

## Plymouth Unitarian Church - Sunday Service - 26th November 2021

**Gathering music** - My soul will sing - Prayer time music

### **Opening words**

*Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.*

**Hymn** In the Bleak mid winter Green 87

We begin with a moment of silence

### **Prayer**

God of all , divine spirit Love We welcome you into our hearts into this scared space that we share together . As we take s few moments out of our busy days help us to connect to whats is the source of all in our hearts and open our minds to the ever expansion of love and kindness

### **Chalice Lighting**

As I light our chalice , a reminder of our unitarian connection we listen to the words of the old testament Esra Chap 14 v 25

*I shall light a candle of understanding in thine heart which shall not be put out*

Good morning everyone ,and welcome to the first Sunday in advent . For any of you that I have not met I am Jennifer and am a member of the BUC Lay pastor at Hastings and student minister .

Firstly I wanted to Thank you for letting me come to Plymouth on my placement. I really look forward to getting to know you and hope I can bring some gifts to congregation apart from biscuits at tea time !

Advent is traditionally, in the Christian calendar of worship, a time to reflect and prepare for the coming of the christ child. It is a chance to remind us all what Christmas is all about . For many it is that beacon of light shining through the darkness of winter promising us that the light will come again , renewal will appear and the birth of the christ child is a time for us to rejoice .

And it is a time for hope

The story of the birth of christ always surprises me In the bible . Such a huge book and yet few words are written about the birth of Jesus. Luke chapter 1 v 26-38 covers the conception, birth, blessing of one of the most significant religious prophets . Its a simple story but one of great awe . A miraculous conception and a birth in circumstances by todays standards would fill us with concern and shame yet has been written and re written into history

Here we have a reminder

### **Luke chapter 1 v 26-38**

*So Jospeh went up form the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David . He went there to register with Mary who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they*

*were there the time came for the baby to be born. And she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger because there was no guest room available for them*

In traditional christian church settings The first Sunday in advent begins with the lighting of a candle, the first of 5 - 1 for each Sunday leading up to Christmas and culminating ion the lighting of the candle on Christmas Day to welcome the christ child .

We have our advent wreath and the first candle will be lit now and we take a moment to reflect. That feeling that there is hope, the joy is coming but we have to be patient.

## **Advent Candle**

Hymn - Do you hear 33 Green

## **Reading - Four Candles**

*Four candles slowly burned. The ambience was so soft one could almost hear them talking. The first candle said, "I am Peace. The world is so full of anger and fighting that nobody can keep me alight." Then the candle of peace went out completely.*

*The second candle said, "I am Faith. I am no longer indispensable. It does not make any sense that I stay awake one moment longer." Then a breeze softly blew out Faith's flame.*

*Sadly, the third candle began to speak, "I am Love. People don't understand my importance so they put me aside. They even forget to love nearest to them. I don't have the strength to stay alight." And waiting no longer the candle of Love went out.*

*A child entered the room where the candles were and saw that three of the candles were unlit. "Why are you not burning?" said the child. "You are supposed to stay alight until the very end." And the child was frightened and began to cry.*

*The fourth candle said, "Don't be afraid. I am Hope, and while I am burning we can re-light the other candles."*

*With shining eyes, the child took the candle of Hope and lit the other candles.*

As we sit here thinking of making lists for Christmas or trying to forget it all let us take a moment to think about the story in Luke . Here was a woman who at this time was a few weeks off giving birth. Heavily pregnant, probably finding it difficult to walk about tired uncomfortable and homeless and carrying not just a child but the some of god. Tall order id say !! She was away from her home in some sense a nomad a traveller. There were many anxieties about being pregnant-and the threat of losing a child

Her focus was most likely on getting enough food and water and rest , preparing herself for what was to come Joseph the weight of responsibility resting on his shoulders , finding somewhere to live making sure Mary was safe and secure.

They had very little apart from their clothes on their back yet they were looked after .

The gift of a new life brining light and joy to the world

With perhaps nothing of material possessions comes a prophet. A story that comes as a sign of hope in the depth of winter time but a story that we had to wait a long time for

For hundreds of years the people of Israel prayed for a saviour, for real change in their lives . They waited and they waited in hope and patience . They had no idea when that gift was coming and in what wrapping or where yet they kept hoping and kept on waiting

The coming of christ was a huge change and to those looking on was unplanned and overwhelming. The coming of the saviour came quietly and into a noisy world and the rest they say is history

## **Reading**

We come to our second reading “Hope” by Vaclav Havel

*Hope is a state of mind, not a state of the world  
Either we have hope within us or we don't.  
Hope is not a prognostication—it's an orientation of the spirit.  
You can't delegate that to anyone else.*

*Hope in this deep and powerful sense is not the same as joy  
when things are going well,  
or the willingness to invest in enterprises  
that are obviously headed for early success,  
but rather an ability to work for something to succeed.*

*Hope is definitely NOT the same as optimism.  
It's not the conviction that something will turn out well,  
but the certainty that something makes sense,  
regardless of how it turns out.*

*It is hope, above all, that gives us strength to live  
and to continually try new things,  
even in conditions that seem as hopeless as ours do, here and now.  
In the face of this absurdity, life is too precious a thing  
to permit its devaluation by living pointlessly, emptily,  
without meaning, without love, and, finally, without hope.*

We are approaching the threshold of winter. Life is being drawn into the earth. The days are short the nights are long and many animals and plants are hibernating.. All of nature has slowed down waiting for the energy to change and warmth to return . Hoping for the spring to return

We may feel that winter is a cruel time - cold - bare and seemingly nothing happening yet deep within the earth roots have been going down deep into the earth bringing stability and nutrients to the plants and trees  
There is so. Much going on internally in ourselves and if we give ourselves the time we can reflect on this honour this and give the time our innersoles need to replenish and rest

## **Stillness**

## **Prayers**

All knowing and loving god we take this time to think of others less fortunate than ourselves . We pray that our generosity of spirit will. Not be dampened our hearts will remain open and our time spent wisely

We ask for your prescience in our lives and reminders of the love and hope that THE Story of Jesus brings

We pray for all those involved in the political system of our country and decision making the will and can affect us and others and that be guided towards decisions that are based on common welfare for all

We pray for all those who suffer in loneliness despair and grief at this time of year . Grant us the courage to help make a difference In someone else life even if this is just for a moment

We pray for all those seeking a new life and whose hope for something better puts them in grave danger of there lives. Those that tr to cross the channel o a daly basis . We party for them and that we can be given the compassion and open heartedness they deserve as fellow children of god

## **Address**

Amnesty international motto It is better to light one candle than curse the darkness.”

I like it. It speaks to me of the purpose of our lives. To live in such a way as to bring light into places of darkness and not just sit back and complain and blame. To live with Hope, not necessarily optimism, but definitely Hope. To do what we can. To live in faith and not to be paralysed by fear.

*Once there lived a blind man in a small town. He always carried a lighted lamp in his hand whenever he went out at night.*

*On one dark night he was going his merry way, lighted lamp in his hand, when he passed a group of young men travelling the other way.*

*On seeing the blind man they began to make fun of him, saying " O Blind man why do you carry the lighted lamp. You are blind and cannot see anything?"*

*At which the blind man politely responded, "This lamp is not for me, but for you people who have eyes. You may not see a blind man coming and walk right into him."*

*At this the young men fell silent, looked at one another uncomfortably, apologised and shuffled off...*

*"It is better to light one candle than curse the darkness."*

“Hope.It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out.”Hope is something that breathes life into us, something that fires us, something that sustains us, regardless of what is going on around us.

The migrant tragedy in the past few days is the largest single loss of life in the channel . 27 people died trying to make the joinery from Calais to England after their boat sank

No of us know the exact stories of those making this treacherous joinery and until we hear those stories we can only imagine what cause people tom risk everything int he hope of a

new and better life .We can speak from our experience of working with people who make dangerous and unpredictable journeys. Many are fleeing conflict and persecution, many are wanting to be reconciled to families already in the UK and build a new life in a safe country

### **Stories of life and death in an inflatable - Zeinab Mohammed Salih**

*On the night he attempted to cross the Channel, Abdulfatah Hamdallah left his blanket and bicycle behind at the camp in Calais.*

*They were the only possessions he would leave behind: his backpack was lost at sea when he drowned attempting to make the perilous crossing over the Dover Strait to England in a dinghy, with shovels for oars. He could not swim.*

One migrant, a 33-year-old Sudanese man, told of making a similar journey to Abdulfatah's but of surviving the dangerous Channel crossing to reach the UK. "I know how lucky the three of us were to survive and not drown like Abdulfatah. We didn't understand anything about how to cross the sea but we just looked for the lights of Dover to guide us." They were the lights of hope

### **Everyone is saying UKUKUK - By Emma Wallis**

After spending most of his adult life on the migrant trail, Alex, originally from Iran, tried to cross the English Channel from France twice

Everybody is saying UK, UK, UK," Alex continues, staring out across the short stretch of water, a passing ferry looming just off the beach. His fears of water soon become apparent though, as he goes off to a hypermarket to buy the best life jacket he can find before making the crossing.

Alex, explains the film, has been traveling the migrant trail "for most of his adult life." He has been "working where he can to save money to make this crossing." He says he has paid a smuggler €2500 to get on a boat. "Tomorrow England," he says as he floats in swimming shorts not far from the shore in France.

Alex pays €40 for the orange lifejacket. "We reached to the sea, to the beach, to the shore around 12 midnight," explains Alex in the film, a little bit later. "We took the boat by ourselves to the sea," explains Alex. Police confirm that many smugglers hide boats in the dunes for attempted crossings. "Then we jumped in the boat, me and about 13 or 14 other people."

"And the waves were coming to us, the first waves were so heavy," says Alex spinning his arms around wildly to imitate the action of the waves, "it meant it turned our boat around and around like this."

"At that moment, I thought oh God, they are going to send us to our death with this boat," says Alex, his eyes widening as though remembering the fear he felt. Alex explains that he and three or four other people asked to go back to the beach. He says the smuggler shouted at him, "No, this boat is fine, believe me." But Alex insisted. "I said, this boat is very small, there are many people, I am not going."

On his next attempt, Alex tells Goudichaud that he has found another smuggler and the boat is bigger, stronger and more technical. The BBC narrator says that Alex has now given all his savings to the smuggler and he feels his only option is to cross.

But after a few weeks of silence, Goudichaud finds that Alex has "retreated to the French countryside." Sitting in a field, in shorts and sandals, Alex remembers the night of his

second attempt. "Very very scary," he says, shaking his head, eyes downcast. "Almost we drowned, almost we drowned," he intones.

"The first people to escape, to run away was the dealer himself, those in charge of the boat," remembers Alex. "They left us with nothing."

This second attempt made Alex decide finally to apply for asylum in France. On July 14, 2021, Alex and Julien Goudichaud meet again and Alex says he is waiting for the French authorities to decide. He hopes that he can stay and start to build a new life in France.

"It is crazy," Alex reflects, "you run away from one dictator [in Iran] and you end up giving money to another dictator, the smugglers, the criminals you know. I regret giving my money to these people."

As the fireworks burst across the sky for France's national day, Alex says he hopes to set up his new life in Calais. "I have memories here," he says, placing his hand at his heart. "Stressful memories yes, but they are part of life, that is life,

Warsan Shire was born in Kenya to Somali parents and lives in London . She has been the young poet laureate for London She talked about the fear she felt going up in a war torn country . She talks of many stories shared with family members about the horror and torture but also about the hope for a better life and using her own story as an example has helped others tell theirs

The following extracted poem is entitled 'Home'

no one leaves home unless  
home is the mouth of a shark  
you only run for the border  
when you see the whole city running as well

.....

that no one puts their children in a boat  
unless the water is safer than the land  
no one burns their palms  
under trains beneath carriages

i want to go home,  
but home is the mouth of a shark  
home is the barrel of the gun  
and no one would leave home  
unless home chased you to the shore  
unless home told you  
to quicken your legs  
leave your clothes behind

Most of us will never even begin to identify or imagine the concept of being homeless, nationless a migrant that is not wanted , that feeling you do not belong you cannot go back or go forward

Jesus parents were homeless when he was born Born in a stable a story that we have somehow made into a magical beginning but I am sure for Joseph and Mary it was far from ideal. The fear and unknown but there was faith and hope

Our lives will probably never compare to these strokes we have just heard and yet we often reach places of despair , emptiness, impatience worry and in these times of trouble we are guided by a faith by a community by a sharing and a small flame to guide our path Our claim flame reminder of the light of hope in the darkness and whether we believe in the Christian story it has a moral that we can grab hold of . There is hope even in the darkness , of new life . The light is coming and in the pagan tradition only 21 days before we start to see a lifting of the darkness

So let us take hope in this first Sunday of advent . Hope there will be a new beginning , we can begin at any time

## **Reflection**

**Music** - Dormition - The Protecting Veil - John Taverner

Hope should never be confused with blind optimism or unrealistic expectation for the future. If life has taught me anything it has shown me that things rarely turn out they way we expect them too. I always remain sceptical of “sooth sayers” or those who claim to be able to predict the future. None of us know what is coming.

Hope is something different it is an orientation of the spirit, it is something that holds us and sustains us right here right now. This may sound like a strange thing to say as we enter into Advent. After all “Advent” is derived from “adventus”, which means coming. It is a period of expectation, of anticipation; it is a time for waiting; it is a time for preparation. In the Christian tradition it is the time marked out for preparation for the coming of the new hope in the Christ Child. This suggests that it is a time to get ready for the hope that is to come and not something that is already here, already present within us.

I do not take the traditional view. Instead for me Advent symbolises the hope that is born in every child. For every night a child is born is a holy night. Every life is a blessing. Every life has that same spirit flowing through it.

## **Prayers**

### **Blessing**

May the hope from theses stories be with you

When you next walk along the shore spare a prayer of hope for those who live for as better life and risk all.

May the miraculous birth death and resurrection, the story of wonder, hope, darkness, loss, grief and joy be with you

May you go in peace in love and in hope

**Hymn** - May the road rise with you - Purple 102

## **Chalice**

Closing Music - Song of hope - Avishai Cohen