

## 13<sup>th</sup> June 2021 – ‘Building sustainable community’

Led by Rev Kate Whyman

**GATHERING MUSIC** We belong to each other, Garth Brooks

<https://youtu.be/VvMDOB-4QOk>

### **WELCOME AND CHALICE LIGHTING**

Good morning and a warm welcome to our time of shared worship. Welcome to you all, however you are joining us today. Life is full of ups and downs, twists and turns, joys and concerns. Whatever you bring with you today, you are welcome just as you are. And particularly if you’re joining us in the building – or online – for the first time. We hope you enjoy your time with us.

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.*

This flame is a point of focus and stability for us. We light it each week, whatever is going on in ourselves, or in the world. And similar flames are lit by Unitarians all over the world. May it centre us this morning in the here and now, in the simple ‘what is-ness’ of this moment together. Amen

After today’s service we will have our first blended meeting, a chance to share information and ask questions on the possibility of us becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, or CIO. I think we could see this as part of a wider plan to make us a more contemporary, more engaged and more sustainable community. A church that is ready and fit for purpose in these times. And so the theme of this service is ‘Building sustainable community’.

### **PRAYER**

Spirit of Life and Love

We live in a crucible of change.

It is a complex, uncertain and often confusing place to be.

There are many calls on us to do more, to be better, to think differently.

To live more fairly, love more deeply, act more urgently.

And we want to answer those calls, and be the best we can be, and do the best we can do, for ourselves, for our families, for our communities. We desire to be part of the answer to the injustice and the suffering we see within us and all around us. But we are frequently shocked and disturbed, frightened and frustrated, lost and alone.

Ground of All Being

We come here for different reasons

Perhaps to find something to hang on to in the storm  
or to share our experiences of what it feels like to be us;  
to be seen, and heard, and valued  
and to find friendship and a sense of belonging.

Or to work together for a better world.

And to connect with something greater that is still, and simple, and silent.

That might anchor us, and shine a light, and guide us along the path, if we allow it.

Divine Spirit

Help us find our way.

May we be what we are meant to be, and do what we are meant to do, no more and no less.

And to know that it is good.

Amen

### **1<sup>st</sup> hymn: 173 (G) The fellowship of the church**

The church is not where altar stands  
within the hallowed walls,  
but where the strong reach out their hands  
to raise the one that falls;  
not stately building, standing fair,  
where people sing their creeds,  
but fellowship of loving care  
which serves all human needs.

The church is not where ancient rite  
is seen on sabbath days,  
but wisdom's constant beam of light  
to guide our common ways;  
the church is me the church is you,  
not mortar, brick and stone;  
it is with all who love the true,  
and where true love is shown.

*Music by Clement William Poole, words by John Andrew Storey*

**STORY:** 'Passing through', from 'The Shortest Distance: 101 stories from the World's Spiritual Traditions', by Bill Darlison

A famous spiritual teacher begged an audience with the king, and was shown into the palace. 'What can I do for you?' asked the king.

'I would like to spend the night here in this hotel,' replied the teacher.

'But this is not a hotel,' said the king. 'This is my palace. You can't stay here.'

'May I ask who owned this place before you?'

'My father.'

And where is your father now?'

'He's dead.'

Who owned the place before him?'

'My grandfather.'

'And where is your grandfather now?'

'He's dead.'

'So, this is a place in which people live for a while and then move on.

How is it different from a hotel?'

**READING:** 'We build temples in the heart', by Patrick Murfin

We have seen the great cathedrals,  
stone laid upon stone,  
carved and cared for  
by centuries of certain hands;  
seen the slender minarets  
soar from dusty streets  
to raise the cry of faith  
to the One and Only God;  
seen the placid pagodas  
where gilded Buddhas squat  
amid the temple bells and incense.

We have seen the tumbled temples  
half-buried in the sands,  
choked with verdant tangles,  
sunk in corralled seas —  
old truths toppled and forgotten.

We have even seen the wattled huts,  
the sweat lodge hogans,  
the wheeled yurts,  
and the Ice Age caverns  
where unwritten worship  
raised its knowing voices.

But here we build temples in our hearts.  
Side by side we gather.  
We mix the mortar of the scattered dust  
of the Holy of Holies  
with the sacred water  
of the Ganges;  
lay Moorish alabaster  
on the blocks of Angkor Wat  
and rough-hewn Stonehenge slabs;

plumb Doric columns for strength of reason,  
square them with stern Protestant planks,  
and illuminate all with Chartres' jeweled windows  
and the brilliant lamps of science.

Yes here we build temples in our hearts.  
Side by side we come,  
scavenging the ages for wisdom,  
cobbling together as best we may  
the stones of a thousand altars,  
leveling with doubt,  
framing with skepticism,  
measuring by logic,  
sinking firm foundations in the earth  
as we reach for the heavens.

Here we build temples in our hearts —  
a temple for each heart,  
a village of temples,  
none shading another,  
connected by well-worn paths,  
built alike on sacred ground.

## **REFLECTION**

This is a chance for silence and stillness, contemplation and meditation.

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

## **ADDRESS**

I sometimes get asked 'How do you write a service?' 'How long does it take?' And 'Where do you get your ideas from?' And I might answer that I begin by finding a theme, which in fact usually suggests itself, though not necessarily immediately. It might be connected to the time of year, or to a festival in the interfaith calendar, or to what's going on in the world. Or

perhaps it's inspired by something I've read or heard or thought recently. But in one way or another, the direction of travel seems to reveal itself.

Then quite often I write the theme – in this case 'building sustainable community' – in the middle of a blank sheet of paper, and begin scribbling whatever comes into my head around it, so that words like 'shared motivation' and 'diverse congregation' or 'environmentally friendly' might begin to appear, and then I link them to other thoughts, like 'energetic', 'loving', 'accepting'; and there might be arrows such as 'energy in' and 'energy out' and so on until it becomes a kind of mind-map. And then I put it away for a while and have a cup of tea. And think about more practical elements like hymns, and I trawl YouTube and Spotify for music, and search through my collections of stories, and maybe discover a writer I haven't come across before, whose words seem to chime, and write a prayer that expresses how I'm feeling and hope it might resonate with you. And then there's lunch, and maybe a trip to the allotment, where I always feel nourished. And later I'll draft an address. And sleep on it. And rewrite it. And so on. So you can see, that for me it's an organic process which might take about 10 hours of what you would recognize as actual 'work', with plenty of mulling time built in. Plus a generous helping of mystery. Because writing a service feels like making something out of nothing and everything. Like writing a poem, or painting a picture or composing music. It's building a temple of the heart from life experience, inspired by what speaks and resonates in the moment, and driven by feels necessary to say right now. It draws on the wisdom of those who have gone before and attempts to be relevant to our situation today. And it requires having faith in the serendipity of the process.

You're probably wondering why I'm telling you this. Well it's partly because our community here needs more people who can create worship, and I thought I'd plant a seed in your minds just to see if it takes root in any of them.

And partly because writing a service mirrors, in some ways, how we might build something more ambitious - sustainable community here.

For example, a sustainable community also needs a theme. Or we might call it a mission or a purpose. This might take some head-scratching to articulate at first, but eventually it becomes obvious, and then the community is able to point itself in this direction. Now it has a clear sense of what it's about. But it doesn't stop there, obviously. It begins to develop a feel for what it will actually do to achieve its aims and how it will work. For example, what will be its activities, how will the people in this community treat each other, how will they make

decisions, how will they get things done? The community's processes might be drawn up on paper – but in reality its paths will meander, as people come and go, as circumstances change, as unexpected challenges arise. More mind-map than straight line, perhaps. Which is fine, because a sustainable community has to be resilient as well as flexible. It needs to be able adjust as required.

And it does the work. It will put in the necessary hours to make things happen. It will do the researching, the learning, the reading, the organizing, the implementing and so on – while also taking time to pause, to reflect, to consult, to pray, to question, to drink tea. And all the time, it will ensure its members continue to be listened to, and are nourished and cared for. Just as a service leader hopes to make, in some way, a positive difference to a congregation while still taking care of herself, a sustainable community strives to maintain its internal balance and harmony, while also enriching its members' lives and doing the work it has been called to do.

And running through it all, too, there's that mysterious ingredient we call trust, or faith, that God or the Universe will mysteriously and miraculously provide what is needed. Because having a direction is the starting point for any project. And doing the work, while taking care of oneself, is essential. But we can't simply sit back and *wish*, nor can we *will* the outcomes we desire. Whether it's writing or service or building community – or any other project – there is a divine collaboration at play, too, which requires our energy, spirit and love as well as our humility and playfulness.

A sustainable community is a system that needs constant attention and adjusting. Our church is just such a system. And, like the temples in our reading, it won't last for ever. And like the King's palace in our story, none of us really owns it, each of us is merely passing through. And yet all have the right to be here – whether it's for a day or a year or for decades, and we are each invited to be part of its endeavour for as long as we stay. We come as honoured guests, to enrich and to be enriched, to honour but not be limited by what has gone before, and to help envision but not determine what happens next.

This community, this system, this beloved and sacred ship in which we sail, needs to be more sustainable. It needs to be - and is already being – reset and rebalanced. We owe it to the wisdom of our ancestors and we owe it to our unknown future to build loving and sustainable community here. And of course, we owe it to ourselves and to our beautiful

suffering world, too. May I add that we hope the G7 leaders in Cornwall also aim to build sustainable community for our world, one that supports those who need support, and is fairer and kinder to our planet, and is built on love and spirit.

May it be so.

Let's sing...

**HYMN 192 (G)** A new community

We would be one as now we join in singing  
our hymn of love, to pledge ourselves anew  
to that high cause of greater understanding  
of who we are, and what in us is true.

We would be one in building for tomorrow  
a greater world that we have known today;  
we would be one in searching for that meaning  
which binds our hearts and points us on our way.

We would be one in living for each other,  
with love and justice strive to make all free;  
as one, we pledge ourselves to greater service,  
to show the world a new community.

*Music by Joseph Barnby, words from Samuel Anthony Wright*

**CLOSING WORDS** by Cliff Reed

Our time of worship ends.

We extinguish the chalice flame  
and maybe watch the sunlit smoke.

Our minds turn back to the here and now,  
but for a while may our spirits linger  
with the smoke, gently rising in beauty.

*Extinguish chalice*

**CLOSING MUSIC** Let's work together, Canned Heat

<https://youtu.be/elurOwLc1LM>