

## 12<sup>th</sup> September 2021 – ‘Meeting each other’

Led by Rev Kate Whyman

**GATHERING MUSIC** ‘Who Else Could I Be?’, Peter Bradley Adams

<https://youtu.be/abGycbJv5XA>

### **WELCOME AND CHALICE LIGHTING**

Welcome to you however you join us this morning. Whatever the state of your mind, your heart, your body, your soul, you are welcome. Greetings to all of you here in the church, to all of you joining this service on Zoom or watching on Facebook, or on YouTube.

I begin with some words by UUA minister Jack Mendelsohn.

‘Here in this sanctuary of dreams and wisdom and beauty we come to grow, to be healed, to stretch mind and heart, to be challenged, renewed; to be helped in our own continuing struggles for meaning and for love; to help build a world with more justice and mercy in it; to be counted among the hoppers and doers.

‘In the face of cynicism, darkness, brutality around us and within, we seek to align ourselves with a living community that would affirm rather than despair, that would think and act rather than simply adjust and succumb.

‘Here we invite the spirit of our own humanity and the healing powers under, around, through and beyond it, to give us the nerve and grace, the toughness and sensitivity, to search out the truth that frees, and the life that maketh all things new.’

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'd like to.*

We light this flame to kindle the divine spark within each one of us. May it shine brightly, bringing light into the dark places of our minds and broken places of our world. Amen

This week I'm continuing in the theme of the web of existence, this time delving into the interconnectedness of all of us humans. I've called it ‘Meeting each other’

### **Hymn 183 (P) We are daughters of the stars**

We are daughters of the stars, we are sons of the earth;  
we are spinners and weavers in this web of life;  
and the joy that we weave reaches out beyond the stars  
and deep within the centre of our being.

We are daughters of the orchards, we are sons of the field;  
we are planters and reapers in this web of life;  
and the vision that we weave reaches out beyond the stars  
and deep within the centre of our being.

We are daughters of tomorrow, we are sons of our dreams;  
we are planners and builders in this web of life;  
and the future that we weave reaches out beyond the stars  
and deep within the centre of our being.

*Music and words © Heather Lynn Hanson*

Let us enter a time of prayer together...In the light of our theme of meeting each other, and also following yesterday's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11, let us share....

### **LET US PRAY** Prayer of St Francis of Assisi

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:  
where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek  
to be consoled as to console,  
to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.  
Amen.

I invite you to bring in to you mind's eye anyone you know who is suffering at this time. In this moment you might like to send them light and love, from your heart to theirs. Blessed be.

**STORY 'Don't change'** from 'Song of the Bird', Anthony de Mello

This week I'm going to read the story just twice. The first time, I'll read it as it is. And the second time (in italics) I'm going to invite you to adapt it for your own situation.

I was a neurotic for years. I was anxious and depressed and selfish.

*(What difficult feelings have you experienced? Or still experience right now?)*

Everyone kept telling me to change. I resented them, and I agreed with them, and I wanted to change, but simply couldn't, no matter how hard I tried. What hurt the most was that, like the others, my best friend kept insisting that I change. I felt powerless and trapped.

*(Has anyone ever told you to change? How did that feel?)*

Then one day my friend said to me, 'Don't change, I love you just as you are.' Those words were music to my ears. 'Don't change. Don't change. Don't change...I love you as you are.' I relaxed. I came alive.

*Have you found someone who is willing to accept you as you are? Or have you been able to accept yourself as you are?*

And suddenly I changed! I now I know that I couldn't really change until I found someone who loved me, whether I changed or not.

*How do you feel when someone loves you as you are? How do you feel when you fully accept yourself?*

## **SILENT REFLECTION (Candles)**

**INTERLUDE** 'O At Skue', Unni Løvlid

[https://youtu.be/NJRxmRf7r\\_k](https://youtu.be/NJRxmRf7r_k)

Thank you to Norwegian singer Unni Løvlid for giving me permission to use her music.

## **ADDRESS**

How is your sense of time these days? During the past 18 months I lost all sense of mine, and I'm still confused, to be honest. I still have this feeling of being a bit lost in time. How long is a week, actually?

And how about your sense of self? I don't know how strong that was before coronavirus swept through our lives, or whether that feeling of 'being yourself' and 'knowing who you are' was affected by the pandemic in any way. Perhaps it was shaken, or maybe it strengthened, or neither. Are you the same person you were before? Am I, I wonder?

Recently I had friends to stay. First to arrive was Alastair who stayed for 3 nights, and then, as I took him to the station to head off on the next stage of his trip, I collected Stephen, who took our service a couple of weeks ago. Since they overlapped, the three of us shared a cup of tea in the Pumpkin café on the station forecourt, which is a soulless place, if ever there was one, and not conducive to truly meeting anyone. And I had a moment of existential crisis because in that moment I honestly wasn't sure who I was. I know who I am with each of these friends individually, but there was a jarring sense of worlds colliding as we all sat down together, and of my own identity collapsing.

That's not because I put on an act with my friends – or no more than anyone else does, I don't think. I am myself in all situations. After all, who else could I be, as we heard Peter Bradley Adams sing earlier? It's just that whoever I am with, there is particular dynamic that's unique to being with that person. So the arrival of a third person inevitably shifts the energy. All three of us had to adjust, especially in that strange hinterland that exists between arriving and leaving a station. It felt weird: a process of disassembling and reassembling.

And it made me realize – again – that ‘being myself’ is not a fixed thing. There isn’t just one version of me. I imagine there isn’t just one version of you, either. Of course I’m basically the same person – I look the same and sound the same – and there’s still the same familiar internal monologue, and the same old characteristics and foibles continue to follow me around. But when I’m with one person – whoever they may be – there’s something unique about the quality of that particular interaction, isn’t there? Do you find that? Different people bring out different facets of us – a more playful side maybe, or a more serious one, perhaps. And the interests, memories, histories and so on that we share with one person are quite different from the connections we’ve made with someone else. This is obvious, I’m sure.

And once I’d got over feeling discombobulated, I began to appreciate how spending quality time with another person is sacred, not least *because* it is unique. And how, if we are open and alert to the possibility... then something brand new can be created – or given – to us *every* time we meet. Like new paints being mixed on a palette, the result can always be something fresh and original and unforeseen. Something not previously understood or touched upon.

Communication can take place superficially but also at a level beneath or beyond the conscious. When we are two souls meeting each other, each with their own potential to give and to receive; when we are breathing the same air, sharing the same moment in time, and seeing what unfolds; that is precious. It is a meeting to be honoured and treasured.

It probably goes without saying that any encounter with another human being will always be more meaningful if we’re able to *share from* the heart, as well as *listen with* the heart. Especially if we have a mutual understanding that meeting each other not only matters, but is what matters most right now. This kind of communication is more than simply passing the time of day, though passing the time of day is fine in order to oil the wheels of what might otherwise be stressful social interactions. But for a spiritual community we aspire for more than merely that. We might reasonably hope to enter shared time and space together, with the intention of truly ‘meeting each other’ where we are, in that moment, held by the divine spirit. This is when our connection can be felt most deeply. This is when we not only know that we are interdependent and interconnected beings in *theory* – which we are – but when we begin to know it *directly*, immediately, as felt experience.

Such meeting is surprisingly hard to find in everyday life. There's a lot of noise out there, isn't there, a lot of chat, a lot of opinion, and not a lot of time and space to truly meet each other in the presence of the holy – we have to make that time.

As a congregation we seem to meet each other best when we intentionally hold space for that purpose, as we do in our congregational services or at a heart & soul gathering, or in a one to one conversation. In these kinds of meetings the pace and the temperature drop, our insistence on being right, or on being heard, give way to a more generous sharing and a genuine interest in each other.

Many of you will be familiar with the guidelines we often use in small groups to help make them safe spaces for connecting more deeply. For example...

- Being present, as far as we're able to be, which means bringing our full attention.
- Speaking from the perspective of 'I', and not in generalizations or on behalf of others, so that we own what we say from the heart
- Having a mutual understanding that what is shared is treated with respect and care.
- Bringing an attitude of openness and willingness both to hear the other, and to be heard ourselves. To share time with each other.

When we do this, we may feel our sense of time and of self heightened... and yet paradoxically also falling away. We may create space for our deeper selves to emerge. And that matters, because it's in the depth of ourselves that we find our essential goodness, that holiness, the divinity which we all share. This is where we can connect in the presence of the Oneness, the Spirit, the Beloved, and remember, once more, that we are all incarnations of the same stuff, the same energy, the same spirit, the same Universe. We can truly meet each other here, in the Divine.

And I think we could do this more often, as a practice. We can do it in a breakout room, we can do it over coffee, we can make spaces and opportunities to truly meet each other whenever we like.

If this feels daunting to you, it needn't. After all, how do you usually meet someone? You probably simply ask them how they are. Easy. The difference is only in being open, and patient enough, to hear a truthful answer. And, if you just get an 'OK', or a 'I'm fine', in response, maybe being willing to ask again. 'How are you, *really?*'

Listening and sharing are two sides of the same coin, we need both, but if we are willing to create such mutually respectful spaces we may get more than we bargained. We might find we not only 'meet each other', but also meet ourselves, and our god.

May it be so.

Let's sing...

**2nd HYMN: 204 (P) When I am frightened**

When I am frightened, will you reassure me?

When I'm uncertain, will you hold my hand?

Will you be strong for me, sing to me quietly?

Will you share some of your stories with me?

If you will show me compassion,  
then I may learn to care as you do,  
then I may learn to care.

When I am angry, will you still embrace me?  
When I am thoughtless, will you understand?  
Will you believe in me, stand by me willingly?  
Will you share some of your questions with me?

If you will show me acceptance,  
then I may learn to give as you do,  
then I may learn to give.

When I am troubled, will you listen to me?  
When I am lonely, will you be my friend?  
Will you be there for me, comfort me tenderly?  
Will you share some of your feelings with me?

If you will show me commitment,  
then I may learn to love as you do,  
then I may learn to love.

*Words and music © Shelley Jackson Denham (arranged by Jeannie Gagné)*

**CLOSING WORDS** by Martha L Munson

We extinguish the chalice here that it might glow gently in our hearts.

May it light your path as you leave this place.

May it guide your way until we are together again.

*Extinguish chalice*

**CLOSING MUSIC** 'One Voice', The Wailin' Jennys

<https://youtu.be/y-24qGCvo7A>