



First Congregational Church (UCC) of Ashfield
429 Main Street – Ashfield MA 01330
Creating Community, Welcoming All

September 19, 2021 “Nature, God and Us”

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When I was a very young child, three years old at most, I made friends with a small planting of Hens and Chickens in a rock garden in our back yard. Hens and Chickens are those little succulents that hug the ground and send out shoots with little baby Hens and Chickens. Each plant forms a rosette . . . and they spread, slowly, filling in the spaces between rocks in the garden. It’s amazing how little soil they need to survive.

One day I sat down on the stone wall visiting with the Hens and Chickens. I saw this yellow glow around and above the plants. It was like warm sunshine floating up from my friends, and I brought my hand to my heart.

(OK, maybe I didn’t do that back then. . . it was a long time ago. . . but every time I think of this scene, I bring my hand to my heart)

No words passed between us.

Only an understanding, a knowing. . .

And a deep connection to each other. . .

~ the little Hens and Chickens nestled in between slate and schist

~ this glowing, warm, “spark” in the middle

~ and me, a three-year old, sitting on the rocks at the edge of the garden

Fast forward several years:

I was middle school age. We had moved to Rochester, MA, a small town inland from Marion and Mattapoisett (I lovingly call it the arm pit of the Cape. . .)

Our property bordered a worn-out parcel of land that had been stripped of top soil years before we moved in. In the winter, water pooled in the low spots, and ice formed in thin sheets across the puddles. One of my favorite things to do was to put on pack boots and go tromping around on the thin ice, breaking it into small pieces. Then I would find a stick and start “herding” the ice – collecting it, directing it into layers on top of one another or fitting different pieces together like a jig saw puzzle.

This game was the best!!! First, the satisfaction of crunching up ice sheets. I can hear the noise it made . . . and the gathering together, playing shepherd to thin breakable meltable little mirrors. I didn’t talk to the ice. . . my siblings and the neighbor kids who joined me would have thought I was nuts. . . And yet, the miracle of freezing water held something sacred for me . . . beyond the physics of phase change from water to ice.

We had a connection. . .

~the ice

~the “magic” I felt playing in the frozen puddles

~and me

When I think about these little vignettes, these memories from my childhood, I recognize them as three strands of a braid: Nature. . . God. . . and Us (we humans).

A braid holds tremendous power! Individual strands weave together and become more; one plus one plus one equals more than three. A braid becomes more than its individual strands, in strength AND in beauty.

This braid, Nature. . .God. . . Us. . .can help us co-create that which we love most.

Now, more than any other time in our human history, *the world needs us*. As the planet's temperature rises, we can see the changes happening all around us.

I know I'm not the only one among us who ends up in tears thinking about what the future will look like if we don't take action ~ not just stopping greenhouse gases from going into the atmosphere, but adopting regenerative practices on the land, nurturing biodiversity and protecting our water.

It's overwhelming and daunting, I know. And yet I'm experiencing an unexpected and amazing internal bubbling up of enthusiasm to do this work. Enthusiasm. . .from the Greek "God within."

This is what I scribbled on a scrap of paper while in the garden this week: "When the love we feel inside comes out in action, ANY action, ALL action, we set in motion a powerful creation, a co-creation that is God, and us, and everything outside of us.

For my part, on this day of celebrating Autumn Equinox, Nature's New Year, I'm going to bring my attention to Nature's yearly cycle. I invite you to join me in marking the "holidays" over the coming year. Each season, I will bring a little snippet of tradition, some thoughts and ideas about how to celebrate the Equinoxes, Solstices and each of the four holidays in between: All Souls' Day, Candlemas, May Day and Lammas. I also invite you to commit to an action, ANY

action over the next year in service to the planet. It could be as simple as walking in the woods with awareness, planting a pollinator garden – or even one plant for the bees – continuing with work with the Citizens Climate Lobby.

My action over this next year is bring solar power to my farming operation. This is a big action! And honestly, there is a part of me that wrestles with the guilt of not having done this five years ago. (In my family, we call that the "should-a, could-a, would-a" syndrome. . .) I'm learning to let go of that guilt and breath in the promise of what it will be like to grow plants in the dead of winter with lighting powered by the sun.

I'm looking for your support and encouragement over this next year. Each time I bring a message about Nature's holidays, you can ask me, "So Holly, how's that solar project going? I intend to make progress with your help.

Let us pray.

Gracious and Loving God. Thank you for being within us, around us, and all about us as we journey together through Nature's year.

Help us to bring our awareness and intention to everything we do, honoring our beloved planet.

Help us to "work the braid". . . You, dear God, Us, and Nature.

Taking that which we love most into a future we create together.

Amen