

8th August 2021 – ‘Creativity and spirituality’

Led by Rev Kate Whyman

GATHERING MUSIC ‘Baleen morning’, Balmorhea

<https://youtu.be/roNXRpnOxs4>

WELCOME AND CHALICE LIGHTING

Welcome everyone to our shared worship this morning. Welcome to you however you are right now, whether you come in joy or in sorrow, in hope or despair, you are welcome.

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.*

With this light as our witness may we:

Open our hearts to the wonder of worship.

Open our minds to the eternal quest for meaning and truth.

Open our eyes to the miracle of creation.

Open our arms to the embrace of each other.

Open our souls, and let the divine sweep in.

This morning's theme is ‘Creation and spirituality’. Let us enter a time of prayer together...

PRAYER of co-creation, by Lyn Fox

Creative spirit, source of life and love:

We give thanks for the beauty of this day and for the company of those assembled here in different ways.

Thank you for the breezes of change, clearing our heads and bringing fresh ideas.

May they cleanse our minds of the oppressions and isms that divide us.

Thank you for the flame of hope, the heat of righteous anger, the warmth of compassion, and the fire of commitment. May they bubble the cauldrons of our creativity and transformation.

Thank you for oceans of love, rivers of connection, tears of relief, and pools of serenity. May healing waters flow over us and through us and among us, wearing down the sharp rocks of despair to bring joy in the morning.

Thank you for the good earth beneath us, around us, and within us. May we take this clay and co-create a new realm of justice and beauty.

Thank you for all these and more. We accept our gifts and commit to building, sculpting, painting, singing, and dancing them to life; to abundant life.

Blessed be. Amen.

HYMN 133 (P) Play trumpet, cello, harp and flute

Play trumpet, cello, harp and flute;
play organ, violin and lute.

Write poems and read the written word;
Write plays, tell stories to be heard;
and let the cosmos all around
with love and justice then resound.

Paint pictures dark and painting bright;
Paint with a brush and paint with light.
Dance minuet and highland fling;
dance two by two and in a ring;
and let the cosmos all around
with love and justice then resound.

Speak words of comfort and of peace;
speak gently so that wars may cease.
Sing melodies and measured phrase;
sing songs to set the world ablaze;
and let the cosmos all around
with love and justice then resound.

Music by Norman Cocker, words © Andrew McKean Hill

STORY *The Scratched Diamond. Based on a tale told in the 1700s by the Jewish teacher, Jacob ben Wolf Kranz, Maggid of Dubno.*

There was once a very wealthy king who owned many beautiful things. He had tapestries, gold, and statues made by the very best sculptors in the land. Of all of his belongings, his very favourite possession was the most glorious diamond you can imagine. It was huge—as big around as his hand. And it was pure—clear and flawless, without any marks or blemishes. He loved to go and sit with that diamond, gazing at its beauty and perfection.

One day when the king went to look at his diamond, he discovered to his horror that it had a long, deep scratch. He couldn't believe his eyes! What could have happened to his flawless diamond?

Immediately he sent for all the best stone and diamond cutters in his kingdom. One by one they came to inspect the diamond. Each looked at it closely and then sadly shook their heads. The scratch was too deep. If they tried to polish it, the diamond might break into pieces.

Finally one last diamond carver came before the king. He looked at the diamond closely, gazing at it from every angle. The king watched with bated breath as the diamond carver turned the diamond over and over, pursing his lips and shaking his head.

Suddenly the diamond carver's face broke into a big smile. "I know how to fix this, your majesty!" he exclaimed. "Leave it to me. In two weeks time I will return your diamond to you, better than ever. However, you may not visit me during this time or check on my progress. You must wait until it is finished."

The king was very excited. Soon his flawless diamond would be back with his other lovely things, perfect again, the scratch removed. It took all the king's willpower to resist the temptation to visit the diamond carver to watch him work.

As for the diamond carver, day after day, night after night, he brought out his tools to fix that diamond. Bit by bit, he worked on that scratch. It was slow, tedious work. He knew he had to work carefully or the diamond could crack into pieces.

Finally the diamond cutter was finished. Carefully he wrapped the diamond in cloth to protect it, and he brought it before the king.

"Here it is, your majesty," he said. With a flourish he opened the cloth and presented the diamond.

The king gasped at what he saw. Where there had once been a scratch, a horrible flaw in his precious diamond, there was now an exquisitely beautiful flower carved into the diamond. Unable to polish the scratch out of the diamond, the diamond carver had instead turned the flaw into something beautiful.

The king loved his diamond more than ever. Now when he went to hold it in his hands and gaze upon it, he was reminded that even something imperfect or ugly or flawed can become something exquisitely beautiful.

READING Julia Cameron, from 'The Artist's Way'

Here are her 10 'basic principles' of creativity and spirituality...

1. Creativity is the natural order of life. Life is energy: pure creative energy.
2. There is an underlying, in-dwelling creative force infusing all of life -- including ourselves.
3. When we open ourselves to our creativity, we open ourselves to the creator's creativity within us and our lives.
4. We are, ourselves, creations. And we, in turn, are meant to continue creativity by being creative ourselves.
5. Creativity is God's gift to us. Using our creativity is our gift back to God.
6. The refusal to be creative is self-will and is counter to our true nature.
7. When we open ourselves to exploring our creativity, we open ourselves to God: good orderly direction.
8. As we open our creative channel to the creator, many gentle but powerful changes are to be expected.
9. It is safe to open ourselves up to greater and greater creativity.
10. Our creative dreams and yearnings come from a divine source. As we move toward our dreams, we move toward our divinity.

REFLECTION

Candles of joy and concern

INTERLUDE The holy opening, Sheikh Ahmad Dede

<https://youtu.be/x8c4rtkpQZI>

ADDRESS

Julia Cameron writes: 'It is my experience both as an artist and as a teacher that when we move out on faith into the act of creation, the universe is able to advance. It is a little like opening the gate at the top of a field irrigation system. Once we remove the blocks, the flow moves in.'

She continues: 'Creativity is an experience -- to my eye, a spiritual experience. It does not matter which way you think of it: creativity leading into spirituality or spirituality leading to creativity. In fact, I do not make a distinction between the two.'

What is your experience of creativity? Is it writing a letter by hand to an old friend, painting with water colours, growing vegetables, singing in a choir, putting up shelves, making a YouTube video, designing a banner for Pride? Do you find creativity in your everyday life? Perhaps in the way you dress, or experiment with cooking, or decorate your home? How does your creativity express itself in your relationships, with your partner, or your children, or with a friend? And are you able to find ways to be creative with your pain and your brokenness?

Is creativity a spiritual experience for you?

It's obvious, when we stop to think about it, that the universe is both *creation* – a noun – as well as continuously *creating* – a verb. My grammar is a bit rusty these days, but I think a verb ending in 'ing' is called 'the present continuous'. And now that I've dredged that memory up from school days, what an excellent description of life it is! The present continuous - very much the perfect tense in which to live and in which to be creative.

As we are part of the universe ourselves, we too are, of course, both 'creations' – each of us a unique being in our own right – and also continuously 'creating'.

As Deepak Chopra puts it: 'There are three forces pervading all of life: creation, maintenance, and destruction. All three are present in the life span of cells, stars, trees, planets, and galaxies, since every form must come into being, be maintained, and pass away.'

Which means our creativity is inseparable from the very fact of our being alive. Being creative is what we do. As I speak here now I am creating sounds, and putting them into a pattern to make meaning – or at least I hope I am. When I walk, I move my feet one at a time in rhythm, in the direction I wish to go. When I imagine, pictures form in my mind of what might be. When I pray I allow the edges of my self to soften into God and the universe. The whole of life is a *creation*, and also a process of continuously *creating*, and much of it is unconscious. We can't help ourselves!

This creative force that we each embody can be playful but also be powerful. It is energy and it needs to be expressed, not suppressed. Our creativity – freely expressed – paves the way for us to live in to our spirituality more fully. It is how we live in tune with the act of creation itself.

The poet Mary Oliver said: 'The most regretful people on earth are those who felt the call to creative work, who felt their own creative power restive and uprising, and gave to it neither power nor time.'

I think that might be true, and I expect some of us do feel regretful about paths not taken, roads not explored. But if so, then take heart because it is never too late. You remain a creative force until your dying moment, and until that moment opportunities to embrace your creativity will continue to present themselves. Maybe not in the way they once did, but still in ways that are joyful and fulfilling, and which will enrich your spiritual life.

For example, I'm remembering Lisa, who joined us here last week. She told me she's living with a friend at the moment who's 80, and still twinkly and interested in everything, and who recently ordered a butterfly growing kit, which is basically some caterpillars, food and a net, designed for children really. But the two of them, Lisa and her friend, are now entranced, waiting and watching as these butterflies – Painted Ladies - emerge from their chrysalises. Soon they'll be releasing them into the wild, knowing they have helped birth new life. What a simple and delightful way to be creative and to connect with an endlessly creative God.

Creativity also gives us the chance to transform our pain, if we're willing.

In our story earlier, the diamond carver was not able repair the damaged gem so that it looked exactly as it did before, pure and unblemished. But that didn't matter, because he saw a way to do something better than that. He used the unsightly scratch as the basis to create something new – a beautiful engraving of a flower. It took time and patience, as well as willingness and openness to do this, but it was worth it. The king was amazed at the transformation and realised that he now valued that diamond even more than before, not least because it reminded him every day of what was possible. How 'something imperfect or ugly or flawed can become something exquisitely beautiful'.

When in your life have you been able to do that? Maybe you are in the process of doing it right now. In my life, the grief of not being able to have a child propelled me on to a spiritual journey I would otherwise have taken, and which ultimately led me to be here today.

Perhaps life is always about doing that...working creatively with our gifts and talents as well as our imperfections and disappointments, with our blessings as well as our losses and hurts, and seeing what we can make of them that's beautiful. Not getting stuck in regret or bitterness, or blame or revenge, but allowing our own innate creative spirit – the energy at the very essence of ourselves – to open up to the great creative Spirit of the universe. Letting it work with our darkness and transform it into light.

Life can be hard, challenging, painful, heartbreaking at times. We all know that, we all experience the truth of it in our own ways. And yet that spark, that creative flame, still burns within and desires our healing, and yearns for our reconnection with the spirit.

Our task in dark times and in joy, it seems to me, is to nurture that light, however feeble it may sometimes seem. To seek it out, and protect it through the wind and the rain until it's burning just strongly enough to light the way ahead, shining just brightly enough to lead us where it already knows we need to go.

May we each cherish the inner light of our own creative spirit. For the creative and the spiritual are at one, and we are each creative beings held by an eternally creative God.

Amen

2nd HYMN: 199 (P) Weaver God

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
tapestryed 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.

Music French carol tune, arranged by David Dawson; words © Kate Compston

CLOSING WORDS Rev Barbara Wells

May you find the deep peace of creation flowing in your spirit.
May your senses awake to the creative spark that lives in you.
May you walk in beauty and seek to create beauty wherever you go.
May you take the risk of discovering the divine within you and around you.
And may the spirit of life bless you with courage and hope as you live creatively with others
by your side.

Extinguish chalice

CLOSING MUSIC Beautiful things, Gungor

<https://youtu.be/kWoolrU5OwI>