

26th September 2021 – ‘Big Green Eco Festival’

Led by Rev Kate Whyman

GATHERING MUSIC ‘September morning’, Gerard Fahy

<https://youtu.be/C7zZju0f7n8>

WELCOME AND CHALICE LIGHTING

Welcome! What a weekend this is! This is the second day of our Big Green Eco Festival and yesterday was a feast of inspiring talks, enticing stalls... and cake. But for now we pause, to take stock and to take time to worship together.

Welcome to you all. First-timers and old-timers. People here in person and with us online. Those of you feeling optimistic and those feeling less so. Welcome to you all.

As surely as we belong to the universe

we belong together.

We join here to transcend the isolated self,

to reconnect,

to know ourselves to be at home,

here on earth, under the stars,

linked with each other

So let us begin, as is our custom, by lighting our chalice candle as a symbol of our free religious faith. *If you're at home do please light a candle with me now if you would like to.*

We light this flame in solidarity with the earth, in harmony with all life, in the knowledge that we are part of the universe. Amen

Let us enter a time of prayer together...

PRAYER Re-creation by Stephen M Shick

Spirit of Life, God of Love, who are we to know how you moved over the waters when all was new? We were not there when you parted them and formed dry land. We didn't hear you cry with joy when earth gave birth to life, or when love began to grow in the human

heart. Your longing for hope created this vast diversity of beings with whom we now share our days.

Spirit of perpetual creation and re-creation, help us to see past our pride and look to our reality. Help us accept responsibility wherever we have taken for granted or destroyed the glorious gifts of clean water and air, of woodlands and grasslands, of creatures that fly through the air and swim through the seas, and walk, creep, and crawl on dry land. Help us to gather the seeds of our humility and compassion for our fellow travellers on this earth. Let us join in celebrating and renewing the earth together. Blessed be.

HYMN 128(P) Our world is one world

Our world is one world:

what touches one affects us all –
the seas that wash us round about,
the clouds that cover us,
the rains that fall.

Our world is one world:

the thoughts we think affect us all –
the way we build our attitudes,
with love or hate, we make
a bridge or wall.

Our world is one world:

its ways of wealth affect us all –
the way we spend, the way we share,
who are the rich or poor,
who stand or fall?

Our world is one world:

just like a ship that bears us all –
where fear and greed make many holes,
but where our hearts can hear
a different call.

Music Cecily Taylor, arr. Richard Graves; words Cecily Taylor, ©1988 Stainer & Bell Ltd

A few days ago I was walking down the coastal path from Rame Head and I noticed two speckled wood butterflies dancing along just ahead of me. They kept me company for quite a while and they reminded me of a recent gathering in which several of you mentioned how butterflies had connected you with the divine. Also Delphine returned my copied of *The Moth Snowstorm*, an autobiographical book by Michael McCarthy about his life and his love of nature, and I remembered he wrote that when he was 7 years old, and his mother was seriously ill, he became entranced by dazzling butterflies on a buddleia bush in his aunt's garden.

STORY From 'The Moth Snowstorm', by Michael McCarthy

'The buddleia was crawling with butterflies...

I gazed up at them. I was mesmerized. My eyes caressed their colours like a hand stroking a kitten. How could there be such living gems? And every morning in that hot but fading summer, as my mother suffered silently and my brother cried out, I ran to check on them, never tiring of watching these free-flying spirits with wings as bright as flags which the buddleia seemed miraculously to tame, to keep from visiting other flowers, to enslave on its own blooms by its nectar's unfathomable power. I could smell it myself, honeysweet, but with the faintest hint of a sour edge. Drawing them in, the wondrous visitants. Wondrous? Electrifying, they were. Filling the space where my feelings should have been. And so, through this singular window, when I was a skinny kid in short pants, butterflies entered my soul.

READING Earth, Mark Belletini (UUA)

This is our earth.

It falls through heaven like a pearl

in a glass of plum wine.

There are no other earths that I know of.

There are no other skies that we have mapped.

This is our earth.

The Oneness who gave birth to it
remains nameless.

There was no midwife then
to bring us word of the birth-cry.
We only rejoice that it is.
This is our earth.
Ice caps its head. Glaciers clasp its feet.
Warm wind, like the breath of a lover, breathes around its breast.
Mountains thrust up to the clouds, bringing joy.
Storms blow across its shores, bringing fear.
Silvery fish capture sunlight and bring it down
into the deep, as on shore, valleys spread
with ripening fruit. Cities teem with the
poor and disenfranchised in the shadow of
golden towers. Children live and also die.
Highways throb. Monks sit in silence. Mothers
work. Crickets chirp. Teachers plan. Engineers
design. Fathers write letters.
People marry
with and without the blessings of law.
People cry.
They laugh, and brood, and worry and wait.
This is our earth.
There are no other earths.
Before its wonder, philosophers fall silent.
Before its mystery,
poets admit their words are shadow, not light.
And all the great names religious teachers have left to us—
Ishtar, Shekinah, Terra Mater, Suchness, Wakan
Tanka, Gaia —
suddenly refuse to announce themselves.
And so we too fall silent,
entering the time where words end
and reality begins.

REFLECTION/SILENCE

INTERLUDE Lifted in love, Lea Morris

<https://youtu.be/K7LEfErdqBc>

ADDRESS

This is our earth, writes Mark Belletini. And it is.

In a way. In the way that my house is my house. But even though I've bought it, it's not really mine at all. Other people lived in before me and other people will live in it after I've gone. But it's my home, where I live. And so I try to look after it, keep it cared for, and reasonably clean and tidy. I'm no domestic goddess, but I don't throw litter on the floor, or burn poisonous gases in it, and I haven't paved over the little patch of grass in the garden either.

The earth is ours too, in that it's our home. It's where we live, while we live – all of us. We don't have anywhere else to go. It's ours in the sense that we are responsible for its care, for our own benefit, for other people's benefit, for future generation's benefit. For the sake of all the plants and animals, and life of every kind. Because it's beautiful. And because our souls are intertwined.

I don't know what exactly you believe, I can only share with you the way I see things and hope they might chime with you. And my understanding – the way I experience life – is that everything is an expression of the divine, and that it's all alive and humming and pulsing with spirit. I believe that I'm part of it in the same way that each cell is part of my body. Just as a single cell can't survive on its own, neither can I. Things only makes sense in relation to the whole. Nothing exists or has meaning without everything else. Nothing and no one is separate – or can possibly be separate – from the whole.

So I guess we can look at what's happening to our planet and pretend that fires in Greece, and floods in Germany, and people fleeing areas of drought and devastation around the world are unfortunate but nothing to do with us. But I think that deep down we know that's not true. We know that the changes taking place in the world both profoundly affect us and are profoundly affected by us. Maybe in ways we are barely conscious of – as yet – but deeply – at a soul level. We can glimpse a deeper truth that life is not a collection of

disparate things or a series of isolated events. It is a continuum in every direction. It's all joined up and interrelated. All-of-a-piece. It is One – and there's nowhere else to be, except in it and of it. But even if we agree with this theoretically, it takes - every now and again – for something like butterflies on a buddleia bush to suddenly break through the barriers of our psyches and enter our souls. And in those moment we know it's true.

Do you compost, I wonder? I was struck the other day by a news piece about a very enthusiastic composter called John Cossham. John has 40 compost bins. I don't know how his neighbours feel about that, but he certainly seemed very cheerful. He doesn't just compost his own waste food, he forages for waste food in other people's bins and collects leftovers from local shops and restaurants. His compost goes to local gardens. So maybe his neighbours do appreciate that.

In the same piece, economist Kate Raworth demonstrated how composting shows us how our whole economy needs to change. She said 'we've inherited a linear industrial system, where we take earth's materials, put them in the pipe of production, make them into stuff we want, use it, often only once, and throw it away. And that 'take, make, use, lose' approach has been running down our life systems. She said 'we've got to bend that linear process into a circular or cyclical one so that our resources are used again, and again, more collectively, more creatively and more slowly.'

I liked that. I could understand it. It made sense. And it felt positive.

This weekend has been – and continues to be – (mostly anyway) a positive, hopeful event. We are trying to focus on things we can do to help both the ourselves and the earth. 'Doing something small to be part of something big', as David Curry put it. And we're hoping to raise awareness of the exquisite beauty and precariousness of life on this uniquely life-giving planet that supports us.

And maybe we're doing that because we're afraid we're going to lose it. That's definitely a factor. But I like to think we're doing this mostly because we love it. Because – like Michael McCarthy's butterflies – the earth has at some point in our lives entered our souls and never left. Maybe you remember a moment like that yourself? Perhaps there have been many.

One way or another we have come to recognize that 'the environment', as it's come to be called, isn't something out there to be used or even just to admired. It's the very air we breathe and ground we walk on. It's the water we drink and the food we eat. The people we

share our planet with, who perhaps annoy us and disagree with us, and vote a different way, or come from a different country, they turn out to be the ones who care for us when we're sick, who grow and distribute our food, they're the ones who build our homes and provide us with electricity and – well, maybe, gas – and that when any of these systems break down we – including you – including me – are all affected. So here, in this church, I think we try to foster an awareness of our intimate relationship with nature. We encourage enough humility to really grasp our total dependence on each other. And we encourage the compassion to care for this sublimely intricate, complex, stunning, shocked, bruised, broken, hopeful, spirit-filled world on which we all float and sail - or fall - together.

So today, let's put our skepticism and also our self-righteousness to one side. Let's not give way to despair, or pick fights among ourselves. Let's lift up our eyes. Open our ears. Reach out our arms. And let the earth into our souls once more. Let us breathe it in, feel how we are fully a part of it all, and can never be apart from it.

For the joy, the fulfillment and the sense of belonging we all crave come when we engage with each other and with all life, when we deepen our connection with the earth, with its extraordinary creatures, its vast eons of geology, its breathtaking geography, its peoples and cultures and its ways of life different our own.

Let us keep breathing, keep loving, and keep on doing the best we can.

And then let it go. For the earth will be here long after we have gone. And it has its own journey to travel.

Amen.

2nd HYMN: 216 (P) Wide green world

Wide green world, we know and love you:

Clear blue skies that arch above you,

Moon-tugged oceans rising falling,

Summer rain and cuckoo calling,

Some wild ancient ferment bore us:

life in desert forest mountain,

life in stream and springing fountain.

We know how to mould and tame you,
We have power to mar and maim you.
Show us by your silent growing
That which we should all be knowing:
We are of you, not your master,
We who plan supreme disaster,
If with careless greed we use you
Inch by extinct inch we lose you.

May our births and deaths remind us
Others still will come behind us.
That they also may enjoy you
We with wisdom will employ you.
That our care may always bless you
Teach us we do not possess you.
We are part and parcel of you.
Wide green world, we share and love you.

Words © June D. Bell

CLOSING WORDS Susan Karlson

We leave blessed by our connections to one another, to the spirit of life.
Walk lightly that you see the life that is below your feet.
Spread your arms as if you had wings and could dance through the air.
Feel the joy of the breath in your lungs and the fire in your heart.
Live to love and be a blessing on this earth.

Extinguish chalice

CLOSING MUSIC Blue boat home, Peter Mayer

https://youtu.be/WhsXI1_rEwI