

“Dancing at Lughnasadh”
Sermon by Sharon Wylie
August 1, 2010

I wish you a happy Lughnasadh! Happy Lughnasadh! Bright blessings of Lughnasadh upon you.

Shall we say it together? Happy Lughnasadh!

What IS Lughnasadh, you may be wondering?

Lughnasadh is a Neopagan holiday that celebrates the beginning of the harvest season, traditionally a time for harvesting grains. It has its origins an an ancient harvest festival in Ireland and Great Britain. It is also known as Lammass, by which name it was celebrated as a Roman Catholic feast day, which is why I use the more difficult to pronounce name, Lughnasadh. It falls approximately halfway between summer solstice and fall equinox and is traditionally celebrated today, August 1. The word “Lughnasadh” is derived from the name of the Irish sun god, Lugh, and the modern Irish word for the month of August is now “Lúnasa,” spelled slightly differently but pronounced the same. In Ireland this is a national holiday recognized on the first Monday in August.

So in simplest terms, we are celebrating August. Summer is at its height, but the days grow shorter, and preparations for the rainy season begin. This is a time, as Joan prompted us, to savor what is precious, to appreciate the sunshine all the more because the days are getting shorter. This is a time for drinking iced tea with friends and meditating on bell peppers and napping after church.

At Lughnasadh, some things in the garden are ripe and flourishing. Some things in the garden are still not ready. Some things in the garden are already dry and wilted. As it is in the garden, so it is in our lives. Some aspects of our lives are ripe and flourishing. Some aspects of our lives are still to come. And some aspects of our lives are dry and wilted.

This is the natural cycle of the seasons and of living. There are times when our dreams, our relationships, obligations, our goals...there are times when some of these are vibrant and nourishing, times when we leap up in the morning called to the work of tending these aspects of our lives. For me, it won't surprise you, this work of planning worship and crafting sermons has called to me this summer. I have woken up with in the morning excited to start writing. I have actually left here on Sunday morning after worship and gone home and started writing the next sermon that same day, because it's all I could think about. I am supposed to be reading books about Unitarian Universalist history this summer, and instead of have been reading books on preaching and worship.

Do you know that feeling? That hobby or friendship or music that you approach with eagerness and excitement. When you are with that person or doing that activity, you lose all track of time. I hope we might share some of these with each other. I'm going to invite you to talk in groups of 3 or 4—however you sort yourselves is fine, there's no wrong way—and talk with the people around you about what in your life fires your spirit, either now or in the past. And if you can't think of anything, or don't want to share or participate, that's fine as well, there's no

pressure, and there's no right or wrong thing to say or do. We'll take just 3 or 4 minutes for this, so be mindful of the time.

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I'm going to call us back together now. Would people like to call out some of the things you talked about, just popcorn style, one or two words at a time? What fires you?

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This is the natural cycle of the seasons and of living. There are times when some of these dreams, these relationships, obligations, these goals are still coming to fruition, times when we've planted the seeds and are waiting and hoping for our hard work to bear fruit. For me, this entire path to ministry is an unknown harvest. I have no way of knowing now that I will EVER be a minister. I have left my family, my home, and my church in San Diego, my partner left his job where he had been very happy, and I am about to start my third year with no income whatsoever. Even if I become an ordained minister, I have no guarantees of finding a congregation that wants me as their settled minister. I have grown fond of saying that I don't have plans, but I do have hopes.

Do you know that feeling? When you've laid the groundwork but have no idea what will happen next. When you are hopeful and fearful all at once and have to acknowledge that you are not in control, that you have done your best, but that the outcome RIGHT NOW is unknowable. I hope we might share some of these with each other. I'm going to ask us to talk in groups of 3 or 4 again—you can stay in

your same group if you like or re-sort so that you can talk with some new people, there's no wrong way—and talk with the people around you about what you hope to harvest in the days or months or years ahead. And if you can't think of anything, or don't want to share or participate, that's fine as well, there's no pressure, and there's no right or wrong thing to say or do. We'll take just 3 or 4 minutes for this, so be mindful of the time.

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I'm going to call us back together now. Would people like to call out some of the things you talked about, just popcorn style, one or two words at a time? What are you hoping for?

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This is the natural cycle of the seasons and of living. There are times to let some of these dreams, these relationships, obligations, these goals...when it's time to let some of these go. Part of the gift of Lughnasadh is to recognize that it's okay to let some areas of our lives wilt and return to seed. Sometimes we need to look around and realize that some things in our lives are past their ripeness. Sometimes no amount of tending can revive a languishing bloom. And our energy is better spent nourishing that which will grow and come to feed US, rather than that which takes our focus and gives nothing in return.

What I've let go of on this path to ministry is a sense of security that came at a cost I was no longer willing to pay. My well-paying job at my family's construction company helped me pay my mortgage and fund my retirement account, but I woke

up every morning at 4 a.m., unable to sleep because of the stress of managing a construction project. The dog-eat-dog business world ignored my values of community and mutual respect. Preparing to attend our weekly project meetings—where the various members of the project team assembled to accuse, argue, and blame each other—was the most difficult part of my work week.

Do you know that feeling? When there is something you feel you SHOULD be doing, but you dread it, and you put it off, and you wish it would go away. Maybe it is time to let it go, and relieve yourself of that obligation, whatever it is.

You know what's coming. I hope we might share some of these with each other, in groups of 3 to 4. But I want us to recognize that for most of us, this is the hard one. So I'll ask us to reflect just on the question of what you have in your life that DOESN'T feed you, and we can set aside the question for now of whether or not you could let it go. That can be a really hard question and isn't something most of us are going to decide in just a few minutes this morning. But please talk with the people around you—if you're comfortable—about what in your life drains you. And again, if you can't think of anything, or don't want to share or participate, that's fine as well, there's no pressure, and there's no right or wrong thing to say or do. We'll take just 3 or 4 minutes for this, so be mindful of the time.

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I'm going to call us back together now. Would people like to call out some of the things you talked about, just popcorn style, one or two words at a time? What might you think about letting go of?

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Letting go is the hardest part, in my experience. It can be challenging. It can be painful. But it can also be freeing. What we leave in the garden often becomes the compost that nourishes next year's harvest. Perhaps the things we let go of now will pave the way for something juicy and exciting ahead.

Yes, Lughnasadh is a time for celebration AND reflection, a time to give thanks for what is being harvested while realizing there is still more to come. Neopagan ritual is participatory, and the practice of each person contributing something of themselves—as we've done here—is of paramount importance. I know this morning may have felt unusual, but through our shared reflections, we have celebrated Lughnasadh here together.

I hope that when you eat bread and fruits this week, that you will reflect on this time of harvest and how it is reflected in your life. And I hope this morning has been a time of both celebration and reflection for you.

Blessed be.