

“Unfold Like Flowers”
Rev. Dr. Stephanie May
First Church in Boston
Flower Sunday Reflection
June 8, 2025

Early this morning, I woke to a glorious orange sunrise. Standing outside on my porch, I plucked faded flower heads from a pot to make space for new growth. My bare feet were wet and a bit cold against the rain-soaked planks of the porch. Birds, awake even sooner than my own early hour, swooped and sang around me. Returning inside, I picked up my mug of freshly brewed coffee and headed for my laptop to write.

To give praise is just this: paying attention with gratitude. Simple, but perhaps not always easy to do.

Psychology tells us that the human mind is wired to scan first for trouble. Undoubtedly looking for the threats that surround us has helped humanity survive for millennia. And there are many, way too many, threats to notice from the most recent headlines of President Trump sending the National Guard into LA to the stories that have fallen out of headlines but remain dire, such as the Israeli hostages taken 610 days ago. So also, there are the more personal struggles—perhaps our own health issues or that of one we love, financial worries, or a persistent sense of loneliness.

In our time and place, core values we hold as a religious liberals are under threat. And more important than threats to principles is the fact that *people* are being harmed, including some here today. From job losses to fear of deportation to erosion of healthcare and other public goods here and around the world, the lives of congregants, friends, neighbors, and strangers have been thrown into upheaval.

I know we want to *do* something. And sometimes it may feel as if all we “do” is watch or read the news as we wait for someone to point to a path of action. I don’t believe there will be *one* path or *one* person or *one* moment that “fixes” things and restores systems that prioritize democratic values of equity, inclusion, and empathy. Rather, there will be a *multitude* of people and paths that hold fast to these values in their daily living in tens of thousands of places and situations.

Resisting the political onslaught against liberal values is a spiritual practice. The deluge of dangers risks overloading our predilection to pay attention first to threats. And yes, the threats are real. And so are the sunrises, the bird song, the flowers and the friends.

So are the presence of communities like this one where we recommit ourselves each week to a covenant that centers the value of love and an ethic of helping one another.

Today, here and now, we are living out a particular vision of the world. By participating in a ritual of gratitude, we are naming the gifts that enrich our lives. In this one way, we remind ourselves of some of what matters to us and is worth fighting to protect. For example, when we engage in our flower communion, we are recommitting to our values of interdependence with the web of Life—both people and plants—as well as acknowledging the beauty that is created by diversity and difference in community. These actions feed our spiritual strength to remain clear-sighted not only of the dangers that face us, but also on the gifts that sustain us and make life glorious.

The title of this reflection, “Unfold Like Flowers,” is a lyric in the hymn, “Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee,” that we sang a moment ago. This call to open ourselves to the joy of life may not seem like an anthem of resistance to injustice, but I think we can hear it as such. Indeed the “sun” to which the flowers open promises to “melt the clouds of sin and sadness”. The sins of injustice and hatred, bigotry and cruel indifference melt before the power of generous, life-giving Love. A Love some call God. Opening ourselves to be nurtured by this Love can transform us and sustain us—even amidst times of strife. Indeed, I do not know anything else that will.

As we move into summer and into unknown months of turmoil, may we rise above the pull to only scan for threats and remember to also pay attention with gratitude for the gifts of love, beauty, truth, and connection that sustain us all. In short, may we remember to give praise.

So may it be. Blessed Be.