

Sunday 15th August 2021 “So much more than ‘Child’s Play’” (Sheila Evans)

Opening Music Video : Piano Music by John Ireland, [Decorations: The Island Spell - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pk3Vz4wK4wU)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pk3Vz4wK4wU> 3 mins 33 secs

Welcome: Welcome, whoever you are, however you are feeling. Whatever sadness or joys you bring, you are welcome. Welcome *wherever* you are, and *however* you are joining us: whether in the church, ‘live’ on-line, watching a recording later, or reading a printed copy of this service, Welcome! However we join in, each one is part of our community, contributing by being with us in spirit, and all equally valued.

Today’s Service continues with this month’s theme of ‘Play’. Entitled ‘So much More than Child’s Play’, we look at how important play is, in its many forms, for our well-being throughout our lives. I had almost completed it before the shocking and sad events of Thursday evening, here in Plymouth, which we will acknowledge in our prayers.

Chalice Lighting: We begin by lighting our chalice flame, as a symbol of our free religious faith. If you are at home and have a candle, you may like to light it now.

We light this chalice in fellowship,
In love, compassion and praise,
Drawing from it inspiration and hope,
And Strength for the days to come.

Opening Words by Friedrich Nietzsche: “The eternal child. - We think that play and fairy tales belong to childhood: how short sighted that is! As though we would want at any time of life to live without play and fairy tales! We give these things other names, to be sure, and feel differently about them, but precisely this is the evidence that they are the same things - for the child too regards play as his work and fairy tales as his truth. The brevity of life ought to preserve us from a pedantic division of life into different stages - as though each brought something new - and a poet ought for once to present a man of two hundred: one, that is, who really does live without play and fairy tales.”
From “Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits”

1st Hymn: Green Hymn Book No. 9 ‘So simple is the human heart’ {Tune: ‘Golden Wheat’
Edward Williams (Iolo Morgannwg) 1747-1826) Words Stopford Augustus Brooke (1832-1916)}

A little sun, a little rain,
A soft wind blowing from the west -
And woods and fields are sweet again,
And warmth within the mountain’s breast.
So simple is the earth we tread,
So quick with love and life her frame,
Ten thousand years have dawn and fled,
And still her magic is the same.

A little love, a little trust,
A soft impulse, a sudden dream,
And life as dry as desert dust
Is fresher than a mountain stream.
So simple is the human heart,
So ready for new hope and joy;
Ten thousand years have played their part,
But left it young as girl or boy.

Prayers: Let us pause and hold in our thoughts and prayers all those of our own church community and in the wider world, who are experiencing difficult, sad or worrying times, whether through illness, accident, or bereavement, human actions or natural causes.

There are countless people around the world in dangerous and desperate situations who we remember in prayer, but today we especially hold in our thoughts and prayers those within our own city who lost their lives, were injured or have been left bereft by the senseless violence which happened just days ago. Let us give thanks for all those in the Police and Emergency services who responded so swiftly, running towards the situation to provide help, where the natural reaction would be to flee to safety. Let us give thanks for the ways in which the local and citywide communities are pulling together to help and support the bereaved, and those affected by being close to this sad event, including the police. May the spirit of compassion and kindness prevail to heal the emotional wounds we are all feeling at this time. You may wish to light a candle for them all now, and pause in silence

Let us be ever mindful that every one of us will be touched by sad as well as joyful events and so may we be moved to offer comfort and solace to one another. And let us give thanks for the happy events which lighten our hearts. May we contribute to, and benefit, from the resources of love and strength which our church community offers, to us and to the wider community outside our doors.... *AMEN*

Let us take a short pause for our own silent prayers

We turn now to our story, a story of hope and reconciliation, inspired by play.

Story: PLAY SAVES LIVES – DANIELLE’S STORY

For more than 20 years, an organisation called ‘Right To Play’ has worked in some of the most difficult and dangerous places on earth to help children through play.

It keeps children in school and out of work. It teaches them how to prevent life-threatening diseases like malaria, HIV and keeps them safe from exploitation and abuse. It gives girls the power to say no to unwanted sex, and make healthy decisions about their bodies and their futures. Play saves lives. This is the story of Danielle, one of the children saved, literally, by play.

HOW ONE FORMER REFUGEE NOW TEACHES CHILDREN TO LIVE IN PEACE

It’s a hot day in Burundi, and Danielle stands in the middle of a crowd of children who have just played a game of football. Children from both major ethnicities in Burundi – Hutus and Tutsis, make up the teams. After-game discussions are important for the children to talk about loss, reconciliation and peace. In this safe welcoming space, Danielle skillfully helps them open up to share how they feel. She understands their pain because she shares it.

Danielle was just eight when the Burundi Civil War broke out in 1993. When it ended, 12 years later, 300,000 Burundians had died in inter-ethnic violence, and ½ million had fled to neighbouring countries. Danielle’s parents, three brothers and older sister were all victims of the violence. In 2,000, 15-year-old Danielle, still grieving her losses, became a refugee, living with a widowed female cousin in one of the many sprawling refugee camps in Kigoma in western Tanzania.

Life in the camps was very hard. Food was rationed, and the horrible combination of stress, poverty, and grief ate away at Danielle. She spent several years in the camp, becoming ever more hopeless and depressed, with a constant ache in her stomach from physical hunger and tension between sadness and anger. The refugee camps were filled with Hutu and Tutsi, each blaming the other for

starting Burundi's civil war. They taught children like Danielle to hate the other side and see them as criminals. Militias swept through the camps recruiting more than 14,000 child soldiers.

In 2001, 'Right To Play' began working in refugee camps, initially providing health education and later a broader program to promote social inclusion, communication, and help youth advocates work for peace.

Danielle joined the programme in 2002. With many other refugee children in the camp, she attended game sessions. Playing games like football and volleyball helped to take children's minds off their frustration, sadness, boredom, and anger. When Danielle played, she could focus on the game and leave behind her feelings of bereavement and anxiety over the future.

Danielle remembers, "Playing games helped me to cope with my situation and find strength despite my despair." She connected well with her coaches, and was chosen for leadership training, to coach youth volleyball teams in the camp.

As part of her training, Danielle learned how to use play to broach discussions about difficult issues, helping the children open up and express themselves. She encouraged them to talk about their experiences in the civil war, about loss and grief, but also about peace, mutual respect, and the possibility of co-existence. The hatred Danielle once felt had drained away, replaced by compassion. She wanted to play a part in dissolving the hatred that had inflamed the war. For the first time in her life, she felt empowered enough to enable positive changes in the lives of others.

Some years later, after the fighting ended, Danielle returned home. Like many returning refugees, she was nervous. Leaving the camp meant leaving her support network – the cousin who raised her and the 'Right To Play' coaches who had become her friends. After just a short time home, she realized how tense the situation still was in Burundi. Despite a formal peace treaty to end the war, underlying anger, loss, and hatred for the other side were still strongly present. Thousands of returning Burundians, including former child soldiers, were joined by refugees fleeing violence in neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo. They struggled to integrate into a fragile society. Although Danielle had changed, many others had not.

Danielle and coaches she had trained, worked hard using play and sports to promote peace, to help the newcomers integrate with their host communities.

The worst of the violence has passed, but there are still sporadic outbreaks, and hundreds of thousands of refugees have yet to return home from camps in neighbouring countries. For Danielle, recent crises reinforce the importance and urgency of her work. She knows that they still face great challenges, but says "Children must have a future that is free of violence, where they are respected and have respect for one another. Only then can we have peace." And her role of enabling the children to do this through play, will remain important for years to come.

Reading: Poem: 'The Gift Of Play' by Edgar Albert Guest 1881-1959

The Poet was born in Britain but grew up and spent most of his life in the U.S.A. He was a product of "small town" America and the values and lifestyle he had as a boy permeate his writings.

Some have the gift of song and some possess the gift of silver speech,
Some have the gift of leadership and some the ways of life can teach.
And fame and wealth reward their friends; in jewels are their splendours told,
But in good time their favourites grow very faint and grey and old.
But there are men who laugh at time and hold the cruel years at bay;
hey romp through life forever young because they have the gift of play.

They walk with children, hand in hand, through daisy fields and orchards fair,
Nor all the dignity of age and power and pomp can follow there;
They've kept the magic charm of youth beneath the wrinkled robe of Time,
And there's no friendly apple tree that they have grown too old to climb.
They have not let their boyhood die; they can be children for the day;
They have not bartered for success and all its praise, the gift of play.

They think and talk in terms of youth; with love of life their eyes are bright;
No rheumatism of the soul has robbed them of the world's delight;
They laugh and sing their way along and join in pleasures when they can,
And in their glad philosophy they hold that mirth becomes a man.
They spend no strength in growing old. What if their brows be crowned with grey?
The spirits in their breasts are young. They still possess the gift of play.

The richest men of life are not the ones who rise to wealth and fame -
Not the great sages, old and wise, and grave of face and bent of frame,
But the glad spirits, tall and straight, who 'spite of time and all its care,
Have kept the power to laugh and sing and in youth's fellowship to share.
They that can walk with boys and be a boy among them, blithe and gay,
Defy the withering blasts of Age because they have the gift of play

Reflection: *adapted from words by Tess Ward, an Anglican priest, hospital chaplain and spiritual director.*

Spirit of Life,

May the song of life beat through my veins, that I may live this day with
whatever sadness or gladness it brings;

Beat through my feet that I may dance the dance that only I can dance,

Beat through my being that I might be in time to your movement,

Beat through my heart that I might bring harmony when I am with another.

Beat with compassion when I am out of step with all around me.

Silence, about 1 ½ mins, followed by short piece of piano Music.

ADDRESS – “So much more than ‘Child’s Play’

‘Makes each job like child’s play’. This was the pleasing legend accompanying the picture of a girl of about 10 (the same age as I was) wielding a paintbrush on the tin my mother held. Mum was going to paint the mantelpiece in the prefab where we lived when I was growing up. I can remember pestering her to let me help. In what was for her, an unusual moment of weakness, Mum agreed. How could she do otherwise, when it said on the tin how easy it would be? Hmm, it doesn’t *always* do what it says on the tin! If this was child’s play, it was meant for a much

older child than either the girl on the tin or me! I made a terrible mess; most of the nut-brown paint went anywhere except on the mantel-piece, and my career as a decorator was over.

Isn't it strange how memories from long ago are brought to mind by a word or turn of phrase? I wondered what the Bible says about 'play' The few references using the actual word 'play' are all in the Old Testament, and only a very few use the word 'play' in the sense of 'going out to play'.

In Exodus, while the people waited for Moses to come down from the mountain with what would become known as the 10 Commandments, Aaron tempted them to make false gods and a golden idol, after which, we read in the King James version, "And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play." (Other versions use the word 'revellery') Hmm, not very good PR for 'Play'!

In Job 40:20 there is a reference to the beasts of the field being able to feed securely, having no fear of predation, and engaging in play.

Zechariah 8:5, says, "The streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there." This refers to what God had already promised in the law to His people, if they were faithful to the covenant.

The remainder refer either to playing musical instruments, or to behaving in a certain way, 'playing' a role. I could find no mention of the word 'Play' itself in the New Testament though there are quite a few references to 'pleasure', and 'enjoyment', and many to 'child' or 'children' run like a golden thread throughout both Testaments.

If you say the word 'Play', many people will automatically think of *children* playing, doing something easy, time wasting even, when they aren't in school getting on with the more important activity of learning. "Its 'child's play'", we say a little dismissively, rather like the caption on that paint tin. But as I and my Mum, discovered, "child's play" may not be quite so easy, and can teach us important lessons, whatever our age.

All young mammals play – its how they learn and equip themselves with the important skills which will keep them alive as independent adults. If you have ever watched a litter of kittens at play, you see how they chase their tails, and pat one another, mewing excitedly – they seem to be having fun and enjoying themselves. They are really learning, through their play fights, how to protect themselves, develop hunting skills and when they become young adults, the strongest becomes the 'alpha' cat, winning the right to the best food and the fittest mates. By this time, their human owners have usually separated them and sent them to different homes. Even a lone adult cat continues to hone its skills: it plays with string, chases its tail and often to the dismay of its human, catches small prey like mice or birds which it proudly presents to its 'alpha' cat – its human.

Young primates: monkeys, apes, and humans, have longer childhoods than cats or dogs, and their play time and a strong sense of curiosity about the world around them, lasts a few years. As they become adults, they lose this to some extent, for the sake of keeping the peace in the group. But we humans, we keep a sense of play throughout our lives. 'Play' in its broadest sense includes an immense variety of activities, each giving pleasure and enjoyment to the person, or people involved, and each creative in its own way. You may remember that in her service last week, Kate referred to 'creativity being a spiritual experience, with creativity leading into spirituality and spirituality leading to creativity' So play in its many forms, is essential to our well-being, physical, mental and spiritual. We heard in Danielle's story, how children in even the worst of circumstances, benefit enormously from being given the chance to play games – it literally saved her life, enabled her to un-learn destructive negative emotions, and gave her skills to save

other children like her. In Danielle's case, it began with playing a game, thanks to the organization 'Right to Play'.

Playing also means making music, with its unique power to cheer, soothe, and inspire, bridging class, gender and cultural divides. No matter who you are or where you come from, we are all united through music. 'Play for Change' foundation is a movement, similar to 'Right to Play', created to inspire and connect the world through music, in South America, Nepal, Thailand and many African countries. As well as supporting free musical education for children, it also works with partners to help meet basic needs in these communities, which are home to some of the world's most economically vulnerable children. This work includes providing primary education, humanitarian aid such as clean water, solar power, food, medicine, clothes, books and school supplies, and tools and training to support micro-enterprise. To date, the lives of more than 40,000 people have been improved through music education and development. What is offered is so much more than 'Child's Play' - its life saving. We will hear some of the children singing at the very end of our service, so for those of you watching on line, do try to stay and listen.

'Play' in its diverse forms, brings hope and vitality to everyone, whatever our calendar age, if we let it in. Sages down the ages, have commented and encouraged us all to 'play' The ancient Greeks knew this. Philosopher Heraclitus said that 'Man is most nearly himself when he achieves the seriousness of a child at play' while Plato observed that 'You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation.' He also had very modern views on education, advising "Do not keep children to their studies by compulsion but by play."

Modern Professor in Psychiatry, Kay Redfield Jamison, would agree. She states very clearly that "Children need the freedom and time to play. Play is not a luxury. Play is a necessity."

The 19th Century, one-time Unitarian Ralph Waldo Emerson didn't mention age, when he acknowledged that "It is a happy talent to know how to play", and George Bernard Shaw wryly observed "We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing."

And there are countless more ways to play, by ourselves or in company. Our minds delight in board games and word games, in learning new languages, debating and writing, and reading. You can lose yourself in a good book, or play, (there's a give away if ever!) losing yourself in the story, becoming, in your mind's eye, one of the characters, a form of play. Our bodies (depending on their condition) delight in sedate strolls, or running, swimming or more physically active sports. Mind and body play together in the kitchen to create nourishing dishes, while our spirits delight in creating and enjoying music, art work, stitching, poetry, and in acts of worship (yes, that's a creative act too! – think about what's involved)

We also enjoy the social aspect of play, meeting up for board games, quiz games, exercise groups, book groups, choir and orchestra practices. When this wasn't possible during the lockdowns, the need was so strong that lots of online groups set up to continue many of these activities via the wizardry of technology, meeting people so far geographically they might never meet in person.

Play and playfulness is essential to our well being. Play lifts us out of the mundane and ordinary, to give respite from the troubles of our lives. How different might our world be if all human beings were able to engage in happy, wholesome, kindly play? How many accidents and tragedies might be avoided if everyone had the chance of just an hour a day, to escape their worries and anger and sadness? To let down boundaries and overcome difficulties and distances between the self and other people? And rather than hurl angry words or worse, at a neighbour, laugh and sing and share a joke with a them? Not only when we are children, but throughout our lives. As Nietzsche wrote in our opening words, written nearly a century and a half ago, why would we

want at any time of life to live without play and fairy tales? For whatever we call them, they are so much more than 'just' 'child's play'-they are life-enhancing and life-saving. Blessed be .. *AMEN*

2nd Hymn: Purple no, 68 'I Dream of a Church' 2m 33s

{Tune:'Streets of Laredo' Traditional, arr. David Dawson. Words © Kate Compston, Used by permission}

I dream of a church that joins in with God's laughing
as she rocks in her rapture, enjoying her art:
she's gals of her world, in its risking and growing:
'tis the child she has borne and holds close to her heart.

I dream of a church that joins in with God's weeping
As she crouches, weighed down by the sorrow she sees:
She cries for the hostile, the cold and no-hoping,
For she bears in herself our despair and dis-ease.

I dream of a church that joins in with God's dancing
As she moves like the wind and the wave and the fire:
A church that can pick up its skirts, pirouetting,
With the steps that can signal God's deepest desire.

I dream of a church that joins in with God's loving
As she bends to embrace the unlovely and lost,
A church that can free, by its sharing and daring,
The imprisoned and poor, and then shoulder the cost.

I dream of a church that joins in with God's living,
As you cherish and challenge, rein in and release,
A church that is winsome, impassioned, inspiring;
Lioness of your justice and lamb of your peace.

Closing Words: from Lauralyn Bellamy

If here you have found freedom,
Take it with you into the world,
If you have found comfort, go and share it with others.
If you have dreamed dreams, help one another that they may come true.
If you have known love, give some back to a bruised and hurting world.
Go in love and peace *A M E N*

Closing Music Video [What a Wonderful World \(Louis Armstrong\) | Playing For Change | Song Around The World - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddLd0QRf7Vg&list=RDddLd0QRf7Vg&start_radio=1) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddLd0QRf7Vg&list=RDddLd0QRf7Vg&start_radio=1