

**“Dandelions and Mushrooms”****Rev. Maeve Hammond****November 5, 2023****Special reading from adrienne maree brown’s *Emergent Strategy*****Scripture: John 14:25-31**

*Let us pray. God of love, God of all goodness, God of all living things, we ask that you may change the words written by your Children into words of transformation, contemplation, and action. As Christ transforms us, may the words we heard also transform us. Amen.*

“A mushroom *is* a toxic-transformer, a dandelion *is* a community of healers to spread.... What are we, as humans, what is our function in the universe?”

I love this quote from adrienne maree brown, writer, activist, facilitator, and science/science fiction enthusiast. She raises up two often-underlooked, natural beings in our ecosystem: dandelions and mushrooms. As adults, how often have we walked past dandelions along a sidewalk or in our own garden and shrugged them off as weeds unworthy of a second glance? As children, do you remember picking up a dandelion at the end of its life cycle, holding it by the stem, and blowing the feathery, white fluff into the open air? I remember spending many a recess hunting for dandelions alone or with my friends, plopping myself in the grass, and watching the bits of dandelion spin in spirals from the plant into the open air. Did you know that these feathery fluffs carry seeds that will spread up to five miles away from the originating plant? The breath of one child carries the potential of new life for miles and miles!

And, mushrooms! How did we get so lucky to share the world with these resilient, intelligent, and sometimes edible organisms? A few months ago, I caught up with the rest of the world’s fascination with fungi. Merlin Sheldrake’s *Entangled Life* taught me about the ways fungi are inextricably interwoven with our own world. They have

complicated, interconnected systems called mycelium that function like tree roots spreading out from a point of origin for miles and miles. Fungi are many and one: they have something almost akin to a communal nervous system and “talk” to each other by sending signals. And, not to freak you out too much, but fungi are *everywhere*—in our walls, in our food, and, yes, even in the pew you’re sitting in. Lest you think non-edible fungi are only out to do us harm or make us sick, they actually, as adrienne maree brown writes, “take substances we think of as toxic, and process them as food” (9).

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Today, we are honoring the traditions of All Saints’ Day and All Souls’ Day. These feast days typically fall on November 1 and November 2, respectively, each year. All Saints’ Day celebrates the saints of the church, or at least, the saints of our own lives who have guided us to become the people we are spiritually, vocationally, and ethically. If you have been worshipping here with us the past year, it should come as no shock that I’ve been thinking about Dorothy Day this week—a still-unofficial saint, but a saint in my heart nonetheless. All Souls’ Day, also called Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed, remembers our loved ones who have left this earthly realm, leaving their memories with us. This week, I have been thinking about many of my loved ones who I have lost. In particular, one of my divinity school mentors, Rev. Tim Stein, has been present in my memories.

I want to ask you a question that may sound a little silly or odd: who have been not just who the saints and souls are in our lives, but who have also been the dandelions and mushrooms in our lives? That is to say, who has been like a community

of healers? Who has been like a toxic-transformer? Who has been your dandelion, by your side, encouraging you to take care of yourself, uplifting you in joy, helping you wash your wounds, and balm your soul? And, who has been your mushroom, taking your ills and discomforts in reassurance, transforming your pain into peace, protecting and defending you and your wellbeing? Let's take a moment to call these names and faces to our memory: our dandelions and our mushrooms. [Silence]

I want to read this hymn from St. Hildegard von Bingen, a Christian mystic, writer, migraine-sufferer, and hymnist from a thousand years ago. In a sermon called "Hildegard of Bingen and Us: The Way of Creative Possibilities," Rev. Patricia Wagner writes, St. Hildegard was born "100 years before St. Francis of Assisi, 200 years before St. Julian of Norwich, at a time when women were uneducated and their lives unrecorded. And would become the earliest known composer in the Western world. A doctor of the healing arts, the author of books of mystical theology and consulted by popes and princes. Yet it took until 1987, 800 years after her death, before her work was finally translated into English."

Hear these beautiful words from St. Hildegard—words that may again bring to mind the dandelions and mushrooms of your life.

Holy Spirit, the life that gives life,

You are the cause of all movement.

You are the breath of all creatures.

You are the salve that purifies our souls.

You are the ointment that heals our wounds.

You are the fire that warms our hearts.

You are the light that guides our feet.

Let all the world praise you.

Holy Wisdom, Soaring Power,

encompass us with wings unfurled,

and carry us, encircling all, above, below and through the world.

Among our earth-bound saints, souls, dandelions, and mushrooms, we also remember the trinity of abiding love that brought these beings into our lives, facilitated our relationships with them, and now holds us and them in tender, Divine hands. As we will hear later on as we partake in the Sacrament of Communion, we remember that Jesus, too, wept for his friends, his disciples, and for the whole of Jerusalem. The mixed joy and grief we may feel over All Saints' and All Souls' Days are *holy* joy and *sacred* grief. *Holy* joy and *sacred* grief are the proof and products of a love brought into our lives by God's hands.

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Is, perhaps, our function in the universe as human beings to open ourselves to the vulnerability of the love God presents us? Is our function to be the dandelions and mushrooms of another's life so that, when we, too, are gone from this earth, we may have truly lived these words spoken by Jesus: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; but the kind of peace I give you is not like the world's peace. Don't let your hearts be distressed; don't be fearful. You've heard me say, 'I am going away but I will return....' Let's get up now, and be on our way” (John 14:27-32). Amen.