

## 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021 – ‘Writing – and revealing – our next chapter’

Led by Rev Kate Whyman

**GATHERING MUSIC** ‘Listen to the grass grow’, Catrin Finch and Sekou Keita

<https://youtu.be/eNLT5XXI-A>

### **WELCOME AND CHALICE LIGHTING**

Welcome. Welcome, to those of you here in the building, to this first service without legal restrictions on numbers or masks or where we sit, but where we continue to take care of ourselves and each other, and respect each other’s needs as best we can. It will take a little juggling, and trial and error, to find our way. So please let us know how you feel about the changes.

And welcome to those of you joining us online or in print, where you are in control of your own environment. We are all welcome here, whoever, however, wherever we are. And you are all welcome to join us afterwards for our delayed Annual General Meeting.

Some opening words by Rev. Scott Tayler ...

We gather as a house of stories.

As we learn of those who have gone before, the way in front of us becomes more clear.

As we weave together the tales of who we are, our loneliness lessens and the web of our oneness is revealed.

As we listen deeply in those times of tender trust, we descend into the longings and learnings, hopes and fears, of the humanity we share.

Beneath the wells from which we drink, there is a deeper well that feeds them all.

Come, let us tell each other tales of our thirst. Let us drink from the stories that sustain us all.

So let’s begin, as is our custom, by lighting our chalice candle.

*If you’re at home do light a candle with me if you would like to.*

May this light invoke for us the sacred presence of that which is greater than ourselves, and of which we are each a part.

Amen.

Let’s sing...

**HYMN 172 (G) Now open wide your hearts, my friends**

Now open wide your hearts, my friends,  
and I will open mine,  
and let us share all that is fair,  
all that is true and fine.

We gather in this meeting house –  
people of many kinds:  
let us, below the surface, seek  
a meeting of true minds.

For in our company shall be  
great witnesses of light:  
the Buddha, Krishna, Jesus – those  
gifted with clearest sight.

Like them, we seek to know ourselves,  
to seek, in spite of fear;  
to open wide, to all, our hearts –  
for all are welcome here.

*Music by James Turlle, words by Peter Galbraith*

**PRAYER** by Thomas Merton

“My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.

I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always, though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone. Amen”

And let's take a moment to bring in to our mind's eye anyone known to us may be feeling lost and alone at this time...May they find solace and comfort.

And may our care and concern ripple outwards to those unknown to us, wherever they may be...May all people, and all beings, find calm in the storm, and peace in their hearts.

**STORY** adapted from Rev Gretchen Haley

Late one night the sea captain of a ship that was engaged in exercises in stormy weather was on the bridge when the lookout raised the alarm, and reported that there was another vessel visible directly ahead of them, though some distance away.

The captain instructed the appropriate officer to contact the vessel immediately, and to order them to turn so that they would pass by to starboard. But to his surprise there was an immediate response back saying, "We suggest you turn immediately to port."

Now the captain knew the formation of the group of ships that were with him, even though he couldn't see them in the dark, and so he responded with a sharp order this time for the vessel ahead (which was now getting closer) to pass to starboard.

But again the vessel responded, straight back with: "We suggest you turn immediately to port."

The captain was growing angry. He couldn't turn to port because he knew there was another ship out there. So he pulled rank, and informed the rogue vessel that this was Captain Jones on the SS Regardless, and that he was engaged in official manoeuvres and he expected the ship to get out of his way. NOW!

The reply came back, "This is the North Ipswich Lighthouse, Sir. I suggest you turn immediately to port."

**READING** by American author Adrienne Maree Brown, from "ripe conditions"

'I have been reflecting a lot lately on how I don't trust people with agendas, and master plans.

I think of those people as trying to create a new story for others, placing a massive end on the story, a period that only they can see. For me, storytelling is an emergent process, a pollination-style intimacy, where the results can't be fully predicted as the conditions shift.

In my experience the best storytelling is the best organizing...it's rooted in a truth people have experienced, it has some magic in it and something to long for, and a moment of beauty. But it is co-created as it is lived, no one can see the end of it. That allows people to stay in the present moment, and attend to the work before them with intention, seeing the story unfold with themselves in it, rather than directed, with themselves just outside the frame.'

She continues: ['There is a] Lao Tzu quote I read recently: "Knowing how to yield is strength." There is a deep yielding to being in the story, not an outsider. There is a power that comes from being part of the transformation within a story, which you miss if you are constantly trying to be outside directing and managing it.'

**REFLECTION** Candles of joy and concern

**INTERLUDE** 'The Swan', Saint-Saens, performed by Philip Croft

## **ADDRESS**

On Monday I went to Boscastle to spend the day with an old school friend and her husband who were staying there on holiday. We usually manage to catch up with each other once a year. She had booked us in to the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic. Have you been there? I never had but I really enjoyed it. Or particularly I enjoyed being drawn into such a rich world of the imagination. The child in me was reawakened, by piskies and faeries and broomsticks and spells. And I was reminded how close magic and mysticism actually are, and of course how anyone with a way of understanding the world that doesn't fit the mainstream can be seen as a threat and be demonized.

Twas ever thus.

I hadn't realized that the artist Robert Lenkiewicz had an association with the occult – I expect those of you who are local to Plymouth are well aware of that – and neither had I quite made the connection between a wand and staff, that they were essentially the same thing, but that a staff was for a higher tier of wizard, though if I had ever seen the Lord of the Rings I expect I would have gleaned that from Gandalf.

I think it is always helpful for me to be reminded of the unknown and the unseen, and indeed the unknowable and the unseeable. I neither believe nor disbelieve in the existence of supernatural beings. Belief is not the point, not for me anyway. But I am enchanted by the idea of them, and certainly open to the possibility that there are things and forces I don't understand. And it is not just superstitious but healthy, I think, to have humility in the face of what we don't know and to be reminded that there are always 'more things in heaven and earth', as Hamlet famously said, "than are dreamt of in your philosophy'. It's good to remember we are not in control; and that though we can do a great deal, of course, to set ourselves in a particular direction, and work towards a goal, there's no knowing how anything will actually turn out. And I thank God for that. Life is a kind of wayfaring, it is crossing uncharted territory that's only revealed by the journey itself, it is co-created in the living of it. It is never presented to us in advance simply to follow.

So here we are, now, on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021, each of us having lived through a time that none of us could have predicted, and one that made a mockery of any – well pretty much all, actually – of the many plans we had made back in March 2020. I have got so used to crossing things out of my diary I'm still amazed when anything in it actually happens.

But no matter. We adjust. We reset. We pick ourselves up. We start again.

What we don't do is give up. Because life calls us, over and over, to hope and to envision and to make more plans. And we do. But perhaps with a little more wisdom, and a little less attachment to whatever specific results we had envisaged, and a little more openness to the outcomes that actually emerge. We understand better, maybe, that we are part of a process that's much bigger than we are, that we are not self-determining, or even group-determining, but fully interdependent interbeings who are influenced by all that is, whether we know about it, or understand it, or not.

But this doesn't make us feeble or helpless victims – far from it. We still have agency. We are still creative and resilient, we still have energy and determination. We play our part. So the art, I think, is to keep our enthusiasm and zest for life but to sprinkle it with a generous

dose of humility, so that when our treasured dreams don't quite work out as we'd hoped we are not defeated and disappointed, not resentful or revengeful – or at least not for too long – but are instead able to shake ourselves off, like a dog that's been drenched by the rain, soon dried and recovered, ready and looking to play once more.

And so here we are, as a congregation. A community with ideas, and hopes, and plans, another year being reckoned with, and setting off once again. We don't want to live stories imposed on us, we want to live our own. This time we do have a map, and a compass. We've been calling it a draft strategy, and I was going to drop the word 'draft'. But you know how it is, there may be spirits lurking in the woods, and rocks lying hidden under the surface of the seas. I know from my own coastal path walking how sudden landslips can lead to unwelcome diversions. And how sometimes it becomes clear along the way that the map is out of date, and the roads have changed. And whatever happened to that landmark that no longer seems to exist?

So yes, we have a draft strategy, and a sense of direction. We've consulted you all on it, and we've listened to what you've said. We all own it. And now it's time to start co-writing the next chapter of our story. But we'll need to keep watch and alert, and not get ourselves stuck on a particular route or too wedded to reaching a particular destination. We'll need to make sure we don't become entrenched, like Captain Jones, in a version of events in our heads that no longer fits the facts in reality, but keep moving forwards, trusting in the process, trusting in each other, and trusting in our god.

Like the ancient prophets and seers who kept looking ahead to see what was on the horizon, testing the water and sniffing the air for any changes, and discerning the way by prayer, by the stars, and by intuition. (And who, crucially, were always willing to change course when necessary.)

Margaret Silf tells a story about a long-distance truck driver who had been newly recruited by a haulage company to transport goods across Canada. He reported for his first night. His task was to drive the truck across the whole of Canada, from Montreal to Vancouver. It would take five days and he would be driving mainly by night. He was given the keys to the truck, and he climbed in and switched on the engine.

The headlights came on. He gazed for a few moments into the black of the night beyond the reach of their beams.

'How foolish is this?' he said to himself. 'I am embarking on a journey of over four thousand kilometers, and my light only reaches for just a few metres into the darkness..'

Perhaps the fledgling truck diver lost his nerve at this point, switched off the engine and went home.

Or perhaps he began to drive. If so, he would have discovered that the light always travelled with him.'

And so will it be for us. We can't know in advance how the journey will go or quite where we will end up. But the light, that divine light by which we are all illumined, will travel with us, too, always showing us just enough to take the next step, gradually revealing the way ahead as we create our story together.

May it be so.

**HYMN 192 (G)** A new community

We would be one as now we join in singing  
our hymn of love, to pledge ourselves anew  
to that high cause of greater understanding  
of who we are, and what in us is true.

We would be one in building for tomorrow  
a greater world that we have known today;  
we would be one in searching for that meaning  
which binds our hearts and points us on our way.

We would be one in living for each other,  
with love and justice strive to make all free;  
as one, we pledge ourselves to greater service,  
to show the world a new community.

*Music by Joseph Barnby, words from Samuel Anthony Wright*

**CLOSING WORDS** Rachel Naomi Remen, *Kitchen Table Wisdom*

A final word on stories...

'Hidden in all stories is the One story. The more we listen, the clearer that [universal] Story becomes. Our true identity, who we are, why we are here, what sustains us, is in this story. The stories at every kitchen table are about the same things, stories of owning, having and losing, stories of sex, of power, of pain, of wounding, of courage, hope and healing, of loneliness and the end of loneliness.

Stories about God.

In telling them, we are telling each other the human story.'

May it be so.

*Extinguish chalice*

**CLOSING MUSIC** Woyaya, by Wiyaala

<https://youtu.be/BwckMpR9V-Q>