

18th April 2021: A cup of tea

led by Ann Kader, reader: Myron

CHALICE LIGHTING

These words are from East Shore Unitarian Church

We light this chalice to remind ourselves

To treat all people kindly because they are our siblings in spirit

To take good care of the earth because it is our home;

And to try to live lives filled with goodness and love because that is how we will
become the best people we can be.

1st HYMN

Our first hymn is: no.173 in the green book "The Fellowship of the Church"

The Church is not where altar stands

Within the hallowed walls,

But where the strong reach out their hands

To raise the one who falls.

Not stately building, standing fair,

Where people sing their creeds,

But fellowship of loving care

Which serves all human needs.

The Church is not where ancient rite

Is seen on Sabbath days,

But wisdom's constant beam of light

To guide our common ways;

The Church is me, the Church is you,
Not mortar, brick and stone;
It is with all who love the true,
And where true love is shown.

STORY Our story is a children's story titled 'When the Dalai Lama came to tea' and is read by Myron.

This is a children's story by Pam Evans who is the founder of the Peace Mala project. She is committed to interfaith dialogue for peace. Pam's creation of the Peace Mala project was born out of the 9/11 disaster but also by witnessing intolerance and prejudice. I have shortened the story somewhat.

Not everyone knew who the Dalai Lama was, but those who did explained that he was very important indeed, and that he came from Tibet. Some people didn't even know where Tibet was, and some thought Tibet was just another part of China. This, of course, is not true. Tibet is a large and magical country with high mountains and blue snow; where the people are warm and friendly and laughter sparkles in their eyes. The Dalai Lama is their leader.

Sadly the Dalai Lama cannot live in Tibet any longer because many sad things have happened there, so now he lives in India with many of his monks. He travels all over the world and has met many important people. Whenever the Dalai Lama arrives in a country there is great excitement. Lots of people want to listen to his magical words.

One day, the Dalai Lama decided he would come to Wales. He had never been to Wales before, but he had heard that Wales was like his own country Tibet; that it had high mountains full of music and that the people of Wales were also warm and friendly.

When the people of Wales heard that the Dalai Lama was coming to see them, there was great excitement. The Dalai Lama came to Cardiff, the capital city. A male voice choir sang for him, he clapped and said he now knew why Wales was called "The Land of Song"

Everyone listened to him and a great fuss was made wherever he went. But the Dalai Lama didn't want any fuss and kept telling everyone that he was just an ordinary monk. Of course, no one believed him. He had to be treated with respect.

Most unexpectedly, the Dalai Lama said he would like to have tea with an ordinary Welsh family. This was a very surprising request. How would a suitable family be chosen without upsetting the others?

The Dalai Lama laughed when his simple request seemed to have caused such a problem. He said there was no problem at all because he already knew where he was going for tea although the family themselves didn't know yet!

He asked to be driven to Gorseinon in South Wales and said he would tell the driver which house to go to when they arrived. This was all very strange indeed, but everyone wanted to please the Dalai Lama and so his driver agreed to go. Imagine the surprise on Mrs. Evans' face when her doorbell rang and there stood the Dalai Lama, his face beaming and his eyes sparkling with laughter.

Mrs Evans recognised him immediately because she had seen him on the television. At first, she didn't know what to do and felt completely unprepared. The Dalai Lama realised this and caught her by the hand and told her that a cup of tea would be wonderful.

Mrs Evans took the Dalai Lama into her living room. For some strange reason, most of her family had turned up unexpectedly that afternoon and were all in her living room. The Dalai Lama did not find this surprising at all. He had wanted them to be there and Mrs Evans twin sister, Aunty Lal, had even baked Welsh cakes that very morning.

The Dalai Lama explained that he had always wanted to try Welsh cakes and knew someone in the family would have made them for him. He really enjoyed the Welsh cakes and several cups of tea and soon everyone was relaxed and laughing. Even Minnie the cat purred contentedly at the Dalai Lama's feet, which was surprising as Minnie was usually a bad tempered cat. The Dalai Lama asked for the recipe and if it would be easy to follow and Aunty Lal gave him her special recipe and a special

copper griddle called a maen. The Dalai Lama was very pleased with his present but said his cook would help him cook the Welsh cakes.

Before leaving, he thanked Mrs. Evans and her family for his Welsh tea and told everyone that he had enjoyed his visit. Everyone crowded around the front door to see him off. It started to rain and the Dalai Lama had heard that it often rained in Wales and was happy that the Welsh rain had come to see him too.

PRAYER

Let us turn to prayer

Today's prayer is a Unitarian 'Lord's prayer' by Graham Williams from Kidderminster meeting house.

Eternal Spirit,

That pervades the world and beyond,

May your existence be recognised

And may your power be spread

Here in the U K

As over

The rest of the world

Supply us with the strength we need to live decently. Forgive us our neglect of others,

As we forgive those who neglect us.

And lead us not into evil ways,

But strengthen our resolve.

For you are everywhere, if we recognise you

And will help us create a better world. Amen.

MEDITATION

There will now be a meditation from the book titled Sonata by Mark Bellatini. This will be followed by a short silence and reflective music

Slower and Slower

Let the difficulties of the week

Take their sabbath now

their brief and simple rest.

Let the worries of the week

Lay their heft gently on the dark earth Below this carpeted floor

Which can bear them with great ease Than any one of us can by ourselves.

Let the tangle of feelings,

The pull and push of these last seven days Sit still for a minute

Stop writhing in my heart,

And move no more than a Bhudda

At rest under a tree.

Let there be stillness in my heart for a moment,

The balance point between breathing in

And breathing out, like the pause of a dancer

Between movements in the music

Let the breathing in the room be free and flowing. Let pulses trace a slower rhythm
in the wrist.

Let the coming silence be like hands

Pulling back a curtain,

Revealing the table set with the feast of life

Which is present here and now,

And has been the whole while,

Present to those who give up living in either the past

Or the future.

Justice for persons and for different nations,
Respect the diverse species in our care,
Community of life on earth sustaining
Love for this planet which we all must share.

Compassion is the strength of love and sympathy
Letting us share another being's pain;
Creature or human, loving friend or stranger,
Love for each other is the whole world's gain.

Wisdom is insight clear, precise and thoughtful,
Searching for truth and human law refined:
Guidance from past, made ready for the future
By the best reasoning of the human mind.

Integrity, with honour and uprightness:
These are the qualities which form and make
Women and men, the people for tomorrow,
Those who serve others for another's sake.

Justice, compassion, wisdom and integrity,
These are the virtues which our poor world needs.
They'll flower tomorrow, fruit in glorious splendour,
If we today go out and plant the seeds.

ADDRESS

Some of you may recall I do a service about tea once a year. I've no idea why. Well this year I do know why, it ties in with Wednesday which is international tea day and if the community cafe would have been open, we would have had a charity fundraiser. Perhaps on Wednesday you might like to send a pound or more to your favourite charity, as they have all been struggling so much.

This whole address was going to be quite different as I thought our church might be open and I was going to talk about the church being a vessel. I will come back to this though.

My thoughts about tea have really come from two books, one titled Three Cups of Tea which I have quoted from before and a tiny book that I bought many years back in Truro cathedral called The Tea Lover's Devotional. It's American, very Christian but the cover is nice, the paper feels nice. As well as passages from the bible and meditations, it also has quotes and recipes.

One of the quotes I like in the book is from Thackeray:

“ nature meant kindly.... when she made the tea plant; and with a little thought, what series of pictures and groups the fancy may conjure up and assemble round the teapot and cup.

I've also learned a great deal about tea from Fairtrade. Just google if you want to find out more. When drinking your tea think how the tea farmers are working in order to benefit you. The tea farmers' philosophy is that every tea production process is indispensable, just as every step you take in life is indispensable.

Tea also has unique chemical properties so it is good for mind, body and spirit. By taking your time to make a cup of tea, savour it and drink it, tea can become a short spiritual practice and retreat. If you don't take time and reflect on your life, you may never find meaning. Maybe one of the cups you have today, use it as a meditation. Just be present with your cup of tea.

I think a lot of you will know the Chinese Zen story about how you must first 'empty your cup'. I think it's worth repeating. The story is a conversation between a Zen master and student. The master is pouring tea into the student's cup. Rather than stopping when the cup is full, he continues pouring as the tea spills over the top of the teacup and onto the table. The student shouts, "Stop! The cup is full!"

"Exactly," says the Zen master. " Like this cup, you are full of your own opinions. You ask for teaching, but your cup is full. Before I can teach you, first, you must empty

your cup.”

So when you have that meditative cup, reflect. Reflection helps you know yourself better.

Of course there are also the wonderful social occasions of meeting with friends for tea and hopefully we will be doing more of this soon. The Buddhist monks knew there was something precious about tea and used it as a conduit, allowing them to reach a deeper understanding of life.

How you make a cup of tea may be slightly different each time depending on how much caffeine is in it, how long you brew it, how hot the water is. You could relate this to your own life, which is a combination of circumstances, life experiences and other factors. Some we just need to let go to be where we want to be.

I had a cup and saucer left to me by a dear friend. It wasn't a particularly pretty cup and saucer, but it was one she always gave me when she made tea and after she died I carried on using it for my tea. After really looking after it for some years, I dropped it. I was really upset over this and even tried to stick it together but the pieces were too small. I did learn from this though, if I'd never used it, I wouldn't have taken the risk of breaking it, but I wouldn't have had the joy and the memories when drinking from this cup. It taught me that all life is fragile but we mustn't let that risk stop us living. If we do that we cut ourselves off from joy and sorrow and all the beautiful vulnerability of life.

Tea is often called the cup of humanity because we use it compassionately in many situations. It may just be a small act of kindness, like offering a cup of tea to someone visiting in hospital or a shared cup of tea while lending a listening ear. Tea is comforting in its simplicity. Eastern philosophy looks to simplicity as a key to peace.

The Japanese tea ceremony is beautiful and represents spiritual experiences and symbolises the transformative awakening of human lives. When you enter a Japanese tea house for a tea ceremony, a stone water basin called a tsukubai is placed at the entrance. The bowl is etched in Japanese words which translate to “I only know plenty” and “I have everything I need”. Very profound words.

I said I would come back to the church as a vessel to hold a congregation in, just like a teapot is a vessel for holding the tea. The late liberal Protestant theologian wrote about the necessity of institutions of religion and as we have seen, we have not needed the institution of our church building to continue worship. So do we still need the church building. I think we still do need the church as a vessel for hospitality. Benedictine monk Father Daniel Holman and Lonni Pratt, in their book *Radical Hospitality*, say what people are looking for when they're in search of spirituality is often, really comfort and a church building should be there for this need.

I leave the final word on tea by Thich Nhat Hanh - "Drink your tea slowly and reverently, as if it is the axis on which the whole earth revolves - Slowly, evenly, without rushing toward to future"

3rd HYMN is no. 30 in the purple hymn book. Each Seeking Faith is seeking light

Each seeking faith is seeking light,
And light dawns on our seeking,
When clashing tongues combine
To pray that light will shine,
And guide and gather all on earth
In peaceful greeting.

Each seeking faith is seeking truth,
For truth is lived by seeking,
And though our faiths conflict,
No dogma can restrict
The power of truth set free on earth
In honest meeting.

Each loving faith is seeking peace
And peace is made by seeking
To spin the strands of trust
In patterns free and just

Til every family on earth
Is in safe keeping.

Each living faith is seeking life,
And life flows through our seeking
To treasure, feel and show
The heart of what we know
In every faith, the light, the life
Is shining, speaking.

CLOSING WORDS are also from the book Sonata. It is part of a meditation called
Praise

Do not think you can take away

Each other's troubles,
But try to be with each other in them. Remember that you are part, not all, great, but
not by far the greatest, small, precious brief breaths
In the great whirlwind of creation.