

30th January 2022 – Planting seeds

Led by Rev Kate Whyman

GATHERING MUSIC Candlemas Eve, Kate Rusby

<https://youtu.be/8KOj5omJujw>

WELCOME AND CHALICE LIGHTING

Welcome. Welcome to all of you here in the church and everyone joining us online today. However you are this morning, however you're feeling, whatever joys or sorrows you are carrying, you are welcome here.

We are approaching the festivals of Candlemas, St Brigid's Day and Imbolc this week. Each in their way are markers of new beginnings and first stirrings. The theme of today's service is 'Planting seeds'.

But let's begin with some words from Jack Mendelsohn

Here in this sanctuary of ancient 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.

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.* May our chalice flame unite us, hold us and inspire us in this time of shared worship together in beloved community. Amen

I'd like to ask you a question, something to think about, to mull over during this service.
And the question is this: What is it you hope to feel when you come here?

However you join us, in person or online, what is it you are hoping to feel? I'll return to that question later, but first...

Let's sing...

1st HYMN 43 (P) Gather the spirit

Gather the spirit, harvest the power.
Our sep'rate fires will kindle one flame.
Witness the mystery of this hour.
Our trials in this light appear all the same.

*Gather in peace, gather in thanks.
Gather in sympathy now and then.
Gather in hope, compassion and strength.
Gather to celebrate once again.*

Gather the spirit of heart and mind.
Seeds for the sowing are laid in store.
Nurtured in love and conscience refined,
with body and spirit united once more.

*Gather in peace, gather in thanks.
Gather in sympathy now and then.
Gather in hope, compassion and strength.
Gather to celebrate once again.*

Gather the spirit growing in all,
drawn by the moon and fed by the sun.
Winter to spring, and summer to fall,
the chorus of life resounding as one.

*Gather in peace, gather in thanks.
Gather in sympathy now and then.*

Gather in hope, compassion and strength.

Gather to celebrate once again.

PRAYER

I invite you to join me now in a time of prayer.

This prayer has a short refrain after each line, which is 'help us to pray'. You may like to join me in saying those words as they arise.

Divine Spirit, Source of All

Prayer is an opportunity for each of us...

To honestly reflect on our lives - *Help us to pray*

To contemplate our deepest values and concerns - *Help us to pray*

To be still and listen to the person we really are and the divine spirit within us –

Help us to pray

To access the pool of renewal, healing and forgiveness, which is always accessible to us -

Help us to pray

To gain the courage to step beyond our comfort zones and to love more fearlessly –

Help us to pray

To give thanks for the wondrous gifts we have been given –

Help us to pray

To share our hopes and concerns with other seekers of the truth –

Help us to pray

To be silent and empty our minds, and allow ourselves to be filled with love and joy –

Help us to pray

To let the divine spirit flow through us - *Help us to pray*

Amen

Let us pause to bring in to mind's eye those known to us, and those unknown, who are suffering or struggling in any way at this time...

We pray for them, and for comfort, courage and guidance for all beings wherever they may be.

STORY Small beginnings, by Margaret Silf

There was once a young man with big dreams. He lived in a little cottage on the hillside, but in his dreams he imagined living in a beautiful forest, where he would raise a lovely family.

One night as he slept, an angel hovered over him and watched him dreaming of the great oak forest where he would like to live. The next morning he awoke to find a perfect acorn, placed at the foot of his bed.

The next night the angel hovered again and watched him dreaming of a fine flock of swans gliding on the lake in his dream forest. The next morning he awoke to find a small but perfect egg, placed at the foot of his bed.

The third night, as the angel hovered, the young man dreamed of the happy family he would like to raise. The next morning, just as he was waking, he heard a whisper in his ear. It sounded like music, and the music expressed the whisper of an angel – a simple word of love.

Great dreams have small beginnings. A single acorn contains the potential for a whole forest of oak trees. A single egg contains the potential for a whole flock of birds. A single word of love contains the possibility of an entire dynasty of happiness.

READING From *Sacred Earth Celebrations*, by Glennie Kindred

The days are beginning to lengthen. It is still cold but buds are forthcoming on the trees. Sap is beginning to rise and the bulbs are pushing through the Earth. Everywhere there are signs of the Earth stirring. Our acceptance of winter is giving way to an urge to move forwards into springtime energy. Now is the time to prepare inwardly for the changes that will come. Plant your ideas and leave them to germinate. Bring your vision and inner understandings out through poetry, song and art.

We are trying in our own way to live the dreams and visions of a new age, but we are still bound by our old conditioning and life patterns. We each carry the seeds of a new vision, of a new way of being. Each time these visions re-emerge after the incubation period of winter, they are stronger and we are surer.

2nd hymn 98 (P) Love will guide us PIANO ONLY

Love will guide us, peace has tried us.
hope inside us will lead the way
on the road from greed to giving.
Love will guide us through the hard night.

If you cannot sing like angels,
if you cannot speak before thousands,
you can give from deep within you.
You can change the world with your love.

Love will guide us, peace has tried us,
hope inside us will lead the way
on the road from greed to giving.
Love will guide us through the hard night.

Traditional melody arr. by David Dawson, words © 1985 Sally Rogers

REFLECTION

We come into community, here, now, with each other, in this place, breathing into the space between us, opening our minds and hearts into this togetherness, allowing the spirit to move through us and among us, opening to the divine whole from which we have come, in which we live and breathe and have our being, to which we will return.

Let us imagine the edges of our beings softening a little into the wholeness, into the oneness, as we become aware of each others' presence, whether we're in the room or at home, we are sharing this moment of stillness, together.

Let us be silent together, you might like to ponder the question I asked earlier: What is it you hope to feel when you come to this place? [If anything occurs to you, you might like to jot it down on the post it, or in the chat box, or notice it and return to your silence.]

SILENCE

INTERLUDE Nunc dimittis

<https://youtu.be/XkVoRt73-4U>

ADDRESS

I've been ordering seeds. I have seed potatoes ready to start chitting (Joan Frost usually reminds me to do this, so I'm thinking of her now.) I have shallots and onion sets waiting (I nearly collided with Delphine yesterday as I was walking up the street and she was hurtling down it on her bike, on her way to her allotment to plant shallots herself, I believe). I feel that this week really is the time to get started. It's amazing how the weeks go by and how easy it is to miss the moment. Although of course things are also already happening out there, without any help from me. The rhubarb is coming through – has been for a while actually – and yes, we can see snowdrops and crocuses pushing up too. A few of us spotted primroses flowering in our own garden spiral, and Ann's daphnia is flowering for the first time – after 2 years? This is a hopeful time, a time life - that's being lying dormant - begins to emerge from its winter hibernation. It's a great time to plant seeds.

I think many of us feel, to some extent at least, that we're tune in with the changing seasons as they cycle, and we respond to the various invitations they seem to offer us. Those of you with an earth-spirit bent may feel this particularly strongly.

And so now is a good time, I think, for planting seeds, not just literally in our pots and gardens, if we have them, and not only in our own lives (though there too), but also in the life of this community. Seeds that may come up and bear fruit – or not – nothing is ever guaranteed of course – but nevertheless seeds of *possibility*. And once we have planted them we may find that they do in fact begin to germinate: in our minds and in our hearts; in our imaginations and our dreams, in the way we move and breathe; and in the way live together and support each other. Seeds that we can nurture and nourish, water and feed, tend and care for as part of our promise to each other.

And so to return to the question: What is it you hope to feel when you come here, to this place? Or to put it another way, what do you hope others will feel when they encounter this community?

And I wonder if you might offer a word or a phrase in answer to that question? If you're online, you could write your thought in the chatbox. If you're here perhaps we can risk just

calling out a word or phrase from where you are and I'll repeat them so everyone can hear – nothing long or complicated – this is just a seed, so one word is fine - something that you hope you and others will feel when they come here.

Connected? Valued? Included? Accepted? Loved? Held? Welcome? Curious? Safe?

Thank you. For me, with these simple but precious words, we are sowing the first seeds of covenant. Our shared understanding of what we're about. The beginnings of a promise we might make to each other. They are the start – only the start – of us discerning what it is we really want to grow here and what we are willing to nurture for each other. It's about noticing how we actually feel now, and how we hope we and others *might* feel when they come here; it's thinking about what we are offered here at the moment and also what we hope to offer to each other and anyone who joins us, whether they come just for one service, or for a year or a decade or more.

For Imbolc, which begins on Tuesday, is the beginning of the Celtic spring and the stirring of new growth. And we too are beginning to grow, once again – to grow a garden in which we can all flourish, in which we can each find our place, and each of us adding to the overarching beauty of it all. We are growing – once more - somewhere we can each feel safe and yet also challenged at times; a place where we are accepted as we are, while also given space and encouragement to grow; somewhere we can tend to our own spirits and also reach out to a hurting world. Somewhere that's bound to feel messy and uncomfortable and rocky at times, but where we nevertheless hang in and find our way through together.

We do have difficulties to overcome, we spoke of those at our meeting last week, but there is also much hope and promise and potential, and some green shoots are already coming through. Thank you so much to all of you who have offered to help in any way, or have pledged your support even though circumstances don't allow you to volunteer right now. It's been heartening and encouraging to feel there is so much goodwill for this church and this community. We're not there yet, so please keep your offers coming and know that they are very much appreciated.

Yes, it's a tricky time. But what we do now – and think now – what we say now – and offer now – all these things will inevitably have a profound affect what we are able to reap later.

We are at the beginning again, in many ways. As, truly, life is always a process of beginning again. Always a new day, always a new moment, always a new opportunity.

Always we are taking stock of where we are, listening with our hearts as well as our ears, seeing with our intuition as well as our eyes, and feeling and sensing our way forward. Reaching towards Beloved Community. Again.

May it be so.

2nd HYMN: 42 (P) From the light of days remembered

From the light of days remembered burns a beacon bright and clear,
Guiding hands and hearts and spirits into faith set free from fear.
When the fire of commitment sets our mind and soul ablaze;
When our hunger and our passion meet to call us on our way;
When we live with deep assurance of the flame that burns within,
Then our promise finds fulfillment and our future can begin.

From the stories of our living rings a song both brave and free,
Calling pilgrims still to witness to the life of liberty.
When the fire of commitment sets our mind and soul ablaze;
When our hunger and our passion meet to call us on our way;
When we live with deep assurance of the flame that burns within,
Then our promise finds fulfillment and our future can begin.

From the dreams of youthful vision comes a new, prophetic voice,
Which demands a deeper justice built by our courageous choice.
When the fire of commitment sets our mind and soul ablaze;
When our hunger and our passion meet to call us on our way;
When we live with deep assurance of the flame that burns within,
Then our promise finds fulfillment and our future can begin.

CLOSING WORDS

If you came here seeking God, then may God go with you.

If you came here seeking the way, then may a path be found.

If you came here needing community then may we be your friends.

And if you came here seeking spiritual renewal then may you leave strengthened in faith, renewed by hope, and touched by the experience of love.

Whatever you came here looking for, may that seed be planted now, and may it grow.

Amen

CLOSING MUSIC 'Seeds', Camille

<https://youtu.be/mGUIBRBmGVc>

Camille says: "Drums call for assembly and rebellion and dance. They speak to the tummy. They come from the ground, and I think we, as a people, need grounding. We live in a world that is completely out of its mind. In a couple of generations most of us have completely forgotten how to grow food, how to live off the land. And drums ground us. They tell us what it is to be together, what it is to be a society."