

“In Shared Joy and Sorrow”

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June 11, 2023

First Parish in Wayland

One hundred years ago, in 1923, World War I had been over nearly five years. But throughout Europe, remnants of destruction remained upon buildings, landscapes, and the too many missing men who had not returned from war.

Against the backdrop of so much lingering sorrow, the [Rev. Norbert Capek](#) of the Unitarian church in Prague created a Flower Ceremony. He invited people to bring a flower to add to a shared bouquet; then asked for each person to leave with a different flower. Exchanging flowers testified to the capacity of all of us to bring beauty and to receive beauty. In a world bearing wounds of violence, such reciprocity of beauty and care heals.

The Rev. Capek also wrote more than 90 hymns, including one that counsels:

*Kindle the flames of love
Where people's sorrows reign;
Tell the happy story of those who overcame sorrow.
Smell the flowers of faith,
Breathe the air of love,
Open your soul to the streaming rays of the sun.*

Kindle the flames of love. In the face of known hardship and an experience of a great war, Capek held fast to his faith in love.

I believe that I've told you about the short story I wrote in 6th grade in which a girl proclaims to her mother, *"I know how to solve the world's problems...LOVE."* For years I was embarrassed by my youthful *naivety* that the solution could be so simple. And yet, here is the Rev. Capek also extolling the value of love. And so also, Lydia Maria Child wrote, *"The cure for all the ills and wrongs, the cares, the sorrows, and the crimes of humanity, all lie in that one word 'Love.' It is the divine vitality that everywhere produces and restores life."*

For many, the power of love is no small thing. And yet, what does it mean to love? In my very [first online sermon](#), delivered on a snowed-out Sunday in February 2015, I shared my favorite definition of love from philosopher Diogenes Allen: *love is the recognition of otherness.* Love is recognizing the humanity of those who differ from you, of those with whom you may disagree or just not like. Love is opening yourself to really recognize that the stranger and your beloved both hold their own value apart from what they are to you.

Being a part of a religious community like First Parish is an immersive education in love. In each sharing of joys and sorrows in a worship service, we are kindling the flames of love as we bear witness to the story another brings. And when we work together for fair elections, an end to racism, or for full medical care for women or transgender folks, we are fostering the divine vitality that restores the fullness of life for all. Learning to live in love is no small thing. Kindling the flames of love transforms each of us and changes the world.

In no way could I say all that is on my heart today. In the end, I simply wanted to share this message of a love that sustains us in shared joys and sorrows. Yes, there have been many programs and meetings and all manner of events and worship services these past nine years. And the vital thread that is woven through all of it is love.

Together we have learned more about what it means to love across our differences, about how to love across the internet when we could not be in person, and about how to reach out in acts of love through social justice. Again and again these past nine years, I have witnessed how you show up for one another in hard times . . . and I have witnessed how you have allowed yourself to be held in care and support amidst difficulty. We have also stood together amidst crowds at the Islamic Center in 2016 and at the corner in front of the Meetinghouse in 2020 as the Paul Revere bell tolled 8 ½ minutes for the memory of George Floyd. This too is love.

The work of love is not done; it does not finish. Sharing this work of love with you these past nine years has transformed and changed me for the better. This is a gift I will carry with me. And, even though I will no longer be your minister, I trust you will continue this work of love within and beyond these walls. Thank you for the love you have shown me and for the chance of loving you the best I could as your minister.

Amen.