

Opening Music: Slow Minuet *from* 'Lady Radnor's Suite' Parry

'Its still not going to rain'/opening clip

Welcome: Welcome, whoever you are, and 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, or watching a recording later, or if you are reading a printed copy of this service, Welcome! However any of us join in, each one is part of our community, contributing by being with us in spirit, all equally valued.

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 rejoice together in the comfort of community, the nurture of friendships, the pleasures of being, the joys of achievement. We join together, praising, creating, receiving, rejoicing. We kindle together our chalice flame, and so assert the presence of the Eternal in our midst

Opening Words: by the Rev. David Usher in response to the adoption of the Charter for Compassion at GA 2011 – 10 years ago, in such different times!

We come together this morning, seeking a reality beyond our narrow selves;
that binds us in compassion, love, and understanding to other human beings,
and to the interdependent web of all living things.

May our hearts and minds be opened this hour, to the power and the insight that weaves together
the scattered threads of our experience, help us remember the wholeness of which we are part.

We come together to renew our faith in the holiness, the goodness, the beauty of life.
To reaffirm the way of the open mind and the full heart;
to rekindle the flame of memory and hope;
and to reclaim the vision of an earth more fair, with all her people one.

1st Hymn: Purple Book 194, "We light the Flame"

Music: 'Beamsley' by David Dawson; Words © by David Andrew Usher. Used by permission

1. We light the flame that kindles our devotions,
We lift our hearts in blessed community.
The mind has thoughts, the heart its true emotions,
we celebrate in worship, full and free.
Our faith transcends the boundaries of oceans.
All shall be granted worth and dignity.

2. So many ways to witness to the wonder.
So many dreams by day for us to dare.
Yet, reaching out, each way is made the grander,
and love made bold for dreamers everywhere.
Diversity will never cast asunder
our common weal, our bonds of mutual care.

3. Infinite Spirit, dwell with us, we pray thee,
that we may share in life abundantly.
Forgive our sins, feed us with good bread daily,
with strength resist temptation steadfastly.
O god of life, sustain us now, and may we
with mindful hearts, be thankful constantly.

Prayers: A prayer for our times

1. Let us pause and hold in our thoughts and prayers all those in our own church community & in the wider world, who are experiencing difficult, sad or worrying times, whether thro' illness, accident, loss of loved ones, by human actions or natural causes.

We pray for all whose lives have been changed forever or lost, due to the pandemic, in this country and around the world. We pray for a better sharing of the vaccine, for none of us is truly safe until all are safe. We pray for all experiencing terror and violence caused by unrest and conflict in many places, especially Syria, Yemen and those living in the uneasy peace of the ceasefire between Israelis and Palestinians - let us pray that it holds. We pray for their neighbouring countries, whose compassion is stretched to its limits by trying to help the enormous number of people fleeing the bloodshed and the destruction of all they held dear. Our hearts go out to them all. May all who claim to be the leaders of the regimes be blessed with compassion and the wisdom to prevent further destruction.

We pray for the inhabitants of Malawi and St Vincent, countries oceans apart, but similarly affected by volcanic eruptions, which have damaged so much of their homes and livelihoods. Our hearts go out to them; may they find the strength to rebuild their lives.

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

2. Prayer: 'For the needs of this hour' by Jacob Trapp

For the beauty that awaits us at the turning of the road
May there be within us the wonder and the welcome of the living soul

For the trials that await us, may there be calm strength,
Courage to trust when mists obscure the way,
Faith to venture when the issue seems uncertain

For the call to helpfulness
May there be quick sympathy and a ready response;

May we find gladness on our way, And the reassuring presence of helpers and friends;
May we find grace generously to forgive, And to seek or work out our own forgiveness;

May our desires be tempered to our needs,
May we value and praise the simple and the lowly
As well as the difficult and the unusual;

May humour and the gift of laughter be ours, may we be understanding, appreciative, Reverent in our relations one to another, Seeking to elicit another's best, And thereby our own *AMEN*

** Let us pause for a few moments for our own silent prayers and reflections

Story: for the young (and young at heart) "**One Flower in a Field**" by Joshua Searle-White, adapted by Kate McKenna

Once upon a time, --- there was a field. It was a perfectly nice field, but it was very dry. Although there was a stream nearby, the water went around the field, not into it. So, the grass was dry.

There were some good things: – like thistles, and nice hollows... it could have been a perfect field, except for the very dry grass. And it had something else: all over the field there were beautiful,

healthy flowers. There were buttercups and cornflowers and daisies and vetch and poppies and more... they were all there. Why were the flowers looking so good in such a dry field? Flowers need water but there wasn't any water, not even for the grass. This is because next to every single flower was a hole; and every hole was home to an animal.

Each animal had just one job to do... to look after that one flower. They didn't have to worry about any of the other flowers, just theirs. Every morning, the animals went down to the stream, scooped up some water, carried it back, and watered their flower.

The tallest and healthiest flower in that field was a Sunflower. That Sunflower was looked after by a Rabbit. The Sunflower was tall, and bright, and strong. Rabbit was proud of it.

One day, Rabbit was hopping around the field when she saw a very strange sight... a flower that wasn't looking healthy. It was a daisy, wilted and droopy. Rabbit went closer to see what was wrong. The daisy needed water. Its petals were wilting because the ground was very dry.

Rabbit felt sorry for the daisy.

And do you know what she did? She did nothing at all! 'There are lots of other flowers here, and they're fine', she thought. So she went home and got on with her own work – watering her own flower. But every day, she hopped back up to the top of the hill to see how the daisy was doing. And every day, the daisy looked a little worse. Rabbit was worried, and sad that no one seemed to be helping the daisy.

Why didn't Rabbit go back to the stream, get more water, and help the daisy?

A very good question; and she did wonder about it. She thought about watering the daisy, but then she thought "well, you can't just walk into someone's garden and water it without asking, can you? That flower is probably someone else's to water. They might be cross with me!" Or she'd think, "Maybe the flower likes being like that" So Rabbit just went on worrying.

But one day, she really couldn't take it any more. She thought, "This just isn't right. Flowers aren't supposed to wilt like that. They're meant to be colourful and bright." She hopped over to the daisy, with some water. She was about to water it when a spiky hedgehog popped out of a hole and shouted at her "What are you doing?"

"I'm watering this daisy; it's dry and will die"

"So?" said the hedgehog. "It's my daisy. It's none of your business if it dies. I'll look after it how I want! Go home and take care of your own flower"

Rabbit looked at the poor sad daisy, and gathering all her courage tipped her water into the ground around it, and then turned and hopped home. She could hear the hedgehog muttering and mumbling. Rabbit came back day after day to water the daisy and the hedgehog kept muttering rude things about her and giving her horrible looks, but he didn't stop her.

Soon the daisy began to look a bit better, and eventually became bright and strong.... .. But, what was really odd was that as the daisy got brighter, Rabbit's Sunflower also became stronger and more beautiful. And stranger still, *all* the flowers in the field started to look brighter. It looked like there was just more water everywhere. Rabbit never really understood what happened, and neither do we.

It *could* be that the other animals were following her example, and running around watering other animals' flowers too.

Or - maybe, it's because when someone waters a wilting flower somewhere, all flowers, everywhere grow a little bit brighter?

Who knows? We'll just have to try it that way and see!

2nd Hymn: Green Hymnbook no.180 "This Old World"

(Tune 'Restoration', Traditional American folk tune Arr by David Dawson.
Words adapted from American folk song)

1.This old world is full of sorrow,
Full of sickness, weak and sore;
If you love your neighbour truly,
Love will come to you the more.

2. We're all children of one family;
We're all brothers, sisters too;
If you cherish one another,
Love and friendship come to you.

3.This old world can be a garden,
Full of fragrance, full of grace;
If we love our neighbours truly,
We must meet them face to face.

4. It is said now, "Love thy neighbour",
And we know well it is true;
This the sum of human labour,
True for me as well as you.

Reading 1: 'This Day of Promise' by Robert T. Weston

Here is a day of promise!
May it be so with me, with everyone!
Even if grey clouds scud overhead,
The storm clouds, rain and the breaking sunshine,
The blossoms bursting in pink and white,
The children gleefully running out to splash in puddles,
The grass green, and the buds
Straining into leaves on shrubs and trees,
And the birds singing joyfully, in the dawn,
Strutting the lawns as proud possessors.

Everywhere, life, life bursting through all fetters,
And the heart singing, protesting against gloom,
Shouting its defiance of clouds and cold;
The glad heart exulting in storm and sunshine alike.

This is a day that aches with the promise of life,
Life which will not be denied.
Let all hearts swell with acceptance,
For out of the earth, into the air and sunshine, out of ourselves,
There rises spirit in us.
Neither dark nor threat shall thrust it down.
It rises irresistible in us.
This is the season's gift.

Reflection: A time for quiet reflection:

Consider this season of growth in these ever- lengthening days of early summer the lush grass, wild flowers and leafy trees, the rushing rivers and sparkling seas, and life, all life, including ours, awaiting the wakening kiss of warm sunshine ...

all hold the promise that the current difficulties are almost at an end, surely, they will pass, and better times lie ahead

Pause in silence and reflect on your concerns at this time, for yourself, for others and for the world. And, of course, you are welcome to give thanks for your blessings, too, and offer up your thoughts to the God of your understanding. **1 ½ mins silence**

Music: we shall arise Lizzie Hornby 's Piano music

ADDRESS – “May Musings ”

“Ne'er cast a clout, 'til May be out”; in other words, ‘Don't be in a hurry to take off your winter woollies until May is over, or as some people think, until the May tree has flowered. Either way, it's a wise old country saying, never more true than this May! Weeks ago, when deciding on the theme of ‘May Musings’ for today's service, it seemed so easy! We would be emerging from winter's lengthy lockdown, in the coldest, darkest time of the year, into a wonderful spring. The ‘merry month of May’ would, of course, be as warm and sunny as last year's, renewing the vigour of our countryside, our gardens and ourselves. Instead of being cooped up indoors, we would all be free to go out and about, for country walks, enjoying the flowers and thriving wildlife, ending a perfect day by gathering with family and friends for a drink or meal outdoors in wonderful weather.

“Life” of course is never that easy or predictable! Unseasonable weather (one of the wettest and coldest Mays on record) curtailed all those plans of sunsoaked dining *al fresco*. TV news showed people doing their stoical best to enjoy themselves, as they sat huddled in winter waterproofs under huge dripping umbrellas in pub gardens. One showed a thoroughly miserable looking dog sheltering under his human's chair! And on events, local, national and global, of the last few weeks, one might indeed ‘muse’ upon the state of the world. We all have our personal worries, for ourselves, family, friends, pets. We may be concerned about illness, job insecurity, finances, to name but a few. The wider picture is hardly encouraging, with news of the pandemic (still with us), doubts about the integrity of public figures, news of injustices, and in-equalities and of destruction wrought by natural disasters, human carelessness, unkindness and callousness, around the world. So, what ‘Promise’ is there on this day?

The promise may be found in the finest qualities of the human spirit, which, like sunshine bursting through storm clouds and rain, come uppermost when a person notices that something needs putting right, and decides to do something about it, rather than standing by quietly, leaving it to somebody else. It takes moral and often physical courage, to say, “This isn't right, lets sort it out” We might feel afraid of being ridiculed, trolled on social media, or even physically attacked.

We can all learn from the example of ‘Rabbit’ in our story. Rabbit noticed that something wasn't right in the field of beautiful flowers, each one tended by an animal neighbour. One flower wasn't thriving, and she soon realized it was being neglected by its ‘owner’. Although initially, she was concerned, she did nothing, because everything else was ‘fine’. After some time, even though the situation had worsened, she still did nothing, worrying that helping it would be seen as unwelcome interference. Only when it worsened even more, did Rabbit pluck up the courage to put things right, in the face of hedgehog's antagonism. That one courageous action saved the daisy, and also led to improvements to the whole fieldful. The story is really a modern parable, of course, a little along the lines of the Parable of the Good Samaritan

So, what can any of us do when we notice a situation where 'something needs to be done'? It isn't always easy. I'm the first to admit, to times when I kept quiet or turned away, rather than speak out or do something to improve a situation. So I am full of admiration for anyone with the courage and such love for their fellow humans, sometimes putting themselves at great personal risk.

There are so many examples! In the past 18 months, thousands of health care workers stood up to the mark, day after day, after day, to tend those suffering from Covid, and a lot sadly shared the ultimate fate of many of their patients – 'Greater love hath no man, or woman, than that they lay down their lives for their friends' – though many of those they helped were unknown to them. Other 'key-workers' have worked steadfastly to maintain essential services, often at considerable personal risk. None of these people stood back nor turned aside. Their names are known only to their family and friends.

Of some better known examples, one is Rev. Dr. Norbert Capek, who established the first Unitarian congregation in Prague in the 1920's and 30's. His wide reputation as a religious liberal, newspaper editor, preacher, and lecturer put him in a dangerous position. He was very outspoken about the religious and ethnic intolerance of the Nazis. With the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia imminent, friends urged him to leave the country. But he chose to stay, and because of his Unitarian monotheistic beliefs, accepted into church membership several Jews. This gave them time to plan their escape to friendly countries. After two years, Dr. Capek was discovered and with daughter Zora, arrested, for the "capital offence" of listening to the BBC on the wireless, and he also for "high treason", citing his sermons as evidence. Zora was sent to a labour camp, and despite his age of 70, Norbert Capek was sent to Dachau concentration camp, then to Hartheim Castle, Linz, where a year after his arrest, he was killed by poison gas in October, 1942.

James Reeb, a white American Unitarian minister, became nationally known as a martyr to the civil rights cause when he died on 11 March 1965, in Selma, Alabama, after being attacked by a group of white supremacists. Reeb had travelled to Selma to answer Martin Luther King's call for clergy to support the nonviolent protest movement for voting rights there. Delivering Reeb's eulogy, Dr King called him "a shining example of manhood at its best".

Sometimes, its not about risking one's life, but of having the courage to be a lone voice, speaking up for a cause about which one is passionate. Greta Thunberg, the young Swedish environmental activist, was concerned about Climate Change from childhood, and changed her way of life to reduce her own carbon footprint. In her teens, to make more of an impact, prior to the Swedish elections in September 2018, she missed school to sit outside parliament with a sign stating 'School Strike for Climate'. Her lone protest snow-balled with more young people joining daily, attracting international attention. One small individual action inspired many thousands globally, to participate in similar actions, raising awareness around the world of this most important issue. Like many who make an impact, she is not universally popular, but considers the message more important.

Just a few examples out of many thousands throughout history! I'm sure each of us can think of at least one or two or more, of people taking actions for what they think is right, each one showing some of the Promise of their own day....

... a day that aches with the promise of life,
Life which will not be denied.
Let all hearts swell with acceptance,
For out of the earth, into the air and sunshine, out of ourselves,
There rises spirit in us.
Neither dark nor threat shall thrust it down.
It rises irresistibly in us.

When seen in juxtaposition to the worst situations, the finest qualities of the human spirit, the qualities of resilience, courage, tenderness, patience, and altruism shine out brightly. Some may regard this as evidence of the divine residing within us all, to be celebrated on this day of promise, when we celebrate love's blessing in its many diverse forms. So may it ever be - AMEN

Final Hymn: Purple Book no. 110 'Now we sing to praise love's blessing'
Tune 'Olicanana' by David Dawson; words by Anna Briggs)

1. Now we sing to praise love's blessing
all through our lives,
Laughter, joy, surprise, confessing
all through our lives,
Love that dreamed a new creation,
Love that dares through incarnation,
Love that offers transformation,
All through our lives.

2. How our wounds ache for love's healing
All through our days;
How our world needs love's revealing
in all its ways.
Fearful hearts suspect the stranger,
Hardened nations arm for danger,
Love lives on, the powerful changer,
All through our days.

3. Love's the grace that makes us caring
All through our lives,
Urges us to warmth and sharing
All through our lives,
Speaks in us, oppression naming,
Strives in us, injustice shaming,
Lives in us, true peace proclaiming
All through our lives.

4. Love's the clown that mocks at winning
All through the world,
Midwife of each new beginning
All through the world,
In the struggles that confound us,
In the chaos all around us,
Love's wide arms with hope surround us,
All through the world.

5. In God's faithful love we flourish
All through our lives,
Known and loved, each other nourish
All through our lives;
Though the world's demands are pressing,
What life brings is left to guessing,
Still we sing to praise love's blessing,
All through our lives.

Closing Words: With love and compassion for each other and the world, may we go from here more worthy of the gift of life and of the blessings of the earth, our common home. *AMEN.*
Rev. Cliff Reed

Music 'Roots and wings' Lizzie's Piano music
Extinguish Chalice

Closing Music: 'Weeting Fair' instrumental