

### **3<sup>rd</sup> April 2022 – ‘Awakening’**

Led by Rev Kate Whyman

#### **GATHERING MUSIC** ‘Morning has broken’, Cat Stevens

<https://youtu.be/e0TInLOJuUM>

#### **WELCOME AND CHALICE LIGHTING**

Welcome. Welcome however you are joining us this morning, from home or in church. And however you woke up today. Maybe with a light or a heavy heart, with spring in your step or weighed down by worry. However you are, thank you for being here. My online yoga teacher always says the important thing is to turn up, and it is. I think that’s true for any spiritual practice, as well as in life. Each day. Turn up.

Springtime has turned up again this year – even if it doesn’t quite feel like it today. Spring feels like waking up – as though the world has been sleeping and dreaming and suddenly the curtains have been opened and the light is streaming in. Our service today is on what it means to awaken anew – over and over again.

So let us light our chalice both as a symbol of our free religious faith, as well as a sign of hope and new starts. If you’re at home, you might like to light your own candle with me now.

Open the door of your hesitant heart

Let the light shine on all the sleeping shadows

Awaken to this day that offers itself to you - and to all -  
with such a great extravagance.

#### **126 (P) Open the door, step right inside**

Open the door, step right inside,  
come into this place where love and hope will abide.  
Reach out your hand, I’ll welcome you in,  
it’s so good to be together again.

Start out the day wearing a grin,  
joyful faces make people want to come in.  
Open your arms to show that you care,  
and our little light will shine everywhere.

When you're in pain, trouble or doubt,  
let the love come in to help the hurting get out.  
Open your heart to share how you feel,  
and we'll build a church of love that is real.

Open the door, step right inside,  
come into this place where love and hope will abide.  
Reach out your hand, I'll welcome you in,  
it's so good to be together again.

*Words and music © Joyce Poley*

Let us pray...

**Prayer** - Kathleen McTigue

Here in the refuge of this Sabbath home  
we turn our busy minds towards silence,  
and our full hearts towards one another.

We move together through the mysteries:  
the bright surprise of birth and the shadowed questions of death.  
In our slow walk between the two we will be wounded,  
and we will be showered with grace,  
amazing, unending.

Even in our sorrow, we feel our lives  
cradled in holiness we cannot comprehend,  
and though we each walk within a vast loneliness,  
the promise we offer here is that we do not walk alone.

This is a holy place in which we gather -  
the light of the earth brought in and held,  
touched then  
by our answering light:  
the flame on a chalice,  
the flicker of a candle,  
the lamps of our open faces brought near.

In this place of silence and celebration,  
solemnity and music,  
we make a sanctuary and name our home.

Into this home we bring our hunger for awakening.  
We bring compassionate hearts,  
and a will toward justice.

Into this home we bring the courage to walk on after hard losses.  
Into this home we bring our joy, and gratitude for ordinary blessings.  
By our gathering we bless this place.  
In its shelter we know ourselves blessed.

*May it be so.*

### **STORY – Poppy on Zoom**

It is said that soon after his enlightenment the Buddha passed a man on the road who was struck by the Buddha's extraordinary radiance and peaceful presence. The man stopped and asked, "My friend, what are you? Are you a celestial being or a god?"

"No." said the Buddha

"Well, then, are you some kind of magician or wizard?" Again the Buddha answered, "No."

"Are you a man?"

"No."

"Well, my friend, then what are you?"

The Buddha replied, "I am awake."

## **READING Frederick Buechner, from Beyond Words**

Moments of hearing for the first time; you never know what may cause them. The sight of the Atlantic Ocean can do it, or a piece of music, or a face you've never seen before. A pair of somebody's old shoes can do it. You can never be sure. But of this you can be sure.

Whenever you find tears in your eyes, especially unexpected tears, it is well to pay the closest attention. They are not only telling you something about the secret of who you are, but more often than not God is speaking to you through them of the mystery of where you have come from and is summoning you to where you should go next.

## **HYMN 35(P) Find a stillness**

Find a stillness, hold a stillness,  
let a stillness carry me.

Find the silence hold the silence,  
let the silence carry me.

In the spirit, by the spirit,  
with the spirit giving power,  
I will find true harmony.

Seek the essence, hold the essence,  
let the essence carry me.

Let me flower, help me flower,  
watch me flower, carry me.

In the spirit, by the spirit,  
with the spirit giving power,  
I will find true harmony.

*Transylvanian Hymn Melody, harmony Larry Phillips. Words Carl G Seaburg, based on a Transylvanian Unitarian text © Alan Seaburg*

## **CANDLES OF JOY AND CONCERN**

### **SILENCE**

**INTERLUDE** 'April', Gareth Malone

<https://youtu.be/OQaBh5Nzpy8>

## ADDRESS

SO how awake *are* you this morning? Bleary eyed? Or bright eyed and bushy tailed?

And what does it mean to be 'fully awake'? Is it something like the Buddha's extraordinary radiance and peaceful presence?

Perhaps there is a quality of aliveness – a vibrancy, a vitality, a clarity?

Maybe there is a lack of self-consciousness to it, too. Being fully awake suggests being alert – looking, listening, open, curious to the world?

Joseph Campbell, author of 'The Power of Myth, wrote:

*'People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances with our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive.'*

Is that what you're seeking? To feel the rapture of being alive?

You may think it's inappropriate to speak of such a thing when there is so much suffering everywhere we look. So much to be sad about - war, poverty, oppression, grief, illness, loneliness...what on earth is there to feel rapturous about, you might ask? Life is grim.

Well, yes, in a way it is. And yet at the same time it is also miraculous, full of love and beauty, creativity and kindness, awe and wonder.

And in difficult times it is even more important than ever to allow ourselves to acknowledge the sheer miracle of being alive. To feel the rapture when it visits us unexpectedly, and to seek it out when it doesn't. We need it more than ever to sustain us.

On Thursday evening a group of us met for Heart & Soul online and shared some of the ways we had recently felt awakened. There was the unexpected sight of a simple sparrow taking a dust bath, the hopeful hoot of an owl in the nighttime, a bracing early morning seawater swim; there was playing with colour through painting and words in poetry. There

was a certain immediacy in the experiences we described in these moments – a kind of falling away of any distance between, or separation from; an unexpected absorption and intimacy.

Intimacy...with what, I wonder? With reality? With our own nature? With God? With the universe? With all that is? Perhaps with all of the above? Whatever it was, we felt fully awake and fully alive in those moments.

As Joseph Campbell put it, they were times when ‘our life experiences on the purely physical plane had resonances with our own innermost being and reality’. There was a sudden alignment, a resonance, a congruence, a transcendence, perhaps. For a moment nothing separated us. There was no distance between us and what we were doing or seeing or hearing or touching or tasting.

I invite you to pause for a moment now and just consider a time when you have felt fully awake. Even if for just a moment. When all time and distance seemed to collapse in to a single point.

John O’Donohue writes:

*‘We live between the act of awakening and the act of surrender. Each morning we awaken to the light and the invitation to a new day in the world of time; each night we surrender to the dark to be taken to play in the world of dreams where time is no more. At birth we were awakened and emerged to become visible in the world. At death we will surrender again to the dark to become invisible. Awakening and surrender: they frame each day and each life; between them the journey where anything can happen, the beauty and the frailty.’*

There is a sense, too, in which we might even wake into each second, and surrender it as it passes, ready to wake into the next one. Maybe that’s what the Buddha was able to do as he was walking along the road that day – wake anew with each moment. Awake with each in-breath, and surrender with each out breath, maybe. Or wake with one step and surrender with the next and then wake again.

Awaking and surrendering is the very rhythm of being alive. Like the ebbing and flowing of the tides, which is perhaps why so many of us are drawn to the sea – because it resonates with our innermost being, with the nature of life itself.

Frederick Buechner advised us to notice the times when 'you find tears in your eyes, especially unexpected tears...They are not only telling you something about the secret of who you are, but more often than not God is speaking to you through them of the mystery of where you have come from and is summoning you to where you should go next.'

That's beautifully put, isn't it? There is a vulnerability, an intimacy and a calling too in those moments when we are touched suddenly by beauty, by kindness, by music, by poetry, by a pair of old shoes, by an empty chair. As though we have been seen, and reached out to, and called forward in that moment.

I was on holiday last week with friends – 7 of them. There used to be 10 of us who went away each year. But time has passed. One had family illness and couldn't come. Another's life situation had changed and she decided not to join us. And another had died. Along with the joy of being together there was the poignancy of the empty chairs, the silent voices, the lost energies of those who weren't there. There were tears in our eyes. Which were of sadness, yes, but also more than that. Also a deep resonance with the rhythm of life, and a call to awake once more to our fragility and our frailty and our mortality, as well as to the extraordinary and miraculous possibility of being alive, now.

We live and move in this universe for such a brief time. When we are able to move *with* it, to know ourselves to be in it and of it, when we awaken to the mystery and allow ourselves to fall in with its rhythm, when we find ourselves with tears in our eyes and God in our hearts, *then* we are awake. *Then* we are fully alive.

To awaken might be to know fully – even for a moment – the ecstasy and the tragedy, the pain and the bliss of being alive, and to hold both those great truths with the intensity of care and the lightness of touch we might use to hold a fragile flower or a newly-hatched chick in our hands.

Or to simply hold them in our gaze, without judgment or commentary, and meet ourselves looking back.

This is the rapture of awakening anew.

Amen.

### **59 (P) Ground, it's time for your rebirth**

Ground, it's time for your rebirth, Alleluiah!  
Flower and leaf buds blossom forth, Alleluiah!  
Rise from soil, rise from the ground, Alleluiah  
Now that spring is all around, Alleluiah!

Friend, take heart and find new cheer, Alleluiah!  
Your new birth at least is here, Alleluiah!  
Rise above despair, defeat, Alleluiah!  
Now with joy your new life greet, Alleluiah!

Earth, for you there is new scope, Alleluiah!  
New life, new world and new hope, Alleluiah!  
Rise from travail into light, Alleluiah!  
Now that we have seen what's right, Alleluiah!

Cosmos, broad and deep with space, Alleluiah!  
Stars and planets you embrace, Alleluiah!  
Raise us to our human part, Alleluiah!  
Hold us with your loving heart, Alleluiah!

*Words © Andrew M. Hill*

### **CLOSING WORDS Don't Go Back to Sleep, Rumi**

The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you. Don't go back to sleep.  
You must ask for what you really want. Don't go back to sleep.  
People are going back and forth across the doorsill  
Where the two worlds touch.  
The door is round and open.  
Don't go back to sleep.

### **CLOSING MUSIC Mountain to move, Nick Mulvey**

<https://youtu.be/vKIngOqVbBc>