

## 6<sup>th</sup> June 2021 – ‘Being the solution’

Led by Rev Kate Whyman. Reader: Caroline Earl. Filming/production: Myron

### **GATHERING MUSIC Earth Song, by Frank Ticheli**

<https://youtu.be/Aarowtnr-hs>

### **WELCOME AND CHALICE LIGHTING**

Good morning and welcome to our time of shared and ‘blended’ worship. Welcome to you all. However you are joining us today, may you know that here you have a place. Here you matter. Here you belong. And that what is true here, is also true in the world, and in the Universe. Welcome.

Let’s begin, as is our custom, by lighting our chalice candle. *And as always, I invite those of you at home, to light a candle with me if you would like to.*

May this be the flame of light that unites us, and may it guide us ever closer towards the love that heals and saves us. Amen

Yesterday was World Environment Day, and I’m picking up that theme today. I’d like to begin with ‘A prayer for the earth’, which I have borrowed from Pope Francis’ encyclical. He begins the prayer with the words ‘All powerful God’. However, as always, I invite you to interpret your relationship with the ‘god’ of *your* understanding in your own way.

### **A Prayer for the Earth by Pope Francis**

All powerful God

you are present in the universe

and in the smallest of your creatures.

You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.

Pour out upon us the power of your love,

that we may protect life and beauty.

Fill us with your peace, that we may live

as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor,

help us to rescue the abandoned

and forgotten of this earth,  
so precious in your eyes.  
Bring healing to our lives,  
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,  
that we may sow beauty,  
not pollution and destruction.  
Touch the hearts  
of those who look only for gain  
at the expense of the poor and the earth.  
Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,  
to be filled with awe and contemplation,  
to recognize that we are profoundly united  
with every creature  
as we journey towards your infinite light.  
We thank you for being with us each day.  
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle,  
for justice, love and peace.

**1<sup>st</sup> hymn: 147 (P) Spirit of earth, root, stone and tree**

Spirit of earth, root, stone and tree,  
water of life, flowing in me,  
keeping me stable, nourishing me,  
O fill me with living energy!

Spirit of nature, healing and free,  
spirit of love, expanding in me,  
spirit of life, breathe deeply in me,  
inspire me with living energy!

Spirit of love, softly draw near,  
open my heart, lessen my fear,  
sing of compassion, help me to hear,  
O fill me with loving energy!

Spirit of nature, healing and free,  
spirit of love, expanding in me,  
spirit of life, breathe deeply in me,  
inspire me with living energy!

Spirit of life, you are my song,  
sing in my soul, all my life long,  
gladden and guide me, keep me from wrong,

O fill me with sacred energy!

Spirit of nature, healing and free,  
spirit of love, expanding in me,  
spirit of life, breathe deeply in me,  
inspire me with living energy!

*Traditional Scottish melody arranged by David Dawson, words by Lyanne Mitchell*

**STORY:** This little story doesn't have a name. I found it in a collection called 'Taking Flight; a book of story meditations', by Anthony de Mello. It's clearly from the Jewish tradition, and I particularly love its humour...

'Goldberg had the loveliest garden in town and each time the Rabbi passed by he would call out to Goldberg, 'Your garden is a thing of beauty. The Lord and you are partners!'

'Thank you, Rabbi,' Goldberg would respond with a bow.

This went on for days and weeks and months. At least twice a day the Rabbi, on his way to and from the synagogue, would call out, 'The Lord and you are partners!' until Goldberg began to be annoyed at what the Rabbi evidently meant as a compliment.

So the next time the Rabbi said, 'The Lord and you are partners,' Goldberg replied, 'That may be true. But you should have seen this garden when the Lord had it all on his own!'

I think all of us with gardens might resonate with that sentiment!

**READING: I only want to say, Elias Amidon**

Now that I am old[er] my thoughts no longer hold the certainty they had, instead they open like a river delta does, spreading to the sea, slow calm channels where grasses bow and water birds float and dive and make their homes. The torrent of my beliefs has eased, thank God, and I no longer need to convince anyone of anything. You and they will find your way. I only want to say how good it is and how good you are, as you try to make things better, how good it is that this is the way it is, and that we are not alone and never were, the same water flowing to the sea and lifting us to the clouds. It is beautiful that we have been made like this, out of mud and air, made so finely that our eyes can shine with the dearest love.

There is nothing to be afraid of.

This may be the best, the most important job we have: to assure one another that each of us is loveable, and that mercy softens every fall. Death, after all, is a fine homecoming.

As I age and slow I wonder if my life has any meaning left. It does! Meaning beyond the need for meaning, this one that drenches me with thankfulness. I am not at war with a meaningless void. There is no need for meaning, here where we glisten like raindrops in the sunlight, each drop a prism.

Something unspeakably good is shining here, some generosity so quiet and nonchalant it leaves no trace of itself yet appears as you and me and every moment created and left behind, nothing ever personal yet everything always intimate.

Mountains slide into the sea, even oceans wave goodbye, and we are not what we seem. My mother died and poured herself into my emptiness. My father followed. I join them, even now.

So shall we walk together, you and I, and watch the evening sky turn into stars? Shall we talk together about what we think is happening? It doesn't matter if what we say is true. God after all is too holy to know, and we can be content to say our hearts have no edge and leave it at that.

### **REFLECTION – Candles of joy and concern**

This is a chance for silence and stillness, and to light a candle for a joy or a sorrow.

**INTERLUDE** Oceans, by Holl Morrell. With thanks to her for making her music available for Unitarians to use (unfortunately there is no link).

### **ADDRESS**

Last week a dear friend, who has been an activist all his life, especially - though not only - where the environment is concerned, said two things that surprised me. The first was that,

having seen amazing examples of nature in far-flung corners of the world, he'd become spoilt and now found it difficult to get excited by wildlife and wilderness here at home. And the second was that, though he did still appreciate the beauty of things, he didn't actually feel a connection with them.

That struck me as strange, and I suppose a little sad. Of course, I realize it's possible to be busy in the world doing things we hope will help, and to be motivated out of a sense of what's fair, or what's morally correct: from a basic sense of what's right and wrong. And I also know it's possible to get burnt out, exhausted and frustrated by the lack of progress, and other people's apparent indifference to the problems. That can lead to getting angry, or despondent and even to giving up.

So there is a real need for us all, I think, to keep replenishing and keep returning to the original source of our motivation. For me it feels impossible to sustain enough energy to act positively in the world unless I keep deepening my connection with it. Perhaps that sounds like yet another project, or still more navel-gazing rather than actually doing anything. But it's actually quite simple. All we need is a little time and space and a small but significant shift in our awareness.

The word 'environment' basically means 'surroundings', doesn't it? For example, if I talked about my environment you would understand that I was referring to the area or the conditions in which I live. '*The Environment*' has come to mean the whole of nature, but the word still suggests something that surrounds us and is therefore *other* than us. As though we were parading centre stage, and the environment were merely the set or the props. And so there can understandably arise the sense that the environment is a backdrop, that it's primarily there to support us, to serve us, sometimes to thwart us and also to amaze us. And so it's possible to lose the feeling of real connection, and become rather detached. To see the beauty and wonder, as well as the damage and disaster, maybe, but then either to dismiss it as of secondary importance, or try to fix it. The temptation is to see 'the environment' either as a victim of our whims and follies, and dependent on our care, or as something we are free to manipulate to our own ends.

In which case something has gone missing. And what's missing, I think, is the intimacy of connection, of mutual relationship.

I've had a week off. The first day I was at home two great tits appeared in my garden. I was delighted. I'd never seen them there before, nor since. On one level their visit was just an unexpected pleasure, something to make me smile. But deeper than that was the strong feeling I had that somehow the boundaries of my 'self' had been expanded by their presence, or maybe they'd been dissolved. It was as though those delightful little birds were not just flitting among the plants looking for insects to eat, but were also dancing inside my heart.

When I took my visitors from Brighton to The Box last week (that's our exciting new museum, by the way), and after we'd marveled at the huge ships' figureheads and the enormous woolly mammoth, we took it in turns to look through a microscope at something much very smaller - a section through a bee's eye. And there was a second in which I felt I was peering through a window into that long-dead insect's inner world. And that somehow – over the mists of time and space, and across the veil between life and death – it was able to gaze back into mine.

Perhaps I should reassure you at this point that I hadn't been taking any hallucinogenic drugs.

Later in the week a breathtaking sunset across the sea, looking West from Aberystwyth, provided a glorious light display. Yet the spectacle was only made possible by the specific arrangement of the earth, the sun, the clouds and my own (and my friends') gaze in that moment. Participating in it seemed to expand the definition of what it meant to be me – or us – in the vastness of the universe. We had collaborated - in just a small way – in creating such an incredible phenomenon.

The following day we spotted two red kites (birds, I mean) circling in the blue sky above Pumlumon in the Cambrian Mountains. They seemed almost to lift me up to meet them. I felt as though I was swooping and gliding along with them, high and free, like them, in the clear air.

Finally, returning once more to Plymouth, I spotted an enormously tall *Ecchium*, in a friend's garden this time. What an absurd and wonderful flower it is! (Or is it a tree?) It looks prehistoric. Seeing it, I felt swept backwards along the great arc of evolution to a time before animals, let alone humans, emerged on the scene. It gave me a sense of the millions –

billions – of years that life has been here and how the universe has been forming and reforming, and continues to do so.

It's amazing what a holiday can do. I recommend it.

I think we all know we're not meant to trash and destroy the planet. That's not our role as humans. That's abundantly clear. But I'm not entirely convinced we were put here to fix it either. For the universe is way bigger, far greater, immeasurably more majestic, and much more extraordinary than us. It has its own trajectory, and we can't know what that is.

But I do think we're invited to fully understand that we are *of* it; to find our place in the pattern of it; to live within and alongside the whole of creation, and yes, to be 'partners with the Lord', as the Rabbi might put it. I do believe we are meant to be – and in fact can't truly be anything but – in intimate relationship with it all. We are made of mud and air. And our relationship with the earth is entirely mutual, and wholly reciprocal. As such, it is a thing of sublime beauty. Why would we not care for this relationship? How could we bear not to?

Like many of you, I yearn to be part of the solution to the devastation and exploitation and the sheer irreverence with which the earth is so often treated. We each should do what we can, as Sheila illustrated so well last week. And part of being the solution must also be to know, deep in our guts, that it is nature that will fix *us*, if we let it. It is the environment that will guide us, and show us what it means – or could mean – to be fully alive. Our role is to fall in love, to drop to our knees in awe and wonder, to lose our selves in the wonder that is life. And also to grow into mature, healthy, loving relationship with all that this world offers. To live in mutually supportive relationship with the seas and the skies, the mountains and lakes, the animals and plants, and with all of the world's people. Ultimately it is realising our intimacy with the whole of creation that will heal us and save us, and it is this, surely, that will heal and save this precious planet, too.

May it be so.

### **HYMN 199 (P) Weaver God, Creator**

Weaver God, Creator, sets life on the loom,  
draws out threads of colour from primordial gloom.  
Wise in the designing, in the weaving deft;  
love and justice joined – the fabric's warp and weft.

Called to be co-weavers, yet we break the thread  
and may smash the shuttle and the loom, instead.  
Careless and greedy, we deny by theft  
love and justice joined – the fabric's warp and weft.

Weaver God, great Spirit, may we see your face  
tapestried in trees, in waves and winds of space;  
tenderness teach us, lest we be bereft  
of love and justice joined – the fabric's warp and weft.

Weavers we are called, yet woven too we're born,  
for the web is seamless: if we tear, we're torn.  
Gently may we live – that fragile earth be left;  
love and justice joined – the fabric's warp and weft.

*French carol tune arranged by David Dawson, words by Kate Compston*

## **CLOSING WORDS**

I'd like to close with those final words again by Elias Amidon.

So shall we walk together, you and I, and watch the evening sky turn into stars? Shall we talk together about what we think is happening? It doesn't matter if what we say is true. God after all is too holy to know, and we can be content to say our hearts have no edge and leave it at that.

Go in peace.

Amen.

*Extinguish chalice*

**CLOSING MUSIC** Blue Boat Home, Peter Mayer

The video shows Peter singing song in a recording made for Earth Day 2020.

<https://youtu.be/0XziR3M2wYk>