

Beltane Pluralism Sermon
May 12, 2024

Maypole Story:

His parents made an unfortunate choice when they named their son "Frost," for no one hated the snow and cold and ice so much as he did. What was even more unfortunate was to be born in a land ruled by an Ice Troll, who loved to freeze everything he touched. Thermostats were closely watched and constantly turned down. The troll provided no shortage of games and entertainment for his residents: skating, sledding, skiing, and snow-shoeing were all enjoyed by Frost's family, and most everyone else he knew. Frost, in the meantime, was forever huddled under a blanket. And a sweater. And a coat. And the long, white scarf that every resident of the land of ice wore so proudly day in and day out. His poor toes were always frozen with the cold, and he was forever seeking some warm place in a land where no such thing existed.

One day, Frost bundled up in his sweater and his coat and, with his long white scarf wrapped around his face, he set out to run away from the Land of Ice. No one ever ran away, and so the border was not well guarded, and within a couple days of walking he began to grow warmer. As he continued on his path, the heat kept increasing, and soon he began to do something he'd never done before and shed layers. By the time he came to the gate of a great city, he'd converted his coat into a satchel and carried most of his clothes within, although he left the white scarf dangling from his neck.

He was welcomed at the gates and brought to a great feast, where he saw the Queen of the realm. Frost was taken aback when she came into the room, as he had never before met a dragon. In the Land of Fire, the temperature was always hot, and the Queen liked nothing more than to set things ablaze, burn whatever could be burnt, and keep things toasty.

Frost enjoyed his barbecued dinner, and later the drumming and dancing around the fire, but was unable to sleep because of how hot everything was, and so went for a walk. He'd traveled far from the Land of Ice, but it not a place where he'd be comfortable settling. As he walked, a young woman fell into step beside him and struck up a conversation.

He learned that her name was Ember, and she hated the constant heat. She asked if he was planning to travel farther, and when he said he was, she asked if she might travel with him. They struck a deal, and the next day set out from the city gate; Frost in his long white scarf, and Ember in the bright red bandana that all the Land of Fire residents wore.

They traveled for several days, until they ran out of land. Ahead of them, a city perched at the edge of a great sea. Rain poured down from the sky, and they entered the city seeking shelter. Inside, they learned that the City of Water was ruled by a Sea serpent who controlled the weather and kept it raining all the time. While it was fun to swim in the sea and the poached fish was delicious, everything about the city was always damp; clothes and blankets and bedding, and neither Frost nor Ember wanted to stay. While they were packing, a young woman approached and told them her name was Brooke, and asked if she might join them on their journey. And so, the three of them set out; Frost in his white scarf, Ember in her red bandana, and Brooke in the length of blue nautical rope that all residents wore.

They traveled for several days, and what started as a gentle breeze picked up into a stronger wind. At a city gate, the guards welcomed them to the City of Air. Brooke especially was fascinated by how much her clothing and hair dried out, and they learned that the place was ruled over by a giant Eagle who kept the wind blowing hard by flapping his great wings.

After a day of hang-gliding and a meal of leafy greens and light grains, one of the servers asked if they planned to travel farther and, if so, if he could accompany them. And so he did. Gust was his name, and he wore a yellow kite tail from his hair as all residents did, while Frost kept his white scarf, Ember her red bandana, and Brooke her blue rope.

The four traveled for several days, entering a forest and discovering a clearing in the center where a single tall tree grew. The place sometimes grew cold at night, but Frost showed them how to bundle against the cold and Ember lit fires to keep them warm until the sun rose once more. The skies sometimes poured down rain and other times fierce winds blew, but Brooke and Gust built them shelters.

Over time, more people came to their encampment. The four friends remained close to the tall tree in the center of the clearing, but more and more shelters popped up around them, more and more people wearing white scarves, or red bandanas, or blue lengths of boat rope, or yellow kite strings.

Ah, but back in the lands of Ice and Fire, the Cities of Water and Air, the leaders noticed how much their populations had dropped. They assigned more guards at their borders and punished anyone they caught leaving, yet more people left every day. And so, each of the monstrous leaders decided to declare war on their former residents.

Frost and Ember, Brooke and Gust saw the arrival of the monsters from the four directions and shuddered. They did not want to return to the lands they'd left behind, but could not mount a defense against the attack either. Then Frost took one end of the long white scarf that he always wore, and tied it to the tall tree at the center of the clearing. He tied the other end to his wrist. Ember followed his lead, tying one end of her red bandana to the tree, Brooke followed with her blue rope, and Gust with his kite string. They encouraged all of the residents to do the same, hoping to weather whatever the monsters brought and hang onto the place they had achieved.

Fierce storms approached from all four directions. The Ice Troll sent out hail, and the Dragon laid out her fiery breath. The Sea Serpent put forth a torrential downpour, and the Eagle flapped up a hurricane force wind.

But something magical happened.

The hail cooled the flames even as the fire melted the hail. The downpour dampened the wind and the air dried the rain. Each of the monsters increased their intensity. All continued to cancel one another out. What fell around the people at the tree was a gentle spring rain.

The monsters, exhausted and defeated, went back home. The people tied to the tree celebrated their victory, some dancing clockwise, others dancing counterclockwise. In the end, the tree was wound with a mesh formed of white scarves and red bandanas, blue ropes and yellow kites strings.

Every year, in memory of their victory, the people set up a pole in the center of their settlement, and tied a different color strand to that pole before dancing around it, a memory of how pluralism had made them a new and happy people.

- Messed with the history of the maypole, but:

Maypole Dance symbolism

- Circle
 - symbolizes unity, wholeness, community, and being protectively surrounded
 - image of the cosmos
- Pole
 - center of activity
 - axis mundi
 - verticality connects all the worlds
 - all the beings of all the worlds
- Ribbons
 - rays shining forth from a common middle point above the dancers
 - we all weave those ribbons together
 - somehow, magically, a woven fabric develops
- diverse people working together means something new is born: pluralism

Beltane

- halfway point between the spring equinox and the summer solstice
- celebration of spring energy
- profound interconnectedness of all life
- honors multitude of life's expressions
 - richness of human experience
 - there are many paths to truth and enlightenment
 - diversity of deities, rituals, and practices
 - rich tapestry of spiritual paths and philosophical perspectives that exist within and beyond our community
 - recognition and acceptance of diversity in belief systems, cultures, and traditions
 - resonates with the spirit of this ancient festival

Beltane and Pluralism

- intersect in celebration of diversity, unity, and interconnectedness of all things

- encourage openness to different truths
 - no one tradition holds monopoly on truth/wisdom
 - Just as every plant and creature has its place in the ecosystem, so too do diverse spiritual paths enrich our collective journey
- offer a path toward harmony and understanding
 - essential to our shared human experience
- call upon us to engage with humility and curiosity
 - learn from one another, drawing strength from our differences and finding common ground in our shared humanity
- call upon us to cultivate empathy, respect, and tolerance towards those whose perspectives may differ from our own
- As the varied colors of the ribbons adorn the maypole, the diversity of human thought and expression enriches the tapestry of our collective existence

Achieving pluralism

- Cultivate Openness
 - Embrace mindset of openness, curiosity towards different perspectives and experiences
 - Be willing to listen deeply to others without judgment or preconceptions
 - ****Take up a ribbon!**
- Educate Yourself
 - Take initiative, learn about different cultures, religions, and worldviews
 - Read books, attend cultural events, and engage in respectful dialogue with people from diverse backgrounds
 - ****Pay attention to the maypole facilitator**
- Promote Dialogue
 - Create spaces for meaningful dialogue and exchange where people feel safe to share their beliefs and experiences
 - Encourage active listening, empathy, and mutual respect during these conversations
 - dialogue reveals understandings and differences
 - Not everyone at the table agrees with one another
 - Pluralism: commitment to be at the table—with one's beliefs
 - ****Interact with fellow dancers**
- Challenge Assumptions
 - Reflect on biases/assumptions about other cultures, beliefs

- Consider stereotypes and misinformation through critical thinking and exposure to diverse perspectives
- **Adapt the dance as necessary
- Build Relationships
 - Foster relationships with individuals from diverse backgrounds
 - Build connections based on mutual respect and understanding
 - break down barriers and promote solidarity
 - engage people of different faiths and cultures in the creation of a common society
 - **Go over even if you just went over
- Tolerance is not enough
 - does not require people to know anything about one another
 - can let us harbor stereotypes and half-truths
 - does little to remove our ignorance of one another
 - Advocate for inclusive policies and practices
 - Stand up against discrimination, prejudice, and marginalization
- Participate
 - Engage in interfaith and intercultural activities that promote understanding and cooperation across religious and cultural divides
 - Attend interfaith gatherings, cultural festivals, and collaborative service projects
 - **Take part in the dance!
- Pluralism and diversity are not the same!
 - Can just observe diversity
 - Can be critical of it/threatened by it
 - Pluralism is engagement that creates a common from all that diversity
 - E Pluribus Unum, “out of many, one,” envisions one people, a common sense of a civic “we,”
 - not one religion, one faith, or one conscience; unum does not mean uniformity
 - Not a "melting pot"
 - plural ethnic cultures, complementing one another, like the different parts of a symphony orchestra
 - **Or the many colored ribbons on the maypole
- Work towards a more inclusive, harmonious, and equitable world
 - Cultivate empathy and compassion towards others, especially those whose beliefs and experiences differ from your own

- Seek to understand the world through their eyes and extend kindness and support whenever possible
- Lead by Example
 - Be a role model for pluralism in your interactions and behaviors
 - Demonstrate respect, tolerance, and inclusivity in your words and actions, inspiring others to follow suit

Closing remarks

- the essence of both Beltane and pluralism lies in unity amidst diversity
- Embrace the lessons of Beltane and the principles of pluralism, nurturing the seeds of understanding and compassion within our hearts, so that we may flourish together in the garden of humanity
- Just as the various elements of nature come together in a symphony of life during this sacred season, so too can we come together in a spirit of inclusivity and respect
- As we envision the many colored ribbons of the maypole and the complexity of the pattern woven into it, may we also consider the beauty and complexity of the human experience
 - inspiring us to embrace the richness of our differences and to work together towards a world of greater harmony and understanding

- May this Beltane season be a time of celebration, reflection, and renewal, as we honor the beauty of diversity and the interconnectedness of all life
- May we find joy, renewal, and connection as we weave the many colored ribbons of diversity into the fabric of our shared community and extend that into the larger world