



## **LENT 5: SPIRITUAL PRACTICE – Flowers!**

From my earliest memories, I have had a love affair with apple blossoms. I think Johnny Appleseed must have once traversed our acreage in the Ottawa Valley where I spent my early childhood: there were dozens of apple trees scattered around the farm. In early summer I would lie on my back under the ones that hedged our vegetable garden, and soak in the fragrance and the beauty of that froth of pink-and-white against a blue, blue sky.

When Tom and I moved to New Liskeard in 2014, my four children gave me an ornamental crabapple tree as a housewarming gift. The image to the left shows you that little tree six years later. It was 2020, the first summer of pandemic lockdown— when we were not even allowed inside the church building— and I sat under that tree to record a Sunday worship service. I don't know what the neighbours thought about the flute music, but the bees buzzed merrily around my head and I was in a blessed spot, surrounded by apple blossoms and birdsong.

Flowers “restore my soul”. Like in Psalm 23. I know it says “the Lord restores my soul” but, for me, God is in the flowers. Apple blossoms, hollyhocks (another favourite), wild roses, gerbera daisies, violets, tulips (*I am Dutch*), peonies, cornflowers, daffodils, dandelions, dipladenia, Christmas cactus, buttercups, delphiniums, forget-me-nots, lilacs, hydrangeas, wild lupins, hepaticas, trilliums, sweet peas, nasturtiums, crocuses, snowdrops, hyacinths, amaryllis, sunflowers, bluebells—I love them all! When I arrived at the MUC office for work the first day, there were two arrangements of garden flowers awaiting me. They welcomed my soul, and I laughed out loud. Thank you!

I have confessed to you on a Sunday morning that I may be forgetful about watering my houseplants now and again; don't let that fool you—I don't know how my soul would survive without flowers.

~ *Judith*



*Wild Lupins—Les Iles de la Madeleine*



*A gift of Sunflowers*



*Back yard Wildflowers*

## FOR REFLECTION

### SCRIPTURE

"Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come; the cooing of doves is heard in our land."

~ Song of Songs 2:12

### POEM— by Mary Oliver

*"I had a dog  
who loved flowers.  
Briskly she went  
through the fields,*

*with its petals  
of silk  
with its fragrance  
rising*

*not in the serious  
careful way  
that we choose  
this blossom or that blossom*

*yet paused  
for the honeysuckle  
or the rose,  
her dark head*

*into the air  
where the bees,  
their bodies  
heavy with pollen*

*the way we praise or don't  
praise -  
the way we love  
or don't love -  
but the way*

*and her wet nose  
touching  
the face  
of every one*

*hovered -  
and easily  
she adored  
every blossom*

*we long to be -  
that happy  
in the heaven of earth -  
that wild, that loving."*

### TO THINK ABOUT...

1. What are your favourite flowers?
2. How are flowers part of your living?
3. Are you familiar with the Victorian "language of flowers"? *\*see below*

### PRAYER

*Silent God – you speak to us in so many ways. Thank you for the poetry of flowers. Amen.*

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\*Following the protocol of Victorian-era etiquette, flowers were primarily used to deliver messages that couldn't be spoken aloud. In a sort of silent dialogue, flowers could be used to answer "yes" or "no" questions. A "yes" answer came in the form of flowers handed over with the right hand; if the left hand was used, the answer was "no."

Plants could also express aversive feelings, such as the "conceit" of pomegranate or the "bitterness" of aloe. Similarly, if given a rose declaring "devotion" or an apple blossom showing "preference," one might return to the suitor a yellow carnation to express "disdain."

How flowers were presented and in what condition were important. If the flowers were given upside down, then the idea being conveyed was the opposite of what was traditionally meant. How the ribbon was tied said something, too: Tied to the left, the flowers' symbolism applied to the giver, whereas tied to the right, the sentiment was in reference to the recipient. And, of course, a wilted bouquet delivered an obvious message!

More examples of plants and their associated human qualities during the Victorian era include bluebells and kindness, peonies and bashfulness, rosemary and remembrance, and tulips and passion.

~ <https://www.almanac.com/flower-meanings-language-flowers>