

## **9<sup>th</sup> January 2022 – Living with intention**

Led by Rev Kate Whyman

**GATHERING MUSIC** Bloom Innocent, by Fink

<https://youtu.be/TOWEphoU-DI>

### **WELCOME AND CHALICE LIGHTING**

Welcome. Welcome to all of you here in the church and all of you joining us online today. I hope the year has got off to a good start for you. It's nice to be back with you all again.

Our opening words come from Manchester Cross Street Unitarians.

We gather here in sacred fellowship,  
To witness the fullness of our lives and all life  
To hold and be held, tell stories and listen,  
To be renewed and renew the world.  
We speak with care and patience,  
We act with gentleness and compassion,  
We forgive each other and ourselves.  
In faith that we build beloved community,  
We renew our covenant today.

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

We light this chalice for a new year  
Letting go of what has been  
Open and hopeful for what may come  
Renewed, restored, ready  
To live life fully anew  
May we move forward with intention.

And the theme of today's service is 'Living with intention'.

**HYMN 33(P)** Enter, rejoice and come in

Enter, rejoice and come in.

Enter, rejoice and come in.

Today will be a joyful day;

enter, rejoice and come in.

Open your ears to the song.

Open your ears to the song.

Today will be a joyful day;

enter, rejoice and come in.

Open your hearts everyone.

Open your hearts everyone.

Today will be a joyful day;

enter, rejoice, and come in.

Don't be afraid of some change.

Don't be afraid of some change.

Today will be a joyful day;

enter, rejoice, and come in.

Enter, rejoice and come in.

Enter, rejoice and come in.

Today will be a joyful day;

enter, rejoice and come in.

*Words and music by Louise Ruspini*

**PRAYER** Our High Resolve, Howard Thurman

“May we keep fresh before us the moments of our high resolve.

Despite the dullness and barrenness of the days that pass, if we search with due diligence, we can always find a deposit left by some former radiance. But we had forgotten. At the time it was full-orbed, glorious, and resplendent. We were sure that we would never forget. We had forgotten how easy it is to forget.

There was no intent to betray what seemed so sure at the time. Our responses were whole, clean, authentic. But little by little, there crept into our lives the dust and grit of the journey. Details, lower-level demands, all kinds of cross currents -- nothing momentous, nothing overwhelming, nothing flagrant -- just wear and tear. If there had been some direct challenge --a clear-cut issue -- we would have fought it to the end, and beyond.

In the quietness of this place, surrounded by the all-pervading Presence of God, our hearts whisper: Keep fresh before us the moments of our High Resolve, that in fair weather or in foul, in good times or in tempests, in the days when the darkness and the foe are nameless or familiar, we may not forget that to which our lives are committed.”

*Pause for to bring to mind those who are suffering at this time...we pray for comfort, courage and guidance for the way ahead.*

**STORY** Higgins, A Drop with a Dream, by Rev Christopher Buice

Once upon a time there was a drop of water named Higgins. [I mean, of course there was.]

Higgins was no ordinary drop of water. [He was called Higgins for a start.]  
He was a drop with a dream.

Higgins lived in a valley where it hadn't rained in a very long time, so all the lovely green grass was turning brown, all the beautiful flowers were wilting, and all the trees were starting to droop.

Higgins had a dream that one day the valley would be a beautiful place again. But what could he do? After all, he was only a drop of water.

But one day Higgins decided to travel and tell others about his dream. All the other drops listened very politely, but no one believed that his dream would come true.

"Higgins," said one, "get your head out of the clouds. You can't spend your whole life dreaming."

Higgins decided that he had to do something to make his dream come true. So he began to think and think and think. One day, as he was walking by a rusty old bucket, he got an idea. "If enough of us drops of water got together in this bucket," Higgins thought, "there would be enough water to sprinkle on a few flowers to help them grow and become beautiful again!"

Eagerly, Higgins told everyone his great idea. But [as you can imagine] everyone thought he was being foolish. "That Higgins is nothing but a dreamer," they said.

Higgins decided he had to do something to convince the others that he was right. So he said to them, "I don't know about you, but I'm getting into the bucket! I hope some of you will join me. Then there might be enough water to help at least some flowers grow beautiful again."

So Higgins ran as hard as he could, hopped way up in the air, and landed with a kerplunk in the bottom of the bucket.

And there he sat . . . JUST A DROP IN THE BUCKET.

For a long time Higgins was very lonely. It seemed like no one else was going to join him. But after awhile some of the other drops could see that the grass was dying and the flowers were wilting and the trees were drooping. They all agreed that something must be done. Suddenly, one drop shouted, "I'm going in the bucket with Higgins!" And he leaped through the air and landed—kerplunk—in the bucket.

Then two other drops yelled, "Wait for us!" And they hopped through the air and landed in the bucket. Then ten drops jumped through the air into the bucket. Then thirty. Then fifty! And then hundreds of drops came from all around just to hop in the bucket!

Soon, the bucket was completely full of water. But now there were still more drops that wanted to join, so they found another bucket and hopped in. Before long, there were two buckets of water—then three—then four—then ten—and then hundreds—and then thousands of buckets of water!

Along came a powerful breeze that blew over all the buckets, and all the water flowed together to make a mighty stream. Everywhere the water flowed, the grass turned green again and the flowers bloomed and the trees stood tall and straight once more.

## **READING** by Phillip Moffitt

With goals, the future is always the focus: Are you going to reach the goal? Will you be happy when you do? What's next?

Setting intention, at least according to Buddhist teachings, is quite different than goal making. It is not oriented toward a future outcome. Instead, it is a path or practice that is focused on how you are "being" in the present moment. Your attention is on the ever-present "now" in the constantly changing flow of life. You set your intentions based on understanding what matters most to you and make a commitment to align your worldly actions with your inner values...

Goals help you make your place in the world and be an effective person. But being grounded in intention is what provides integrity and unity in your life... What would it be like if you didn't measure the success of your life just by what you get and don't get, but gave equal or greater priority to how aligned you are with your deepest values?

## **CANDLES OF JOY AND CONCERN**

### **SILENCE**

**INTERLUDE** Love will guide us, by Lisa Redfern (mp3)

### **ADDRESS**

Thursday was the day when the Christians around the world remembered the three wise men who, having followed a great star in the East across deserts, valleys and mountains, finally arrived at Bethlehem to find the Christ child.

Their journey was hard, at least it was in TS Elliot's famous retelling of it, but they travelled with commitment in the direction they had set themselves – the direction which was given to them by the risen star.

We can assume that the wise men were – well – wise, and thoughtful, spiritual people. In some translations they were astrologers – in which case they were men whose way it was to observe closely the night sky and who would therefore have readily noticed the appearance of an unusual star and would have quickly interpreted its meaning. They were men who were living in accordance with their beliefs and their values, and were alert to signs and promptings that enabled them to discern meaning and direction.

They were 'living with intention'.

And that feels important.

Philip Moffit used to be Chief Executive of Esquire magazine before he became a Buddhist. As he says, goals are useful, they help us be more effective and efficient and motivated in the short term. They're much more specific than 'good intentions', which can of course be rather vague. As the saying goes, the road to hell is paved with them. For example, I could easily say I intend to do more exercise this year and nothing much may come of that – in fact I think it's what I think I said last year. It turned out to be a bit of waft and wishful thinking.

But 'living with intention', in the way I'm talking about this morning, is not vague. It's not about achieving specific outcomes, but it IS about living in a way that is aligned with our beliefs and our values, a way that's in harmony with the inner promptings of our hearts and spirits. Living with intention means making a commitment to align our words and actions with our inner truth. To live with integrity. You might say that following the star became a goal for the wise men – it was a short term objective to reach the newborn King. But if so, that goal arose out of their deep understanding, out of their way of being in the universe, out of their souls' divine purpose. It emerged as a consequence of the fact that they were already 'living with intention'.

And this is how we each hope to live, is it not? With intention. We may stray from our intuitive sense of what is right. But, as people of spirit, who are touched by the sacred and yearn for wholeness, we do strive to do our best. Coming here is part of that. We hope each week to remind ourselves once again of our 'high resolve', as Howard Thurman put it.

Living with intention might sound like an individual affair. After all it's up to us each to work out what we believe and value, and to live accordingly. Fair enough. So how does being part of a religious *community* fit in to this idea? For example, where and how does my integrity fit in with each of yours? How does yours overlap with mine? What is our collective intention? What is our soul purpose *as a beloved community*, rather than simply as a collection of individuals on their own separate journeys?

What can we learn from Higgins, I wonder, who managed to persuade other single drops of water to join together in a shared endeavour?

As you know, last year we drew up a strategy for the church, which is very much made up of goals, and that's been very helpful, and we're already working hard on them. You will be well aware that our live-streaming is up and running. I can report that our new website is coming along nicely, and we are also now on the brink of becoming a CIO, which may not sound very exciting but is a very positive step forward for our governance. So progress is being made, which is hugely encouraging. And I do think that the goals we set ourselves arose from the values we sense – or maybe just assume - we share. We could name some of them. For example, last year we spent some time focusing on the 7 UUA principles. Can you remember them? I'll remind you:

1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person
2. Justice, equity and compassion in human relations
3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations
4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
5. The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large
6. The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all
7. Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

I imagine most of us might agree with these principles, in theory at least. They sound good, don't they? But I do wonder if they're just good intentions - like me knowing that exercise is a

really good idea, but not actually doing it. And I wonder whether those principles really touch us, and actively guide us in the way we live our own lives or in the way we build community here. Or are they just a sort of comfort blanket that make us feel better about ourselves?

Over the past couple of years, in conversation with many of you, a recurring theme has been 'community'. It keeps coming up in different ways. What does it *mean* to be a community? Are we actually a community or just a collection of individuals? What is it that we've all agreed to, together? What is it that we promise each other? In other words what is the loving, breathing, living intention of this congregation?

The seven principles speak to a beautiful vision – a wonderful dream of a free, equal, just, kind, mutually respectful world. And they encourage us to acknowledge our complete interconnectedness, our total interdependence on each other and every living thing. But that's not enough in itself.

Being part of a religious, spiritual community is about *building* just such a free, just, kind, and mutually respectful world *right here*. In Christian language, this is the place we can build the Kingdom, here in our own back yard. Here we can, if we choose, practise putting all those wonderful principles in to action *with and for each other and our wider community*. We have the potential to do that, but it will take all of us to be willing to make this new beginning.

Like Higgins and all the other drops of water in the story who, reluctantly at first but then with more and more energy and passion, threw themselves into a rusty bucket and, with the wind behind them, together made the grass green again and the flowers bloom once more – we could build truly beloved community here. What an adventure it would be! How remarkable it would be to share a dream and to live it with intention together. Never mind three wise men, crowds of people of all genders would surely cross continents to see such a thing – a living breathing example of beloved community in action.

Or we could not bother, we could simply take away what we need for ourselves, do our own thing, follow our own path, and watch our community wither and die. The choice is ours to make, and next week I'll explore how we might do that.

But for now, in the spirit of hope, let's join in singing...

**2<sup>nd</sup> HYMN: 178(P) Together now we join as one**



Together now we join as one  
our common faith to sing;  
to render to this pilgrim world  
our heartfelt offering.

We strive to be a fellowship  
with mind and conscience free,  
to search for truth and saving light  
in cosmic mystery.

We worship God – love's source and power;  
we celebrate the life  
that all earth's children freely share  
beyond their sinful strife.

We would, in love, serve humankind  
with caring, justice, peace;  
and with the earth seek harmony  
that pride and pillage cease.

We hold in reverence the man  
who walked in Galilee,  
who healed the sick and loved the poor –  
revealed divinity.

We welcome truth, we welcome light,  
all prophecy and song,  
whoever they be channeled through  
to all they shall belong.

*Words © Clifford Martin Reed*

**NOTICES** Sheila

**CLOSING WORDS** adapted from Erik Wikstrom

If you are who you were,  
and if the person next to you is who he or she was,  
if none of us has changed  
since the day we came in here —  
we have failed.  
The purpose of this community —  
of any church, temple, zendo, mosque —  
is to help its people grow.  
We do this through encounters with the unknown — in ourselves,  
in one another,  
in "The Other"— whoever that might be for us,  
however hard that might be —  
because these encounters have many gifts to offer.  
So may you go forth from here this morning  
not who you were,  
but who you are now,  
and curious who you could be tomorrow.  
So may we all.

**CLOSING MUSIC** 'New beginning', Tracy Chapman

<https://youtu.be/72PkUgZ651k>