

Plymouth Service, Sunday 22 August 2021, Stephen Crowther

Gathering Music: *Lo how a rose e're blooming, Jane Siberry*

<https://youtu.be/sFJj0m1pO-0>

Welcome: Good morning and welcome to our service this morning

Please know you are welcome here. Wherever you are on your spiritual journey, know you are welcome here. Wherever you are in your relationship with God – or not – please know you are welcome here. Whatever state of mind you are in; no matter how heavy or light your heart is this morning – know you are welcome here – may you find solace and connection during our time together.

As is our custom, we **light a chalice:**

We light this candle as a symbol of welcome. May its flame be a beacon of hope to all those seeking refuge and comfort. May it light the way home for those wandering in the wilderness. May its flame burn away the bonds of shame. May it connect with the light of love in all our hearts bringing trust and a sense of belonging, reminding us that we are never alone.

(pause)

We are of different identities, sexualities, diverse beliefs and life experiences. We have chosen to come together in this moment for worship. This makes this a holy moment – a sacred moment.

In case there is anyone joining us, who doesn't normally worship with us on a Sunday, I would like to extend a special welcome. Unitarians have no fixed statement of beliefs or creed to which you have to agree in order to be accepted. Our attitude is that religion is wider than any church or faith-group, and deeper than any set of beliefs. Here we practice a free faith unfettered by dogma.

As such, when I speak of God, I invite you to bring your own unfolding, personal and intimate understanding to the name – for it is yours and yours alone and may just be your most intimate relationship of all...

(pause)

Some Words: from Frederick Buechner

Your life and my life flow into each other as wave flows into wave, and unless there is peace and joy and freedom for you, there can be no real peace or joy or freedom for me. To see reality - not as we expect it to be but as it is - is to see that unless we live for each other and in and through each other, we do not

really live very satisfactorily; that there can really be life only where there really is, in just this sense, love.

So, listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery it is. In the boredom and pain of it no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace.

(pause)

Hymn: 188 *Let Love Continue Long* (HFL)

So, how are you doing? Still confused by the 'rules'?. intro service & music/Jane Siberry

Reading: At the River Clarion, by Mary Oliver

1.

I don't know who God is exactly.

But I'll tell you this.

I was sitting in the river named Clarion, on a water splashed stone
and all afternoon I listened to the voices of the river talking.

Whenever the water struck a stone it had something to say,
and the water itself, and even the mosses trailing under the water.

And slowly, very slowly, it became clear to me what they were saying.

Said the river I am part of holiness.

And I too, said the stone. And I too, whispered the moss beneath the water.

I'd been to the river before, a few times.

Don't blame the river that nothing happened quickly.

You don't hear such voices in an hour or a day.

You don't hear them at all if selfhood has stuffed your ears.

And it's difficult to hear anything anyway, through all the traffic, the ambition.

2.

If God exists he isn't just butter and good luck.

He's also the tick that killed my wonderful dog Luke.

Said the river: imagine everything you can imagine, then keep on going.

Imagine how the lily (who may also be a part of God) would sing to you if it could
sing,

if you would pause to hear it.

And how are you so certain anyway that it doesn't sing?

If God exists he isn't just churches and mathematics.

He's the forest, He's the desert.

He's the ice caps, that are dying.

He's the ghetto and the Museum of Fine Arts.

He's van Gogh and Allen Ginsberg and Robert Motherwell.
He's the many desperate hands, cleaning and preparing their weapons.
He's every one of us, potentially.
The leaf of grass, the genius, the politician, the poet.
And if this is true, isn't it something very important?

Yes, it could be that I am a tiny piece of God, and each of you too, or at least
of his intention and his hope.
Which is a delight beyond measure.
I don't know how you get to suspect such an idea.
I only know that the river kept singing.

It wasn't a persuasion, it was all the river's own constant joy
which was better by far than a lecture, which was comfortable, exciting,
unforgettable.

3.

Of course for each of us, there is the daily life.
Let us live it, gesture by gesture.
When we cut the ripe melon, should we not give it thanks?
And should we not thank the knife also?
We do not live in a simple world.

4.

There was someone I loved who grew old and ill
One by one I watched the fires go out.
There was nothing I could do
except to remember
that we receive
then we give back.

5.

My dog Luke lies in a grave in the forest, she is given back.
But the river Clarion still flows from wherever it comes from
to where it has been told to go.
I pray for the desperate earth.
I pray for the desperate world.
I do the little each person can do, it isn't much.
Sometimes the river murmurs, sometimes it raves.

6.

Along its shores were, may I say, very intense cardinal flowers.
And trees, and birds that have wings to uphold them, for heaven's sakes—
the lucky ones: they have such deep natures,
they are so happily obedient.
While I sit here in a house filled with books,
ideas, doubts, hesitations.

7.

And still, pressed deep into my mind, the river keeps coming, touching me, passing by on its long journey, its pale, infallible voice singing.

(pause)

Music interlude: *Living Statue* by Jane Siberry (duet with kd lang)

https://youtu.be/SBeP_II6SEY

We come now to a time of **Prayer and Quiet Reflection**. We will we move through prayers of thanksgiving, reflection, listening, loving.

Let us join together in prayerful stillness.

You may want to close your eyes and direct the focus of your attention inwards, bringing it to your heart – penetrating its walls and spending a few moments breathing into it deeply.

(pause)

Holy and Loving God of our hearts,

Spirit of Life and Love

Known by Many Names and yet known by None -

Guide our thoughts and our words this day.

Help us be open to your presence in this moment.

Help us be open to your presence here among us in this moment as we try and adjust to these familiar, yet unfamiliar ways of being together.

We still live in trying and unnatural times,

which means we have to worship in different ways.

Although this is not the way we know

or the way we would like it to be,

help us come together in ways that allow us to know you.

May each of us find our own way through this time

- together.

We are a fragile community – many members are having to contend with health issues both physical and mental. We lift those that are unwell and ask for them to receive healing. And we ask for courage and stamina and resilience for those who are having to tend to loved ones. Bring them strength in their commitment and to love and care.

(pause)

- We begin with **Naming Prayer**.

This is a time to reflect on the things in our lives that we feel grateful for and to acknowledge them. I invite you to think back over your day, week or month. Notice what or who you feel grateful for - however big or small. Take your time with this. Naming whatever it is you are grateful for, silently - holding them in the confines of your heart.

- And now, we come to **Knowing Prayer**.

Resting in God's presence, allow yourself to be bathed in that healing light of unconditional love - breathe it in.... breathe it out, filling the space around you with it.

Take a few moments to look back over your day so far. If your day has only just begun, then also include yesterday. Without judgement or criticism of any of it, gently recount the events from the moment you awoke right up to this moment here, now.

1. And as you do this, ask God to bring to your heart the moment for which you are most grateful.

If you could relive one moment, which one would it be?

When were you most able to give and receive love?

When did you feel most alive? most connected? most fully yourself?

Ask yourself what was said and done in the moment that made it so special. Breathe in the gratitude you feel and receive life again from that moment....

2. Ask God to bring to your heart the moment for which you are least grateful.

When were you least able to give and receive love?

When did you feel most drained of life? least connected? least yourself?

Ask yourself what was said and done in the moment that made it so difficult. Be with whatever you feel without trying to change or fix it in any way. You may want to take deep breaths and let God's love fill you just as you are....

As this time of knowing prayer comes to a close, you might want to speak inwardly to God - that which you hold sacred, asking for comfort, compassion, or forgiveness... perhaps asking for guidance, or ways to live your life more fully.

- Now we move to **Loving Prayer**.

This is an opportunity to offer prayers for whoever or whatever you feel is in need of our loving prayers right now. It may be for a loved one, a stranger, someone you are in need of resolution with or maybe for yourself. Or you may have a concern in the world.

- Now we move into **Listening Prayer**.

This is a time to sit in silence and stillness, with the intention of allowing ourselves to listen for the still, small, voice within that may speak. Don't force it – allow itself to be heard – or not....

SILENCE for approx 5 minutes

May all our prayers be heard. Amen

Music interlude: *Calling All Angels* by Jane Siberry <https://youtu.be/KRUErh47sao>

Some words: *That Which Holds All* by the late Nancy Shaffer UUA Minister

Because she wanted everyone to feel included
in her prayer,
she said right at the beginning
several names for the Holy:
Spirit, she said, *Holy One*, *Mystery*, *God*.

but then thinking these weren't enough ways of addressing
that which cannot fully be addressed, she added
particularities, saying, *Spirit of Life*, *Spirit of Love*,
Ancient Holy One, *Mystery We Will Not Ever Fully Know*,
Gracious God, and also *Spirit of this Earth*,
God of Sarah, *Gaia*, *Thou*.
and then, tongue loosened, she fell to naming
superlatives as well: *Most Creative One*,
Greatest Source, *Closest Hope* –
even though superlatives for the Sacred seemed to her
probably redundant, but then she couldn't stop:

One who Made the Stars, she said, although she knew
technically a number of those present didn't believe
the stars had been made by anyone or thing
but just luckily happened.

One Who Is an Entire Ocean of Compassion,
she said, and no one laughed.

That Which Has Been Present Since Before the Beginning,
she said, and the room was silent.

Then, although she hadn't imagined it this way,
others began to offer names.

Peace, said one.
One My Mother Knew, said another.
Ancestor, said a third.
Wind.
Rain.
Breath, said one near the back.
Refuge.
That Which Holds All.
A child said, Water.
Someone said, Kuan Yin.
Then: Womb.
Witness.
Great Kindness.
Great Eagle.
Eternal Stillness.

And then, there wasn't any need to say the things
she'd thought would be important to say,
and everyone sat hushed, until someone said
Amen

(pause)

Reading: comes from a recent Richard Rohr blog post. It offers modern paraphrases of words by Brother Lawrence - a 17th century French Carmelite monk. He offers no real methodology, but simply encourages us to be ourselves and to be aware of God's presence - you may find the words reassuring - I do!:

I don't practice any particular prayer discipline. I have no specific technique I use to meditate. I know these methods work for many people. But for me, when I tried them, I just spent all my time rejecting my wandering thoughts, over and over. I've tried to practice these disciplines, but now I don't worry about them anymore. Their only purpose anyway is to bring a person to union with God. Why should I fast or set aside particular prayer times or deny myself in some way when I've found the shortcut? If every moment I'm consciously practicing love, doing all things for God's sake, then I don't need to worry about these spiritual methods.

My thoughts are the biggest obstacles to this way of living my life. The little useless thoughts that drift through my head, making mischief, distracting me. I've learned to reject them as soon as I notice them. They have nothing to do with the reality at hand—nor with my eternal salvation—and once I stop paying attention to them, I can get back to communing with God.

I have abandoned all particular forms of devotion, all prayer techniques. My only prayer practice is attention. I carry on a habitual, silent, and secret conversation with God that fills me with overwhelming joy.

When we walk in the presence of God, the busiest moment of the day is no different from the quiet of a prayer altar. Even in the midst of noise and clutter, while people's voices are coming at you from all directions, asking for your help with many different things, you can possess God with the same serenity as if you were on your knees in church.

I can't always maintain my focus on God, of course. I'll suddenly discover that I've barely given God a thought in a good long while. Usually what gets my attention is that I'll notice how wretched I'm feeling—and then I'll realize I've forgotten God's presence.

But I don't worry about it too much. I just turn back to God immediately. And having realized how miserable I am when I forget God, my trust in God is always that much greater.

The Divine Presence occupies the here and now. If you are not aware of this—become so!

(pause)

Blessing: by John O'Donohue

May the light of your soul guide you; May the light of your soul bless the work you do with the secret love and warmth of your heart; May you see in what you do the beauty of your own soul; May the sacredness of your work bring healing, light and renewal to those who work with you and to those who see and receive your work; May your work never weary you; May it release within you wellsprings of refreshment, inspiration and excitement; May you be present in what you do. May you never become lost in the bland absences; May the day never burden; May dawn find you awake and alert, approaching your new day with dreams, possibilities and promises; May evening find you gracious and fulfilled; May you go into the night blessed, sheltered and protected; May your soul calm, console and renew you.

And so, until such a time that we can be together in person – may the wind of the Spirit blow through our world, giving the answer of God's everlasting love. That as you re-enter your day, you do so with peace and joy in your heart. Amen

Postlude: *Great Train* by Jane Siberry

<https://youtu.be/TDpat8Eu7bs>

Extinguish chalice