

Order of Service

Music: 'Moonlight Sonata' + galaxy pics <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gj-1W7Bp3sc> 5min 11 s

Starting recording: Usual opening music 'Its still not going to rain'

Welcome/ Chalice Lighting/ Opening Words:

1st Hymn: Purple Book 186, "We are Travellers on a Journey" 2 mins 20 seconds
(Tune: 'Ascension' by Henry Hugh Bancroft; Words © by Andrew M. Hill. Used by permission)

Prayers, led by Sheila plus a Short pause for our own silent prayers

Story: "Astronomy Lesson" by Rev. John Storey Read by Sheila

Reading: 2 poems to be read by Cliff **at the lectern**

Reflection: Spoken piece by Sheila, followed by **Silence, about 1 ½ mins,**
followed by Music: 'Still we rise' by Lizzie H

ADDRESS – "Our stories are written in the Stars "

2nd Hymn: Green Book no. 247 "A World of Wonder"

(Tune: 'Laudate Dominum' by Charles Parry, words by Sydney Knight used with permission)

Notices

Closing Words:

Music: closing clip 'Roots and wings'

Extinguish Chalice

Closing Music Video: 'Interstellar' by Hans Zimmerman, featuring organ with orchestra

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XwXfDR-qDhA> 3 mins 53 seconds

Breakout Rooms

Opening Music: 'Moonlight Sonata' video

5mins 11 seconds

Starting recording: Regular opening Piano Music

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 we join in, every 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.

Kindler of the stars, and of the fire at Earth's heart,
Be with us now as we kindle this flame,
Symbol of our own flickering spirits as they reach out to you and to each other
In reverence and in love. *(Rev Cliff Reed)*

Opening Words: 'Out of the stars' by Robert T. Weston,

Out of the stars in their flight, out of the dust of eternity, here have we come,
Stardust and sunlight, mingling through time and through space.
Out of the stars we have come, up from time;
Out of the stars we have come.

Time out of time before time in the vastness of space, earth spun to orbit the sun,
Earth with the thunder of mountains newborn, the boiling of seas.
Earth warmed by sun, lit by sunlight: this is our home;
Out of the stars we have come.
Mystery hidden in mystery, back through all time;
Mystery rising from the rocks in the storm and the sea.
Out of the stars, rising from rocks and the sea,
Kindled by sunlight on earth, arose life.

Ponder this thing in your heart; ponder with awe:
Out of the sea to the land, out of the shallows came ferns.
Out of the sea to the land, up from darkness to light,
Rising to walk and to fly, out of the sea trembled life.
Ponder this thing in your heart, life up from the sea:
Eyes to behold, throats to sing, mates to love.

Life from the sea, warmed by sun, washed by rain,
Life from within, giving birth rose to love.
This is the wonder of time; this is the marvel of space;
Out of the stars swung the earth; life upon earth rose to love.
This is the marvel of us, rising to see and to know;
Out of your heart, cry wonder: sing that we live.

1. We are travellers on a journey,
Which has brought us from the Sun,
When primal star exploded
And earth in orbit spun;
But now as human dwellers
Upon earth planet's crust,
We strive for living systems
Whose ways are kind and just.

3. We are travellers on a journey,
Through realms of inner space
Where joy and peace are planets
That circle starts of grace;
And when we find the stillness
Which comes at journey's end,
There'll be complete refreshment,
A resting place, a friend

2. We are travellers on a journey,
Which grows from human seed,
And through our birth and childhood
Goes where life's path may lead;
But now we are delving deeper
In quest of greater worth
And reaching unknown regions
And planets of new birth.

Prayers:

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 through illness, accident, or bereavement, human actions or natural causes.

We pray for all whose lives have been lost or changed forever, due to the pandemic, in this country and around the world. As the numbers of those developing the illness rises, may everyone behave sensibly to lessen the possibility of spreading it, to help keep us all safe, especially the most vulnerable. We pray that there be a better sharing of the vaccine, around the world, for none of us is truly safe until all are safe.

We hold in our thoughts and prayers those who died or lost their livelihoods as after the recent excessive rainfall in Germany, Belgium and Netherlands,; and those in California, Oregon + other western states in USA who are suffering from the opposite: life-threatening drought and wildfires. Our hearts go out to them all, and to their families; may they find the strength to rebuild their lives.

We pray that within our own country, the intolerance and hatred shown by some people, towards those whom they perceive to be different in any way, cease. May better understanding, and a spirit of kindness, prevail to heal the wounds and prevent more.

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*

Let us take a short pause for our own silent prayers

Story: "Astronomy lesson'

by Rev John Andrew Storey, (1935 -1997) a former minister of this church

First published in 'The Inquirer', No.7349, 1 October 1994.

“Over the years one of the things I have looked forward to in the autumn, as some consolation for the end of the summer holidays, is the evening classes which start at that time of the year. I have done many things over the years, but one which I especially enjoyed was Astronomy. Much of it was over my head - which is where you would expect the stars to be - but on the whole it was fascinating and instructive. Even the little bit of the Universe we can observe contains billions of stars, and our own galaxy, the Milky Way, contains an estimated one hundred thousand million stars.

In our class we were taught that there are known to be as many galaxies as there are stars in the Milky Way. That is a lot of stars!

So vast is the Universe, that although light travels at a constant speed of 186,000 miles a second, the light from the most distant stars visible to us has taken thousands of years to reach us. It is a strange thought, but when you look at the heavens you are seeing them not as they are now but as they have been in the past. Some of the stars we 'see' may no longer be there, although we are still receiving from them the light which began its journey in the distant past.

Going to evening classes often gave me ideas for sermons, not to mention hymns and poems. The thought came to me in my class, or perhaps when I got home, that some of the great men and women of the past are like stars whose goodness continues to shine and lighten our path though they are no longer with us in the flesh. In the words of one of my hymns: 'The lives of those who serve the right, Shine with a lustre that will last.'

Perhaps the following poem says something of what I mean:

We're taught that stars - like people - die,
That what we see is just their light
Which travels on through endless days
Until it glimmers in our sky,
But though these suns no longer blaze
They still add lustre to our night.

The luminaries of this earth,
The saints, philosophers and seers,
Though dead, like burned-out stars in space,
Still shed a light across the years,
For though they share our common birth
They shine with more than common grace.

We too, though made of lesser clay,
May leave an echo of our stay. “

Reading: Two poems about stars

1. 'Starlight at Sea' by Katharine Lee Bates

Over the murmurous choral of dim waves
The constellations glow against the soft
Ethereal dusk, — forever fair, aloft,
Serene, while man climbs painfully from caves
To cities, clamorous cities, life that raves
Like surf against the rocks.

It is not oft
Our cities glimpse the stars, their luster scoffed
Away by low, hard glitter that outbraves
Night's blessing of the dark.

But here upon
Mid-ocean, all whose muffled voices ring
A rapture lost to our vexed human wills,
We see the primal radiance that shone
On chaos, —see the young God shepherding
His gleaming flocks on the empurpled hills.

2. 'Stars' by Sara Teasdale

Alone in the night
On a dark hill
With pines around me
Spicy and still,

And a heaven full of stars
Over my head,
White and topaz
And misty red;

Myriads with beating
Hearts of fire
That aeons
Cannot vex or tire;

Up the dome of heaven
Like a great hill,
I watch them marching
Stately and still,

And I know that I
Am honored to be
Witness
Of so much majesty.

Reflection:

'A Naming Prayer of Thanks'

Oh, All-Pervading Power,
Which brought the Universe into being,
Which infused with energy all the particles of Matter,
of the visible, the dark and the yet- to- be- discovered....

Which sustained the expansion from the 'Big Bang'
... outwards and onwards to this moment in Time,
and all the moments past, and all the moments yet to come.....

Oh, Power,
Whose energy over aeons drives the formation of gas clouds, and galaxies,
The formation of stars and their families of planets from those gas clouds,

Oh, Power,
Which infused the chemical soups on the cooling planet with Life,
and drove the evolution of the tiniest cells to the largest organisms,
from bacteria to bison,
from diatoms to dinosaurs,
from algae to eucalypts,
from mice to monkeys,
from the earliest primates to humans –

Oh, All-Pervading Power,
Which drove the evolution of humans to become the Consciousness of the Universe itself,
May our consciousness be just and compassionate, and
Forgiving of the darker side of humanity.

May cruelty, bigotry, selfishness and ignorance give way
to kindness, compassion and love in each one of us.

May kindness, compassion, forgiveness and love begin with me, and spread out to all I
know, and all those I have yet to meet.

Oh All- Pervading Power,
by whatever names you are known,
Thanks be for all this ... *AMEN*

Silence, about 1 ½ mins,

followed by Music: Piano piece by Lizzie 'Still we rise'

ADDRESS – “Our stories are written in the Stars ”

If the sky is clear this evening, go outside just after 10pm and allow a few minutes for your eyes to become accustomed to the almost darkness (for at this time of year, it doesn't get truly dark) If you look almost directly over head, you will see 3 bright stars marking out the shape of a large triangle – the so called 'Summer Triangle' If you live away from the city lights, you will see a faint misty band running across the sky – the Milky Way If you turn towards general direction of where the sun set, you will see about half way up from horizon, the stars of the Plough, shaped a bit like a saucepan with a bent handle! (which is why Americans call it the Big Dipper). This is part of the constellation of the Great Bear. If you follow the line of the handle, you will come to a bright orange-gold coloured star, called Arcturus, ('the keeper of the Bear') If you look at the other side of the Plough, you'll see two stars marking the side of the pan. Follow those up about a handspan, and you will come to the North Star, called Polaris. As your eyes become more accustomed to the dark, you will notice more stars, depending on how clear the sky is. If you are in the city itself, the brightness from street lights and houses will block out many of the fainter stars, including the Milky Way, but you will see the half Moon quite high up towards the south.

This will give you a taste of the wonders of the night sky – even if you don't know any of the constellations, its still awe inspiring, to look out into the Universe, of which we are part. Our ancestors knew the night sky like the back of their hands. They found patterns in the stars, what we call constellations, and learned which ones were in the night sky month by month, using them as a calendar, telling them when to sow seed and when to harvest, when to bring in their cattle as winter approached, and when to let them out in spring. They used the stars as tools for navigation. They embedded the fabric of their beliefs and culture into the sky, imagining they saw their heroes and villains there, telling their stories. Ancient China, Sumeria in the Middle East and Egypt each had their own star maps, as well as native peoples in the north and south Americas, and Australia, all telling their own stories. It was, however, the Greek philosopher, Ptolemy in the 2nd century, who first identified and listed 48 constellations. His notes were used for centuries and set a bench-mark in astronomy.

Today, there are 88 officially recognized constellations covering the whole sky, both the northern and southern hemispheres. For people with fancy phones, they can use apps like Google Sky and Astroviewer, to locate them. And learning a little of the stories behind the constellations, the legacy which spawned our own stories, is satisfying and humbling.

The old stories are part origin myths, early attempts to explain how everything came into being, and part morality tales, lessons showing how our short comings can lead to our downfall or good behavior be rewarded. Remember the 3 stars in the Summer Triangle, mentioned at the very start? They are actually in 3 separate constellations. The bright blue-white star almost overhead is Vega, in the constellation of the Lyre. In Greek mythology, it belonged to the great musician Orpheus. He fell in love with a nymph, Eurydice. When she died from a snake bite, Orpheus travelled to the Underworld to bring her back to the living. Orpheus was allowed to bring his beloved back to the upper world only on condition that he walk in front of Eurydice, and not look back until they reached the surface. He faltered only at the very end of their journey and turned round to look at Eurydice – who could blame him for wanting that reassurance? only to see her slip away into the darkness for ever. The

moral is clear –disobey orders, and risk losing what is most precious to you. Orpheus spent the rest of his life forlorn for his lost love, and his Lyre was placed in the sky by the gods after his death.

Another of the 3 stars in the triangle, is Altair, in constellation of the Eagle, Aquila, the pet of Zeus, the king of the Greek gods. Zeus was furious when Prometheus, one of his advisors, stole a ray from the Sun and smuggled it down to earth to give humans the gift of fire. Zeus did not believe that mortals were worthy of such a gift. As punishment, he had Prometheus chained to the side of a mountain, stripped of his garments. Aquila continually attacked Prometheus, pecking out his liver. Because he was immortal, his dreadful wounds healed themselves every evening, only to be opened up again the next day by the Eagle. The moral again is clear, if you annoy your political seniors, you will be punished, as true today as then! Eventually, Hercules took pity on Prometheus and killed the eagle with his bow and arrow. Somewhere in the sky is the bow and arrow. Hercules too can be seen in our summer skies.

Arcturus, that bright orange star in the south west, is in the constellation Boötes (the Herdsman). It is the fourth brightest star in the entire sky. Being visible all over the world, various legends from many cultures were attached to it over thousands of years.

Later in the year, as summer turns to autumn, different constellations appear in the night sky. Amongst them is a very famous group of stars, the Seven Sisters, or Pleiades. When the ancients saw them rising in late autumn skies, they knew winter was literally on the horizon. The Pleiades are mentioned in the Bible, twice in Job (9:9 and 38:31), and in Amos 5:8, and mentioned in Revelation (1:16) of a vision of the Messiah holding seven stars in his right hand during his second coming.

The ancient morality tales and origin myths attached to the constellations were examples of human search for our origins and to give meaning to our lives. They are telling our story: As King David wrote so beautifully to his director of music in Psalm 19,

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.

They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them.

Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world”.

The skies are certainly revealing their knowledge to those with the equipment to detect it. Scientific studies of the stars, in the last 300 - 400 years, have measured their movements and analyzed their light, searching for answers to modern versions of ancient questions. Astronomers have discovered much, with large telescopes and analytical tools now orbiting high above earth, clear of the distorting effects of the atmosphere, ever more is being discovered about our Universe, and our place within it. By analyzing starlight, astronomers have detected many different elements in the stars themselves, and scattered throughout the space between them. These elements form during the long and complex lifetimes and deaths of the stars, which come in many sizes, temperatures and ages. Everything which exists, including our own planet Earth and all the life on it, is made from these elements forged in ancient stars – we are *literally star dust*.

Astronomers and cosmologists have calculated the distances to the stars and galaxies, cities of billions of stars. They know that light travels at 186,000 (300, 000km) per second. The light from our own sun, which is a star, but relatively close so that we see it as a disc, rather than as a point of light, takes just over 8 minutes to reach us (8 'light minutes')

In a year, light travels about 6 trillion miles (9 trillion km). That is a 6 or 9 with 12 zeros behind it! Of the stars in the Summer Triangle, Altair is the nearest, but still so far away that its light takes almost 17 years to reach Earth, from Vega 25 years. Arcturus, is 37 light years distant. Deneb, the 3rd star in the Summer Triangle, is much further away; its light has taken over 1,400 years to reach us and it is one of the farthest stars the *unaided* human eye can see. The light from more distant stars and galaxies has taken so long to reach us, many hundreds of thousands or even millions of years, that as John Storey learnt in his astronomy lessons, many of the stars we 'see' may no longer exist, although we are still receiving their light which began its journey in the distant past, long before humans walked on planet Earth.

The most distant objects detected are almost 13 billion light years away—numbers beyond human comprehension. By measuring changes in the light from the stars and galaxies it was shown that they are all moving away from us, and from each other. The further away, the faster they move, which means the Universe itself is expanding. So, in the extremely distant past, it would have had a starting point in time and space, infinitely small, hot and dense, and Something happened to cause it to start expanding, in what is called 'the Big Bang' (or maybe, gentle sigh?) This is a *theory*, an attempt to explain how the universe developed from its original form, into what it is today. It doesn't attempt to explain what initiated the creation of the Universe, or what came before, or the biggest question of all, Why? We can't ever know, of course! 'Something' happened, caused this: call it what you will, 'Creator', 'God', or the Power which brought it all into being. Once started, over eons, as it cooled, that Power drove its evolution into matter, and light, galaxies, stars and their planets. On at least one small planet circling one medium sized star, that Power drove its evolution into life, and over billions of years, that Power drove the evolution into forms of life which became sentient - able to perceive or feel things. Eventually at least one life form, humans, became self -aware, and aware of the universe of which we are part. Each individual has a little of that primordial Power within – call it the spark of the Divine, if you like. As such, we have a responsibility to treat all life forms with humility and respect, for all share that Divine spark.

If we represent the 13.7 billion years since that Power drove the 'Big Bang', by a walk of 1.37 km, a little short of a mile, the whole of recorded human history would take up the last half of a milli-metre, or a tiny fraction of an inch! We indeed, travellers on a journey, where will we go and what will we become, in the next chapter of our story?

2nd Hymn: Green Book no. 247, 'A World of Wonder'

(Tune 'Laudate Dominum' by Charles Parry, 1848-1918) Words by Sydney Henry Knight, 1923- used by permission)

1. The sun at high noon,
The stars in deep space,
The light of the moon on our upturned face,
The high clouds, the rain clouds,
The lark-song on high,
We gaze up in wonder,
Above to the sky.

2. The green grassy blade,
The grass-hopper's sound,
The creatures of shade
That live in the ground,
The dark soil, the moist soil,
Where plants spring to birth,
We look down at wonder
Below to the earth.

3. The glad joys that heal
The tears in our eyes,
The longing we feel,
The light of surprise,
Our night dreams, our day dreams,
Our thoughts ranging wide –
We live with a whole world of wonder inside.

Closing Words: *An Irish Blessing:*
May the sun be warm and kind to you;
The darkest night some star shine through;
The dullest morn a radiance brew;
And when dusk comes - God's hand to you!

Music: 'Roots and wings/closing clip' *wait 20 seconds,* then **Extinguish Chalice**

Closing Music Video: 'Interstellar' by Hans Zimmerman, featuring organ with orchestra
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XwXfDR-qDhA> 3 mins 53 seconds

Breakout Rooms