

## Sermon for Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Central Michigan

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### Beltane Celebration

Good morning my friends. I want to talk this morning about the holiday of Beltane, which falls at this time of year. It is synonymous, almost, with May Day. Behind me you see the beautiful flowers that Gisela brought in, adorning our altar, a reminder that May and warmer weather are here.

Yesterday felt to me like the first truly warm day of the spring. I went jogging yesterday and I had this little experience that was an emblem of the warm weather and of people being outside. A man was sitting by his front door, with the door wide open, playing music on the radio, and it struck me that this is what people are doing now. We are hanging out outside, and the time has finally come for that.

I got home from jogging, I took off my shoes, and I was barefoot in the grass—and it was definitely the first time for that this spring. So it seems appropriate that we are marking the time of firsts around the first of May.

That barefoot part reminded me of a story I read back when I was in elementary school. It was the story of a famous person, and the beginning of the book had a chapter about his childhood. And it said this: that the father of the family had a rule for the children that they couldn't go barefoot in the springtime until a certain tree was in flower. And so the boy in the story went searching through the woods, and finally found this tree, and took a branch of the blossoming tree back to his father because he required proof, and then from that point on, they could go barefoot.

I remember reading this story as a child, and it struck me then that it was from a foreign time in the past when people lived closer to nature. Because for me—I grew up in the suburbs and this was probably the 1970's when I was reading this—in the time and place where I grew up, we were more likely to know if it was time to go barefoot in the spring by seeing the weather report on the news.

Today, of course, I'm trying to get more in touch with the cycles of nature—and that brings me to talking about Beltane.

The holiday of Beltane is celebrated by modern-day Pagans. In the wheel of the year—the celestial year—in the earth's journey around the sun, we are halfway between the spring equinox (March 21<sup>st</sup>) and the summer solstice (June 21<sup>st</sup>). The halfway point between those two celestial events is what we celebrate as Beltane. In Gaelic tradition, it was celebrated as May Day, the first of May, and Beltane is actually around the 6<sup>th</sup> of May. You might think of other holidays or traditions that are around the first of May. I'm thinking of Cinco de Mayo—the fifth of May, of course—which is a celebration of Mexican American culture. Depending on who you are and where you are the holiday of Beltane might be traditionally celebrated with a rite of fertility, or with a bonfire, or both. At the end of my remarks this morning I will come back to how each of us might have a ritual that marks this time: the change of the season and the journey of our planet around the sun.

I'm reminding all of us today, including myself, of what we already know: we already know that it's important when the grass grows and the flowers bloom and the seasons change. We already know that deep inside ourselves, and I'm reminding us of that, and of the importance of us marking this transition at this time.

I want to talk about the difference—and the connection—between the Outer world, how time is changing outside of us, and the Inner world, what's happening inside of us. How is time passing for you, and how are you marking it on the inside? I'm thinking for instance, that three weeks ago was Easter Sunday. I was here leading a Zoom worship service on that day. And on that Sunday, I was talking about the symbolism of Easter as hope and rebirth—and the fact that some of us might not be feeling that joyful, hopeful rebirth message, and we might be feeling instead like the disciples of Jesus felt on Saturday when he was dead, and they weren't sure if he was going to be born again. Similarly today, I'm preaching about flowers blooming and being barefoot in the grass, and people being outside, and hope.

Where are you on your journey? Is today a day of hope for you?

As I look to the past, three weeks ago was Easter: how was I then? how am I now? I invite you to think about that for you: what's your inner experience of time passing?

About three weeks before Easter was the spring Equinox—and that was around the time for me when the Isolation started. Or the Quarantine. I mark the time by when we started doing worship services by Zoom and not having anyone in the sanctuary, and that was about seven weeks ago. For many of us that's a milestone in our lives, and maybe it will be for the rest of our lives: the time when the Quarantine started. And this is the time during. And later will be the time after.

But on this day, I invite you to think about how is time passing for you internally? What's going on inside? How has it been for you since the beginning of this Quarantine, however you mark that day? For students and teachers it was probably the day that school was cancelled. How are you now, after 6, 7 weeks of Quarantine? How are you today compared to three weeks ago on Easter?

There's no right or wrong answer. I invite you to feel how it is for you—how are you now and how is time passing for you? ...just as we recognize time passing outside of us by our orbit around the sun, and by the change in the weather and the flowers and the trees and the birds singing.

The last thing I'm going to do today is to invite you to create and enact a ritual to show this. What could be a ritual to show and to connect what's happening on the inside for you, and what's happening outside in the world? On this day of Beltane when we're halfway between spring and summer, I have three suggestions that I will make: take them if they serve you and leave them if they don't serve you.

You could commemorate this day as a ritual by simply going for a walk. Maybe you are able to walk outside, or perhaps you can sit outside, or perhaps you can just be at your window and experience the outside. I know that for some of us our space is very constrained right now. The idea is to experience nature, but with an intention: the intention of connecting to the spirit, to the divine, whatever word you use for that, to the deepest self within you. That's one suggestion as a ritual for Beltane.

Another suggestion would be to create a space outside if you can. Yesterday my partner Mary did some cleaning up in the garden and made a little place to sit. Just like the man that I saw sitting by his front step playing his music and enjoying the outside. You could let that be a ritual for you, to create a space and to claim, "now is the time to be outside, and to put my feet on the green earth."

Here is my third and last suggestion for a ritual to honor Beltane. Some of you will remember that in the fall we had a ceremony here to commemorate loved ones who have died. It was a ceremony to remember the dead, and on that day we brought fall leaves into the sanctuary and everyone was invited to bring home a leaf to remember a loved one. I have a variation on that to suggest today. If you were to find a dead leaf in the grass or in the woods, and if you were to let it go, with intention, into the river, that might be a fitting ceremony for Beltane. You could ritually let go of whatever it is that doesn't serve you today and just let it float down the river.

In closing today this is my blessing for all of you and for myself: On this spring day, this time of Beltane, may you be well in your body, mind, and spirit. May you find ways to connect your inner life to the beauty of the natural world as the earth orbits the sun and the days grow longer.

May it be so.