"Summer Spirituality"
A Homily delivered by the Rev. Dr. Stephanie May
At the First Parish in Wayland
June 14, 2015

As summer approaches, what are you looking forward to? How many of you are counting until the last day of school? What else are you anticipating? Maybe it's a trip—either to a new place or a familiar spot that you visit every year? Perhaps it's the fresh vegetables and fruits that have begun to appear in farm stands and farmer's markets...or in your own garden? There are so many parts of summer that can bring delight—from bare feet to swimming in the ocean to spending more time with your kids.

After such a hard winter, I think we're ready for summer. Jane Rzepka, a long-serving UU minister of wit and wisdom, writes about the relationship between New England winters and summers in a short meditation. She describes a woman who walks off the subway train only to realize that she's left behind one glove. Turning to see the missing glove on the seat, she can see that she doesn't have enough time to safely retrieve the missing glove. Instead, she tosses the glove in her hand through the closing doors to land beside its mate. Describing this image as one of "letting go," Rzepka writes,

> After a lifetime of struggling not to lose our mittens, then our gloves, cavalier abandonment does not come easy. In New England at least, our pattern is to cling, as we cling to our gloves, to routine, hard work, and obligation, all fall, all winter, and right through to the Fourth of July. But in the summertime, there is a letting go. We close up our schools and our churches, put our overcoats in mothballs, and dust off the swan boats, the lobster pots and last year's new gas grill. We need that. We need to cast that glove of responsibility back into the train. We need a vigorous and decisive toss about how to free ourselves of the confining gloves of life, even if we love them.[1]

I like Rzepka's image of tossing the glove. I suspect Rzepka's characterization of New Englanders as people who like to cling to our hard work and responsibility may have some grounding in truth. But clinging to something can become tiring. We need a break. Yet, we also cling because we *need* something...we need our gloves on a blustery, winter day. So, we develop habits and systems to insure that we don't lose track of the gloves. But now it's summer and a different season. We can toss our gloves with abandon.

As Rzepka describes, school will soon be closed for the summer and our formal worship services will stop until the Sunday after Labor Day. In this shift of seasons, I want to challenge all of us—myself included—to explore this idea of summer as a season of letting go. What might we need to let go of? And, what might we discover in the space and time created by such letting go?

---

[1] Jane Ranney Rzepka, "The Glove in the Subway," in *A Small Heaven: A Meditation Manual*, (Boston: Skinner House Books, 1989), p21.

Another way to think about this challenge is as a call to enter the summer with an intention to remain spiritually engaged. Our lives and our spiritual needs do not cease just because we will not be meeting here in the sanctuary. We will still need to feel a sense of connection to others and to a larger purpose and meaning. From September through mid-June, we walk through these doors to be reminded of these connections—connections that do not cease simply because we're not gathered in this room together.

So I ask, how will you nurture your spirit this summer? One option, of course, is to attend the summer services that offer many ways to gather and to reflect. I hope many will attend. Yet, what are other options for how you might remind yourself or your family to stay mindful of our connections to something larger? Perhaps you might engage in traditional spiritual disciplines such as prayer or meditation. Or read a book such as the highly recommended *Being Mortal* or Marina Keegan's volume *The Opposite of Loneliness*. Or maybe you turn off the tv and spend more time outside—walking the dog or sitting on a porch with a good friend. Perhaps you start a journal or try out some yoga classes. Maybe you look for an opportunity to volunteer or to educate yourself more about a pressing social issue. There are so many different ways that we can remind ourselves about the larger world of which we are a part. So many ways that we can experience our connections to others and to the wonders and the challenges of our shared world.

Engaging in such intentional work to expand and deepen our sense of the world is fundamentally a spiritual and religious task. I believe that we *are* spiritual beings who need to nurture a sense of connection to something more than the mundane creaturely tasks of simply staying alive. As spiritual beings, we need to gather in worship to be reminded that we are a part of something larger—whatever name we may (or may not) give to that sense of something more. As spiritual beings, we also need to gather in community to know that we are not alone in this journey of life with its joys and sorrows, celebrations and losses. So also, we need to reach out in service—to share something of ourselves with others as an expression of our commitment to foster connections of love and justice. Worship. Community. Service. These are why we come together.

These are why the First Parish in Wayland has gathered for 375 years. These are the reasons why for two hundred of those years, this congregation has met here, in this elegant meetinghouse. Generation after generation, people have come together to connect with each other and with a sense of the holy. Generation after generation, people have gathered here to teach the next generation how to recognize and nurture these connections to God, to the Holy, to one another and to the wider world. We are spiritual beings in need of spiritual community. We are humans in search of the truth of what really matters and how to make our lives meaningful and our shared world more loving and just.

As we unite as one congregation, we come together with different ideas, interests, and gifts. Unique in our particular experiences and personalities, by gathering together we create a community where we can learn from one another in our differences. This gift of gathering together in diverse spiritual community is something to celebrate!

And so, today, we celebrate together. We celebrate with a bountiful array of flowers assembled by many hands and with a quilt cake pieced together from many contributions. We celebrate with shared songs and dance as well as by eating and drinking together. Again and again, we gather in religious community to nurture our spirits, to be a part of something larger than ourselves. For the gift of this community may we be grateful.

On this day of celebration and the start of our summer season, may we let go of our committee responsibilities and our months of hard work over this last year. May we abandon ourselves to the simple joys of being together and of being alive here and now on this summer day.

So may it be. Amen.