

7th November – Building bridges

Led by Rev Kate Whyman

GATHERING MUSIC ‘Who do I turn to’, Joy Oladokun

<https://youtu.be/c041SkjJdmA>

WELCOME AND CHALICE LIGHTING

Welcome. Welcome to everyone here in the church and all who are joining us online today. You are welcome just as you are.

Today we are ‘building bridges’, a theme suggested by Suzanne and by her photo of the new Tintagel Bridge, which we’ve borrowed once more.

Instead of opening words it seems appropriate to sing the chant, which is 222 in our hymn books, Myron will put the words on the screen.

Building bridges between our divisions,
I reach out to you, will you reach out to me?
With all of our voices and all of our visions,
Friends, we could make such sweet harmony.

And now, as is our custom, let’s light our chalice candle as a symbol of our free religious faith. *If you’re at home I invite you to light a candle with me now.*

We light this chalice to find inner peace,
love for each other, and faith in ourselves.
To be welcoming to whoever we meet
and kind to all living creatures. Let us gather around
this light of hope as we share this time together.

PRAYER by Rebecca Edmiston-Lange

God of all peoples, Spirit of life and love, be in our hearts and minds this hour.
Bless this gathering and this place.

Help us to speak to one another as we would be spoken to, with truthfulness and kindly regard. Help us to hear one another, to respect our differences as an aid to mutual understanding. Help us to acknowledge our limited vision -- that together our grasp of truth is much greater than when alone.

May we find here greater clarity of mind and purpose, strengthened commitment and courage, and a deeper appreciation of our diversity. May we find that renewal of the spirit which comes when people of good faith, reason and passion dialogue together.

Spirit of life and love, be in our hearts and inform our minds and deeds this hour and in the days to come. May it be so.

Let us pause to pray for guidance for our world leaders, our own government, all those who have power and influence in the world that they may use it with care and humility, and with commitment and fortitude, to serve the health and wellbeing of our planet and all who inhabit it, especially those people and species and environments most marginalized, oppressed and at risk. Amen

Our first hymn is...

HYMN 119 (P) O source of many cultures

O Source of many cultures,
of lives, beliefs and faith;
you brought us all together
to share one world in space.

Now show us how to honour
each vision of your way,
to live within the tension
of difference you display.

The colour and the culture,
that kept us both apart,
are gifts that we can offer,
a means for us to start

a journey with each other
till hand in hand we show,
through mutual understanding,
respect and love can grow.

English Traditional Melody, words by Andrew Pratt © 2000 Stainer & Bell Ltd

STORY from Anthony de Mello's book of stories called 'Taking Flight'

A guru asked his disciples how they could tell when the night had ended and the day begun.

One said, 'When you see an animal in the distance can tell whether it is a cow or a horse.
'No', said the Guru.

'When you look at a tree in the distance and can tell if it is a neem tree or a mango tree.'
'Wrong again', said the Guru.

Well, then, what is it? Asked his disciples.

'When you look into the face of any man and recognize your brother in him; when you look into the face of any woman and recognise in her your sister. If you cannot do this, no matter what time it is by the sun it is still night.'

READING by Mark Belletini

For religion to be significant, it has to provide more than the comforts of community. It also has to provide opportunities for deepening, for what I call spiritual growth, and for the casting down of false images and stereotypes, which hurt us all. A good religion has to open us to the real diversity of our modern world. For our work as liberal religious people is not to be competitive with others, and to find ways to supersede others, but rather to find ways to supersede ourselves, to grow beyond our limitations and our constrictive boundaries, each and every one of us. Diversity, you see, must not end up being some sort of feel good slogan, a word we keep in our back pocket to make us feel like we're broad minded. Diversity is a gift. But it cannot be a gift...unless it is received. It is only received when there

are hands and hearts open enough to receive it. And the opening of fists into welcoming hands and welcoming hearts is our spiritual work....

SILENCE

INTERLUDE Tchidim, Mamane Barka

<https://youtu.be/aoRmbmAgx18>

ADDRESS

I love bridges. They're beautiful both in their design and in their function. There is a magical quality to them, don't you think? I can't be the only one who finds it exciting to drive over the Tamar Bridge into Cornwall, and over the Severn into Wales. A bridge literally takes you somewhere else – over the water, to a new land, to the other side. It opens up new pathways and connections. It makes the previously impossible possible. And the great thing is that it works in both directions – both sides benefit from the link that is created.

The building of a bridge can be difficult. Sure, a plank of wood or some well chosen stepping stones to cross a tiny stream might be simple enough, and also very pleasing. But spanning a huge river, or an estuary, is a mammoth task – a real feat of engineering – and a symbol, to me anyway, of hope and faith, of dreaming and exploring.

But you have to really *want* to build a bridge, and see the advantages of it. There's no excuse for not building simple bridges across small spaces. But it takes time – 8 years, for example, to build the Forth Bridge – and it takes energy and vision. A bridge is a leap of faith and a triumph of curiosity, to be open and curious to changes unforeseen, lands not yet travelled, people not yet met, adventures yet to be taken. A bridge is somewhere the imagination and the spirit can take really flight.

Which is why the phrase 'building bridges' is often used in mediation, and in dialogue such as interfaith work. To build a bridge you have to reach out – and build out - from both sides. You have to dare to leave the comfort of the shoreline you know and take a walk out towards someone else's world, and be prepared to meet them there. You have to be willing to make connections across what otherwise might – and often does – divide us. In this case, not so

much across water, but nevertheless across boundaries of faith and belief, of nationality and language, of culture and skin colour, gender and sexuality, ability and neurodiversity – differences of all kinds that can and do separate us unless we're prepared to build those beautiful and creative metaphorical bridges that reach across them.

Mark Belletini said:

For religion to be significant, it has to provide *more than* the comforts of community. It also has to provide opportunities for deepening, for what I call spiritual growth, and for the casting down of false images and stereotypes, which hurt us all.

And that:

'our work as liberal religious people is ... to find ways to supersede ourselves, to grow beyond our limitations and our constrictive boundaries'.

Growing beyond our own limitations and constrictive boundaries is very much spiritual work. These are the things that keep us small and blinkered and prevent us from living with fullness of spirit. They not only keep us divided from each other and from strangers. They also keep us divided from our own essential nature. So this 'bridge building' is work that benefits us all. It's how we learn to understand each other and ourselves, and how we discover how to live and work and learn together and in harmony.

How do we do it?

Recently I've started to attend events again – as we all have. It's taken a while, and I can't say I'm completely back in the swing of going out. But last week I went to the Grey to Green event held at Plymouth University, which was about a drive to get more green roofs and green walls in the city and met some people from the council and the Green Minds project. Yesterday I took part in the Cop 26 march, along with several of you, and felt part of a bigger movement. During interfaith week, which begins next Sunday, I'll be attending an event on religion and the media at Marjon and another at the invitation of the Lord Mayor. This week I wrote to our neighbours the Red Cross – who are also one of our hirers – to see if we might partner with them and our other neighbouring churches and the synagogue to install a defibrillator for all our use. All of these activities begin to build bridges.

Meanwhile our community café is also making connections, with sign language teaching, and with a young local artist who is offering group sessions for us and our local neighbours

in the flats across the road. An invitation has also gone out to our interfaith friends to see if they'd like to take part in our Death Café on Sat 20th with us.

How can our other activities build bridges? How might, for example, our poetry group, Oasis, Heart & Soul and our Sunday services begin to reach out? How do we build more bridges with our hirers? And how can we build bridges in our personal lives, at work, at home, in our own local communities?

The author and activist Verna Myers says "*Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance.*" So who can we invite in, and – what's more - are we willing to we ask them to 'dance' with us when they get here? Which I understand to mean being willing to meet them half way, which means letting go a little, being willing to make some changes in order to adapt and embrace others, as we hope they may do the same for us, so that we can truly collaborate and all grow and learn from the experience.

The music today has all been about building bridges, for me. The opening song sung by Joy Oladokun, a woman of colour who fears being misunderstood and undervalued. The reflective music was played by Nigerien musician Mamane Barka who I met when he came to play his wonderful biram – a stringed instrument - in Brighton, but particularly when he collaborated with an Indian Sitar player. I remember watching as they jammed together and it was magical. They found – coming from completely different cultures and musical traditions – that they could understand each other, could find rhythms and harmonies and ways of expressing something completely new together. It was mesmerizing to listen to them build musical bridges that transcended their differences and created something new and beautiful.

The final music is a collaboration between a B'ahai rapper from Arizona called Colby and a Cameroonian singer called Awu. They both have a passion for peace and understanding between people and they've found they can do more than simply appreciate each other's music, they can also sing – and dance – together.

I'll finish with the words of our opening chant:

Building bridges between our divisions,

I reach out to you, will you reach out to me?

With all of our voices and all of our visions,

Friends, we could make such sweet harmony.

2nd HYMN: 195 (P) We sing a love that sets all people free

We sing a love that sets all people free,
that blows like wind that burns like scorching flame,
Enfolds the earth, springs up like water clear.
Come, living love, live in our hearts today.

We sing a love that seeks another's good,
that longs to serve and not to count the cost,
a love that yielding finds itself made new.
Come, caring love, live in our hearts today.

We sing a love, unflinching, unafraid
to be itself despite another's wrath,
a love that stands alone and undismayed.
Come, strengthening love, live in our hearts today.

We sing a love, that wandering will not rest
Until it finds its way, its home, its source,
through joy and sadness pressing on refreshed.
Come, pilgrim love, live in our hearts today.

We sing the Holy Spirit, full of love,
who seeks out scars of ancient bitterness,
brings to our wounds the healing grace of Christ.
Come, radiant love, live in our hearts today.

*Music by Alfred Morton Smith © Estate of Doris Wright Smith. Words by June Boyce-Tillman
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CLOSING WORDS by **Jean Rickard**

We have a calling in this world:
We are called to honor diversity,
To respect differences with dignity,
And to challenge those who would forbid it.
We are people of a wide path.
Let us be wide in affection
And go our way in peace.
Amen.

CLOSING MUSIC 'Paradigm', Colby and Awu

<https://youtu.be/aJYjrJ2RK7M>