

“The Seeds We Plant”
April 12, 2020

Music for Gathering

Recording by Shana Aisenberg

Welcome Rev. Betsy Tabor

Welcome.
Here we seek justice and truth and understanding.
Here we celebrate life and contemplate mystery.
Here we seek healing and wholeness.
Welcome, all.

In the mid-1800s, free-thinking New Englanders strayed from religious doctrine. Called Transcendentalists, they found the holy (they used the word “God”) not in church but out in the world. Today we light our chalices, symbol of Unitarian Universalism, with the words of Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau:

Though I do not believe
that a plant will spring up
where no seed has been,
I have great faith in a seed.
Convince me that you have a seed there,
and I am prepared to expect wonders.

Now and then, our Sunday service spotlights a passion of our members. Today we’ll hear from lovers of seeds: Ingrid Albee, Amy Gullicksen, and Margaret Rieser. We’ll give thanks for life’s blessings. We will hold in the light people who need our prayers. And we will hear from one another. And we’ll sing.

A Congregational Moment

“Fields”

By Shana Aisenberg

Ingrid Albee and Seeds - video

Ingrid is working today – she is an Emergency Room nurse – but she and Mark, avid gardeners, had ideas to share about seeds. He knew the Henry David Thoreau quote. He also helps Brett School teachers compost its food and loves these words by Walt Whitman:

Behold this compost!...
The bean bursts noiselessly through the mould in the garden
The delicate spear of the onion pierces upward...
Out of its little hill faithfully rise the potato's dark green leaves...

In this video, Ingrid recalled the pleasure of passing seeds from friend to friend.

Hymn: “Earth was Given as a Garden”

Amy Gulicksen and Seeds

We wait with great anticipation for the arrival of our box. When it doesn't come as quickly as we'd like, we are anxious and hope it's not lost in the shuffle, sitting on a cold metal shelf somewhere, never to make it into our hands and reach its potential. But as usual, it appears on our doorstep in due time.

Its like Christmas, that box. Not brightly colored or bedecked with ribbons and bows. But it holds the potential of the warm season to come: the small round seeds of greens that set our iron levels and digestive tracts back on course after a long wither of hearty stews and casseroles; the chalky, hard snap pea seeds that send our mouths into a symphony of crunch, their green sweetness so refreshing after the cold season of sickly sweet cakes and pies and hot chocolate; the brightly colored jewel-like seeds of corn that we dry and grind for flour for next winter. Oh, and the seeds of sweet corn that represent the essence of summer: steamy days and cool swimming, barbecues and bonfires with those we love. Who doesn't look forward to butter dripping down the chin....

One of my first seed memories comes from my grandparents' garden. With salt shaker in hand, we'd harvest the large orangy-red beefsteaks, warm from the sun. I was taught that you just sink your teeth into the mass, savor that first bite, then sprinkle a little salt for the next bite, and again, dig in. To feel the seeds in their protective mass of gel running down your hand and wrist, probably down your chin and maybe even onto your shirt...is a delight I will never forget. How fun to find out, years later, that all you have to do to save tomato seeds from non-hybrid species is smear that gel and seed mass onto a dry paper towel. Then you let the whole thing dry out, and store it in a zip-lock for the winter

Another memory is from my parents' garden. Jim and I were getting married on their farm under the Harvest moon, 1996. My parents had asked me the previous spring if there was anything special I'd like them to grow for wedding decorations.

i thought about this. The one thing I really wanted was sheaves of grain. So, as a family, we planted tiny Winter Rye seeds, brown and hard. When the time came, we harvested stalks of golden grain, tied bundles in deep purple satin ribbon – to match the bodice of my wedding dress – and set them out as a reminder to everyone of the abundance in our lives. They were really pretty, too!

In the spring garden, swollen pea seeds absorb the water from rains. They start out hard and pale green, and become round and plump, like a womb waiting to burst forth with life.

Calendula seeds are like spiky worms, until you look closely and see they are quiet and still; they also look like a fancy headdress a Hindu god or goddess might wear.

Potatoes, a huge garden seed, are chunky and angular; there's no way they're going to shift with heavy rains like the carrot or lettuce seeds do.

And sweet cicely: omg and bright green, like miniature okra pods, imparting a licorice sweetness to water come summertime.

Did you hear on the radio the Baker Creek Seed Company spokesperson in the midwest? On a normal day this time of year, they would process a thousand seed orders. This year, that has increased 10-fold and they're trying to process 10,000 orders every day. This is very hopeful, indeed.

Seeds are our future. They satisfy us in their tiny, hard state and as full-grown plants. They flavor our food and beverages, and the magic within them nourishes us and gives us hope for the future.

Reading: "First Sown" by Marge Piercy

Peas are the first thing we plant
always. We lie full length
on the cold black earth and poke

holes in it for the wrinkled
old men of the seeds

Nothing will happen for weeks.
Rain will soak them, a white
tablecloth of snow will cover

them and be whisked off. The moon will sing to them:

open, loosen, let the pale
shoots break out. No,
they are pebbles, they sit
in the earth like false teeth.
They ignore the sweet sun.

Then one unlikely day
the soil cracks along miniature
faults and soon baby leaves
stick out their double heads
and we know we shall have peas.

Time for All Ages Marion Posner

"Seeds of Love" English folk song

Joys and Sorrows Margaret Rieser

"To Spring" by Edvard Grieg Eve Goss

Meditation

Rev. Betsy

We give thanks for what sustains us: water, air, soil, compost, the harvest. \

We give thanks for the miracle of the seed in our hand that becomes flower, tree, herb, vegetable. We're grateful for seeds passed from hand to hand in back yard, farm and reservation: corn, bean, and squash.

We are grateful for the safety of home, nourishment, and each other.
For gifts of the imagination that sustain us: music, words, poetry, homemade cards.
For all that is our life, we are grateful beyond words.

[Respond to Joys and Sorrows]

We pray for strength of body and spirit.
We hope for a return to the life we miss.
We hold in the light the sick, the well, the unsure.
We hold in the light loved ones and strangers working every day to serve the greater good, saving our lives as they risk their own. For them we pray for safety - good health - good spirits - peace of mind.

May all people be safe and well and at peace. Amen

Tomorrow is Holocaust Remembrance Day in Israel. Jews have sung the song Ani Ma'amin (I Believe) in synagogues and on death trains, the melody passed from boxcar to boxcar. Today we hear this prayer of Jewish faith...we feel and remember.

“Ani Ma'amin” (“I believe”)

Margaret Rieser and Seeds

It was a hot September day, and we were in the peaches. At lunchtime, we piled onto the wagon loaded with the baskets of fruit we'd picked all morning. Tom, our foreman, drove the tractor to the farmstand so we could get our lunches. When we headed back to the orchard after our break, Tom had a surprise. He had an ice-cold watermelon that he had taken from a sales bin and stashed in the walk-in cooler that morning. Tom loved watermelon. We all did.

When we got back to the peaches we realized that we didn't have a way to cut the watermelon. So Tom cracked the watermelon on the tractor fender, and we broke the chilled fruit into large shards, and leaned against the tractor dreamily feasting, spitting the seeds as far as we could. This was 1982, by the way, and most watermelons had seeds. We were grateful to Tom, who had never learned to read or write, but knew fruit like nobody's business, for taking such good care of his picking crew.

Tom mused dreamily: What if you had one watermelon seed, and you planted that seed and grew a watermelon plant, and that plant had 5 watermelons. Each of those watermelons has about 500 seeds. So then you plant all of those seeds. Before you know it, you'd have a whole lot of watermelons, and you'd be a rich man.

Hope. Sometimes it's a single watermelon seed, thoughtfully spit under the peach trees. Sometimes it's an act of kindness, like groceries left on the doorstep by a neighbor. Hope can be listening to the wind in the pines, and knowing that you are connected to the swaying boughs because you are part of the story of life on earth.

Hope and faith go together. I feel hope in the mystery and power of gathering with others – like right now. Hope comes when we show up, when we care. Hope is putting tiny lettuce seeds in the ground and setting out the scraggly tomato plant we've been nurturing on the windowsill.

“There are no great things. Only small things with great love”. This quote is attributed to Mother Teresa, but one doesn't need to be a saint to find meaning in these words. We are just people. The opportunities to take great actions are few and far between, if ever. But small things with great love? Carrot seeds laid in a row under a thin layer of soil, watered daily. Someone reaching out to say, “I see you. You got this.”

Yeah. We got this.

Sharing *The Seeds We Plant* Rev. Betsy

Though I'd love a watermelon plant to appear someday, we don't welcome every seed that sprouts in our garden. Especially maple seeds, said our friend Jacquie Lotz this week – the helicopter ones that spin and ride the wind. “They're everywhere,” Jacquie said, “and, once they take root, not easy to pull up.” You might say they hold fast to life. As do we.

Seeds, small and strong, wait for the right time to unbend, crack through the shell and grow. A cherry seed can wait a hundred years with no problem, while forget-me-nots self-seed. As Cathy Mersfelder says, “You can never have too many forget-me-nots.” Seeds – packages of life – wait for their moment. As do we.

Like them, we're given a life force and circumstances beyond our control. Unlike them, we are given a choice about how to navigate life and where to put our energies, our commitment. We're given a choice about where to lay down the roots of what matters most to us.

And so, we come again to a time of sharing. Like fall seeds tucked away indoors somewhere, we are living indoors, packages of life waiting for a change in circumstance. I invite you to share in a sentence of two what you feel committed to as you wait and hope for better times? What do you want that life to look like? What seeds of intention are taking shape within you? In what direction would you like your roots to grow?

You can raise your hand under “Participants” and we'll call on you and unmute your sound. And you can also continue to share in the chat space.

Marion P: I think my intention is to try and concentrate on the things that over these days I recognize to be so important – and not allow the days to be full of a lot of things that perhaps, if I look back, have been less important and get in the way of doing important things. I could list

those, but I think that's another matter. They certainly include really reaching out to others rather than thinking, "Wouldn't that be good to do one day."

Marsha C: Hello from Brooklyn. I think the best thing I've learned during this is not to fear the future – that with the adjustments and accommodations I've made to be calm and happy and productive while in the epicenter of all of this, the real takeaway is that, whatever happens to me in the future, getting older, I'll probably be able to make adjustments and live with it and be happy with it and productive and connected. So I'm feeling good about it and not afraid.

Ellen W: My intent is going to be to enjoy the face-to-face time with friends and neighbors more. I tend to be a bit of a solitary person, a bit of a loner. I think it's fine to keep in touch with people on text and phone, and whatever, but I want to see people and give people a hug and just spend more time with them. It's something I'm going to be conscious of.

Kathy B: I'm very grateful for time spent with my daughter Kara who came from Kentucky last June, but we hadn't been able to see each other at all because she was working and we were watching the kids. She is now living with us along with kids. So as far as peace and quiet, there is none, but it's been a real joy that we've been able to make music together, she's joined in with the choir. And we've really developed strong ties with the little guys, who are constant entertainment, and we feel very lucky to have the opposite of quiet. I hope that the connections we've made will carry us forward.

Barbara B: One of the things I've learned is that I can be crazy busy on the outside, and when I'm stuck at home, I'm still crazy busy here. I've discovered that that crazy busy is a way of hiding from my vulnerability. Covid brings you face to face with your own death. I find that I'm labeling things to give away if I don't make it, and I'm busy, busy, busy, and it finally occurred to me that part of this "busy" is not wanting to let go and face, and trust, the letting go that has to happen at some point. So my intention for when this ends is to really watch my "busy" and to try to be more present, in the exact moment, rather than planning or scurrying away to avoid what I don't want to look at.

Hymn: "The Fire of Commitment"

Shared Affirmation

Love is the spirit of this Fellowship,
The quest for truth is its sacrament,
And service is its prayer.
This is our great covenant:
To dwell together in peace, to seek truth in love,
And to help one another.

Extinguishing the Chalice

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth
The warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.
These we carry in our hearts. (Blow out chalice)

- In this season of hardship, we've yet to receive any requests for financial help. We *can* help you or someone you know who could use a bit of help. Pick up the phone and let us know. We'll help get each other through.
- Explanation of 10-min break-out groups at coffee hour.
- Lastly, our circle is growing. Invite a friend. A neighbor. A sibling, anywhere. Follow UUFES on Instagram and FB. And see you at the 3 p.m. check-in – we may do a Death Cafe this week. Stay tuned.

Benediction

Inch by inch, row by row
 Someone bless these seeds I sow
 Someone warm them from below
 Till the rains come tumbling down

Pulling weeds and picking stones
 [We are] made of dreams and bones
 Feel the need to grow my own
 Cause the time is close at hand

Grain for grain, sun and rain
 Find our way in nature's chain
 Tune the body and the brain
 To the music from the land

- "The Garden Song" by David Mallett

In these days of waiting inside, keep strong and safe.