. Dungy

A fifth of animals without backbones could be at risk of extinction, say scientists.  
—BBC Nature News

Ask me if I speak for the snail and I will tell you  
I speak for the snail.

  speak of underneathedness  
and the welcome of mosses,  
  of life that springs up,  
little lives that pull back and wait for a moment.

I speak for the damselfly, water skeet, mollusk,  
the caterpillar, the beetle, the spider, the ant.

  I speak  
from the time before spinelessness was frowned upon.

Ask me if I speak for the moon jelly. I will tell you  
  one thing today and another tomorrow  
and I will be as consistent as anything alive  
on this earth.

  I move as the currents move, with the breezes.  
What part of your nature drives you? You, in your cubicle  
ought to understand me. I filter and filter and filter all day.

Ask me if I speak for the nautilus and I will be silent  
as the nautilus shell on a shelf. I can be beautiful  
and useless if that's all you know to ask of me.

Ask me what I know of longing and I will speak of distances  
between meadows of night-blooming flowers.

  I will speak  
the impossible hope of the firefly.

  You with the candle  
burning and only one chair at your table must understand  
such wordless desire.

  To say it is mindless is missing the point.

# Council of the Beings Ritual

Original practice by Joanna Macy and John Seed. Modification for UU Worship by Stephani Pescitelli  
Preparation:

Research names of 5-10 endangered species in your region.

Make cards with endangered/threatened species names to hand out during worship or beforehand to be read by handful of congregants: “I am the <insert species name here> and I am here for the <insert species community>”

E.g. “I am the wolf and I am here for the four-leggeds”

“I am the rusty patched bumble bee and I am here for the pollinators”

OR Write these names on a slide to be displayed and popcorn voices on the spot.

## Script:

Leader: *Just as we take time to listen and affirm the joys, concerns, and stories of each other in this space, we will now take time to honor the inherent value and sacred life of our other-than-human relatives.*

*Just as when our fellow human beloveds are threatened, we are here to hear the voices of our animal and plant friends when they are in need and commit to their protection.*

*The following species are local species who are endangered or threatened. As we hear their names, let us hold their lives in compassion, care, and curiosity.*

*First, I'll ask those with cards [or ask folks to read from the pre-prepared slides] to read these species names aloud.*

*Then, I invite anyone here today [or in the chat over zoom] to name aloud popcorn style any animals, insects, plants, or fungi that you see in your backyard or local park to honor our interdependence and connection with each other.*

*After we hear each name, we will all repeat together: “May You Survive and Thrive”*

Congregant: [reads cards]

All: *May You Survive and Thrive!*

[After all cards are read]

Congregant or Leader: [names any other species or types]

E.g. monarchs, dogs, cats, llamas, horses, lightning bugs, trout, fish, spider, eagles, birds, etc.



[After about a dozen names]

Leader: *And now, let us imagine this full ecosystem surviving and thriving between, among, and beyond us.*

[You may want to take ideas from the congregation or have some images of a thriving future to share.]

*May we remember all of these beings, small and large, abundant and threatened, near and far. Let us honor our Web of Life by honoring ourselves, each other, and all the life with which we share this sacred home. Amen.*



## Small Group Ministry Resources

We highly recommend [Camille T. Dungy's book, Soil: The Story of a Black Mother's Garden](#). In resistance to the homogenous policies that limited the possibility and wonder that grows from the earth, Dungy employs the various plants, herbs, vegetables, and flowers she grows in her garden as metaphor and treatise for how homogeneity threatens the future of our planet, and why cultivating diverse and intersectional language in our national discourse about the environment is the best means of protecting it.

Discussion questions are at the back of the book. Examples of questions include:

- How does Soil connect the act of diversifying nonhuman spaces with that of human spaces? Why is that important?
- How does Dungy interweave the personal with the political in this book? How about the material with the spiritual?
- In what ways does this book unearth important American history, especially African American history?
- How is Soil an intersectional ecofeminist text?
- Why does Dungy believe that environmental and social justice concerns are related? How does this book represent that interconnection?

More links about the book:

[Brooklyn Rail article](#)

[The Atlantic article](#)

What lives are you learning to love?  
How do you show love?

## Closing Words

- Stephani Pescitelli

Spirit of Life,  
On this special day of Biodiversity and always  
We give thanks  
For the bees, moths, and butterflies  
For the glistening green mosses and prickly pear cacti  
For the pine trees, purple flowers, and fleshy fungi  
For the birds, the bears, and the big cats

We give thanks  
For the whales, the worms, and the walruses,  
For the flies, the foxes, and the ferns  
For the llamas, the lichen, and the lizards

We give thanks  
For the land, water, and air we share  
For this whole sacred ecosystem of beings

Bless what we share in common - our hungers, thirsts,  
our drive to connect  
Bless our beautiful differences and diversity - our  
bodies, histories, our unique paths  
Bless the roots and relationships that connect us to  
one another  
And bless our right to belong, to be, to become  
In this wild, wonderful Web of Life that is our home.

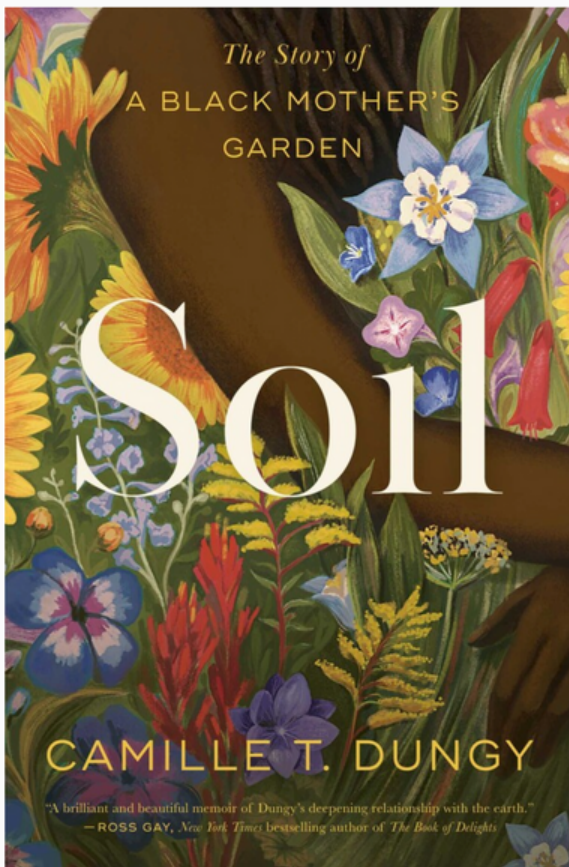
May it be so, May we be so.  
Amen, Blessed be.

## Music


# 203 "All Creatures of the Earth and Sky"  
#38 "Morning Has Broken"








CURRICULUM FOR ALL AGES



May you Survive and Thrive  
an endangered species curriculum



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Visit our [website to see May You Survive and Thrive](#) - a curriculum about biodiversity for all ages.

### This Month's Team:

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