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UU Fellowship of the Eastern Slopes
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Becoming

What is this flower you hold? Look at it closely. Its color. Shape. The arrangement of its petals. How many are there? How would you describe this flower's personality? Perky? Exciting? Sweet? Noble? Sensual? Feel its life force. Now notice its softness, its delicate or broken places. Feel its vulnerability. How beautiful!

Crocus in the snow. Daffodils soon after. Hyacinth, reminiscent of Easter. Tulips. Fragrant lilacs. Forget-me-nots. Clouds of columbine. And now peonies – “their red stems holding/all that dampness and recklessness/gladly and lightly,” as Mary Oliver wrote. Each flower unfurling according to the eternal order of things. Delighting us.

Our own unfurling happens on a different timeline. We “become” over a lifetime. How we express our essence, our unique arrangement of chromosomes, has to do with circumstance, the accident of our birth, and choices we make.

When we love or experience beauty, when we find meaning or feel passion, when glimmers of grace help us see life as a gift...we delight in becoming.

Becoming is also hard work. It's not easy to make a living. It hurts to be lonely or depressed. It's hard to feel marginalized or to trust again after a disappointment, or to go on with one's life after a loss or to live with illness or pain or addiction. It's distressing to fail, to let others down, to feel our shame. Life can bring us to our knees.

It is in living each struggle and joy that we become. As if the container we occupy – I think of it as our soul – grows with everything we see and hear and touch and taste, every fragrance we breathe in, everything thought we think. I imagine the soul as a big, shallow white bowl, ever-expanding, brimming with the moments of our lives, each new moment calibrating into the whole.

...What the soul is [said Mary Oliver]
I believe I will never quite know.
Though I play at the edges of knowing,
truly I know
our part is not knowing,
but looking, and touching, and loving...
softly,
through the pale-pink morning light.

Like the flowers we hold today, every person has beauty. Each has flaws and broken places, too. We are strong *and* vulnerable. How we nurture ourselves is a factor in our becoming. As the flower tilts toward the sun, we tilt toward what draws our interest. Sometimes this can be a slippery slope – what draws us can take us away from our highest selves. But when we pay

attention, we can choose to tilt toward what nurtures the good – in us and for all. Many people turning together toward goodness can be a beautiful thing.

Composer and conductor Eric Whitacre created a huge online choir several years ago. He invited singers all over the world to record and upload videos of themselves singing a piece of music. The videos were then synchronized and made into a mind-blowing on-line presentation – a shimmering prism with two thousand faces, people singing their hearts out alone into their computers...and together. Google The Virtual Choir.

A choir becomes as singers become. A painting becomes as the artist becomes. A pregnant couple become parents, gently over 9 months, then – whether birth or adoptive parents – very fast when the infant arrives! As we live and work and laugh and cry, we become, and even in our last years we continue to become.

Who have you become? What aspects of yourself would you like to strengthen, nurture, fertilize? What feeds the lily? What feeds you?

These flowers, beautiful today, will live a short while longer. We memorialized longtime UUFES member Bob Young with stories and with bouquets that Eleanor Jenkins created with apple blossoms, rhododendron and wild verbena from his own garden. As we tidied up afterward, I asked Eleanor what we could do with these striking arrangements all over UUFES – at the entryway, on every table, here on the chancel. “Oh! That’s the thing about flowers,” she said. “We only have them a short while.”

Like a flower, we too will live a while longer. What better reason to seek a path of goodness and light? What better reason to seek it together?

So may it be.