

## 24<sup>th</sup> July 2022: PLYMOUTH UNITARIANS

### How do we want to be together?

1. **PRELUDE** – Home, Boyce Avenue

<https://youtu.be/g9rukbg95k>

## 2. **WELCOME/CHALICE LIGHTING**

Welcome everyone to our first café style service since 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020!

As those of you here in church have already discovered, we've set out the chairs around tables so you can talk more easily to each other and it's a bit less formal. And I'm going to lead most of the service from the lectern. There won't be an address – but instead there will be time for you to share your thoughts together over a simple activity.

To all of you on Zoom today – welcome to you too! I can't sit you round a table, but later on when we come to the activity, I'll put you into smaller break out groups so that you can do that together too.

Don't worry. No one will have to do anything they don't want to do. So relax and enjoy.

The theme of this service is a question: 'How do we want to be together?'

Some words by Eric Wikstrom...

We come together this morning because within us there is something that knows we need more than we can find in our aloneness. We know—instinctively, in the depths of ourselves—that we need others for this journey of life even though we may also guard our independence and individuality quite jealously. So let us celebrate all that makes us unique yet also all that makes us one, and let us dream dreams of all that we can do... together.

And as is our custom, let us begin lighting our chalice as a symbol of our free religious faith. (Do light a candle at home)

## ??? TO LIGHT THE CHALICE

We light this flame to remind us of the light that shines within each one of us, now and always. May we always nurture this light – in ourselves and each other.

### 3. **SONG 126: Open the door, step right inside**

This is about literally opening the door and walking in, but also metaphorically coming in by whatever means. But it's also about opening our hearts to each other.

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*

**PRAYER** Let us pray. Elizabeth Tarbox

Spirit of Life, we give thanks for the opportunities to love that present themselves in the turmoil of life.

Where the light catches the tears in another's eyes, where hands are held and there are moments without words, let us be present then, and alive to the possibility of changing.

Let us seek to make another's wellbeing the object of our concern.

Let us seek to be present to another's pain, to bathe another's wounds, hear another's sadness, celebrate another's success, and allow the other's story to change our own.

Let us stand in the morning on damp grass, hear the syllables of bird song, and fill up on sweet air that rolls over oceans and continents.

Let us look up at the stars and the planets that fill the night sky with majesty.

Let us witness the first fresh buds of spring amid the brown sticks of winter. And for all this, let us be grateful.

Let us not defend ourselves against the discomfort of unruly emotion, nor seek to close down our hearts for fear a new love will come to shake our foundations.

Let us instead be open to discovering a new way of seeing an old problem, or appreciating the perfection of a seashell, or the possibility of friendship.

For in giving ourselves to what we do not understand, we receive life's blessings, and in taking care of another, we are cared for.

Amen

#### 4. **STORY: The farmers and the carpenter**

Once upon a time, two brothers who lived on adjoining farms fell out with each other. It was the first argument they'd had in 40 years of farming side by side. It began with a small misunderstanding that grew into a major difference. Harsh words were spoken and then silence...

One morning there was a knock on John, the older brother's, door. He opened it to find a travelling carpenter on his doorstep. 'I'm looking for a few days' work', said the carpenter. 'A few small jobs here and there, perhaps? Could I help you?'

John scratched his head, and then he had an idea. 'Yes,' he said. 'There is something you can do for me. Look across the creek at that farm. That's my brother's farm. Last week there was a meadow between us, but then he took his plough and he dug that creek between us. So I'm going to go one better. See that pile of wood by the barn? I want you to build me a 8-foot fence so I won't have to see him any more.'

'I see,' said the carpenter. 'I think I understand the situation and I'm sure I can help you.'

John needed to go into town to get more supplies so off he went.

Meanwhile the carpenter worked hard all day, measuring, sawing, nailing.

By around sunset the carpenter had finished work and John returned. His eyes opened wide and his jaw dropped. There was no fence at all! Instead there was a bridge stretching from one side of the creek to the other. A fine piece of work it was, too, with handrails and everything. And there was his younger brother coming across with his hand outstretched.

'You're quite a fellow to build this bridge after all I've done,' said the younger brother. The two farmers met in the middle of the bridge, and took each other's hands. Then they turned and saw that the carpenter preparing to leave.

'Wait!' called John. 'Stay a few days longer – I have other jobs you can do.'

'I'd love to,' replied the carpenter. 'But you'll be fine and I've got other bridges to build.'

5. **READING** from M M Owen about Martin Buber's '*I and THOU*'

*Kathy mentioned this book recently when she was speaking about what friendship meant to her, and it reminded me to go back to it. Martin Buber was an Austrian Jewish and Israeli philosopher and he wrote 'I and Thou' in 1923. It isn't an easy read, and very much of its time, though it's still a classic in the spiritual canon. Writer MM Owen explains what it's about. He writes:*

'The basic argument of *I and Thou* goes like this: Human beings are not isolated, free-floating objects; they are subjects who exist in perpetual, multiple, shifting relationships with other people, the world, and ultimately God.

Now we have two ways of relating in life, which Buber calls I-IT and I-THOU.

In 'I-It' mode, our 'Ego' approaches another person or thing as an object separate from itself, as something or someone to be known or used, and its nature is always mediated through the subject's own self-regard. From the I-It stance, we don't engage with people or things in their entirety. Instead, we engage with them as a collection of qualities and characteristics, mostly for how they are useful to us.

By contrast, in the I-Thou relationship, rather than experiencing another being or thing, we *encounter* them. In other words we meet their whole being, and that being is not filtered through our preconceptions and projections. 'No purpose intervenes,' as Buber put it.

In this 'I-Thou' mode of relating we can step into a space 'between', a space in which two people coexist (and co-contribute). In this 'Between' lurks the vital, nourishing experience of human life, the real sacred stuff of existence. As he put it: 'All real living is meeting.'

The I-It stance is not inherently negative. It is necessary and unavoidable that in life we treat certain things as Its. This is how we change a lightbulb, follow a recipe, collect data or compose a mathematical proof. In Buber's reading, though, much of the alienation and stupefaction of modern living can be put down to our over-reliance on the I-It. We will solve our woes, he argued, by shifting toward the 'I-Thou' relationship - *encountering* not just experiencing reality.

6. **SONG: 192 We would be one**

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 than 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 Joseph Barnby, words from Samuel Anthony Wright*

7. **REFLECTION:** We come to a quiet time of reflection.

And to help us use this time creatively, let's remind ourselves what this time is an opportunity for...

To honestly reflect on our lives

To contemplate our deepest values and concerns

To be still and listen to the person we really are and the divine spirit within us

To access the pool of renewal, healing and forgiveness, which is always available to us

To give thanks for the wondrous gifts we have been given

To let the divine spirit flow through us

Let us be silent.

SILENCE

8. **INTERLUDE:** Sanctuary, Carrie Newcomer

<https://youtu.be/HjOioWTVAl4>

9. **ACTIVITY ‘How do we want to be together?’**

That is the question. Because we are a spiritual community and a beloved community. And what does that mean for how we *are* together.

This morning we have heard songs about home and sanctuary and building community.

We heard a story about a travelling carpenter who built bridges.

And about the difference between experiencing others as useful or interesting to us, and encountering them as they truly are - as whole and sacred.

And it seems to me that we want these things here. We want a spiritual home, a sanctuary, a place where we feel safe, where we are seen and heard, a place that helps build bridges across divisions.

And if we want those things, then it's really down to us – each one of us – to work out how we want to be together in this sacred space. We're the only ones who can do it.

This activity is to help us think about how we might do that.

I have given you a list of words. They are ways of being that might help build beloved community. You can probably think of others, and that's great – feel free to add them to the list.

I invite you to do 2 things:

Consider the list on your own first, and choose just one that feels important to you. Don't overthink it – just let one of these words (or one of your own) come to the forefront of your mind. I'll give you a couple of minutes to do this.

In your small group (here is a chance to practise being together!) each person has the chance to say why they chose their word – why it's so important for them in building beloved community. You have 10 minutes altogether, so start by deciding how you're going to share the time between you.

## **10. HYMN (P) 68 I dream of a church**

I dream of a church that joins in with God's laughing  
as she rocks in her rapture, enjoying her art:  
she's glad of her world, in its risking and growing:  
'tis the child she has borne and holds close to her heart.

I dream of a church that joins in with God's weeping  
as she crouches, weighed down by the sorrow she sees:  
she cried for the hostile, the cold and ho-hoping,  
for she bears in herself our despair and dis-ease.

I dream of a church that joins in with God's dancing  
as she moves like the wind and the wave and the fire:  
a church that can pick up its skirts, pirouetting,  
with the steps that can signal God's deepest desire.

I dream of a church that joins in with God's loving  
as she bends to embrace the unlovely and lost,  
a church that can free, by its sharing and daring,  
the imprisoned and poor, and then shoulder the cost.

God, make us a church that joins in with your living,  
as you cherish and challenge, rein in and release,  
a church that is winsome, impassioned, inspiring;  
lioness of your justice and lamb of your peace.

Traditional melody, arr. David Dawson, words © Kate Compston

## **11. CLOSING WORDS:**

May you be filled with the blessings of this beloved community.

May you carry them with you as you depart from here.

May you discover the places in the world where these blessings are needed.

May you have the courage to share them.

May there be an open place within you to receive the blessings of the people you meet along the way.

## **12. CLOSING VIDEO: 'We shall be known', MaMuse**

<https://youtu.be/dX11MEtbkXI>