

**10<sup>th</sup> July 2022 – ‘What does friendship mean to you?’**

**Led by Sheila Evans and Friends**

**GATHERING MUSIC:** ‘You’ve got a friend’, James Taylor

<https://youtu.be/xEklou3WFnM>

**WELCOME:** to everyone here today. Whether you are here in person or online, whether you have been attending for a long time, for a few times and especially if you are joining us for the 1st time today – welcome! ... however you are feeling: sad, worried, happy or curious... whatever your faith or none... you are welcome here. The theme of our Services this month is ‘Friendship’ and today’s asks ‘What does friendship mean to you?’ There are different takes expressed in our story, our reading and two personal contributions. We hope that there will be something meaningful for everyone to ponder upon.

First, as is our custom, we start by lighting our Chalice Flame, as a symbol of our free religious faith. And if you are joining in on Zoom, and have a candle nearby, you may like to light it with us now.

**CHALICE LIGHTING:**

“We gather in the comfort of this community, in the nurture of our friendships, the pleasures of being, the joys of our achievements.

We sing together, praising, creating, giving and receiving.

We kindle together our chalice flame, as warm as the companionship of family and friends.

A few quotes on friendship

"Be slow to fall into friendship; but when thou art in, continue firm & constant." Socrates

"Friendship improves happiness, and abates misery, by doubling our joys, and dividing our grief." Cicero

"I would rather walk with a friend in the dark, than alone in the light." Helen Keller

"It's the friends you can call up at 4 a.m. that matter." Marlene Dietrich

"Sometimes being with your best friend is all the therapy you need." — Anon

**1st HYMN 172 (G) ‘All are welcome here’**

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*

## **PRAYERS**

### **'United' adapted from a prayer of Cliff Reed's**

Keep us united, Spirit of Oneness, keep us united where we already are, and help us be united where we are not.

Keep this land of many peoples united, as it became united, step by step,  
Through centuries of rivalry, war and conflict.

Save us from all that would divide us and return us to a dark past.

May the quest for unity keep the peace of this continent, the peace which came after so much war, where freedom and democracy replace the rule of tyrants and despots. Help us work towards preserving that precious peace, so threatened by current conflicts in lands only a few hours flight distant.

May our faltering steps towards that unity and peace find a safe path through the traps and pitfalls that beset the way ...

May awareness of the unity of humankind supplant the false divisions that infest our minds - the divisions of race and nation, politics and idealology, sect and religion.

Spirit of love, help us to learn that our rich diversities are not threatening nor to be feared, but to be treasured.

We are the human race, we are the Earth, so may we be united in a spirit of kindness and friendliness. *A M E N*

### **A Buddhist Prayer**

Let us be aware of the source of being common to us all, and to all living things. Invoking the presence of the Great Compassion, let us fill our hearts with our own compassion – towards ourselves and towards all living beings.

Let us pray that all living beings realise that they are brothers and sisters, all nourished from the same source of life. Let us commit ourselves to live in a way which will not deprive other living beings of the chance to live. Let us pray for the establishment of peace in our hearts and on earth.

### **A prayer taken from words by Richard Lovis, former pastor of this church**

Let us be grateful for the love and support of friends; and for chance encounters that have proved helpful; and for strangers who have met our needs in times of crisis, not seeking anything in return.

In all these, we may glimpse, if we choose, the love of God working in our lives ...

.... Let us be grateful for temptations we have overcome, difficulties we have surmounted, pain and hurt we have been able to rise above.

In all these, we may glimpse, if we choose, the power of God at work in our lives...

...May it be that each of us may find in this time together, some of our deepest needs met in some measure; some of our thankfulness re-inforced; some of our channels for relating to life re-affirmed *A M E N*

**STORY: The Lion and the Mouse, Aesops Fable, from BBC Teach, read by Poppy**

A Mouse was scurrying through the forest when he saw a Lion sleeping under a tree. The Mouse stopped and said to the Lion: 'You may be very big but I'm not scared of you.' The Mouse climbed up the Lion's tail and sat down on its back leg. 'Oh no, Mr Lion, you don't frighten me one little bit.' Still the Lion didn't move so the Mouse climbed up towards his head. 'All the animals in the forest are scared of you, Mr Lion, but not me 'cos mice are the bravest creatures in the world.' Again the Lion didn't move so the mouse climbed up the lion's face and shouted in his ear. 'Why should we be scared of lazy lions who spend all day snoring under trees?'

The Mouse was enjoying himself and feeling very brave when he noticed that the Lion's eye was open and looking straight at him. Quick as a flash the Lion grabbed the little Mouse in his paw.

'What were you saying?' said the Lion.

'Nothing,' said the little Mouse.

'Something about brave mice and lazy lions..?'

'That wasn't me,' said the Mouse. 'I'd never say that. I think lions are...'

'Quiet,' said the Lion. 'I'm going to eat you. What do you think of that?'

'I don't think that's a good idea,' said the Mouse.

'Why's that?' asked the Lion.

'Because...'

'Yes?' said the Lion

'Because...'. And suddenly an idea flashed into the Mouse's tiny head.

'Because one day I could help you.' The Lion roared with laughter. 'You? How could a tiny Mouse help a huge Lion like me?' But the Mouse couldn't think of a single way in which a tiny mouse could help a lion. He shut his eyes and waited to be eaten.

But the Lion didn't eat the Mouse. He just laughed and gently put the Mouse down on the ground. 'That's the funniest thing I've ever heard,' said the Lion. 'A tiny mouse helping a huge lion like me. I'm not going to eat you after all. You're too funny to eat. I'm going to let you go.'

'Oh, thank you,' said the Mouse. 'I think that's a very wise decision. I meant what I said. I will help you, Mr Lion. One day. Just you wait and see.' The Mouse ran away feeling very lucky.

The very next day he was scurrying through the forest when he heard more roaring. This time it wasn't a roar of laughter but of pain and fear. The Mouse crept closer to the terrible sound and saw the same Lion all tangled up in a hunter's net. The more he struggled the

more tangled up he became. He was just about to run away when the Mouse remembered how the Lion could have eaten him but let him go. And then the Mouse remembered saying: 'I will help you, Mr Lion. One day.' Suddenly the Mouse was chewing at the ropes and gnawing as fast as he could. His teeth were tiny but razor sharp and soon he had cut the ropes and the Lion was free.

The Mouse looked at the Lion. The Lion looked at the Mouse.

'Yesterday I laughed when you said you would help me. I'm not laughing now. You are a very brave little Mouse. Just goes to show you don't have to be big to be a big friend. Thank you.'

'That's alright,' said the Mouse. 'You get into trouble again just give me a shout, OK?' 'OK,' said the Lion and he turned and walked away.

The Mouse watched him go. He smiled to himself and now somehow he didn't feel quite so little.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> HYMN 33 (G) Do you hear?**

Do you hear, O my friend, in the place where you stand,  
Through the sky, through the land, do you hear, do you hear,  
In the heights, on the plain, in the vale, on the main,  
In the sun, in the rain, do you hear, do you hear?

Through the roar, through the rush, through the throng, through the crush,  
Do you hear in the hush of your soul, of your soul,  
Hear the cry fear won't still, hear the heart's call to will,  
Hear a sigh's startling trill, in your soul, in your soul?

From the place where you stand, to the outermost strand,  
Do you hear, O my friend, do you hear, do you hear,  
All the dreams, all the dares, all the sighs, all the prayers –  
They are yours, mine, and theirs: do you hear, do you hear?

**READING: From 'The meaning of friendship', by Mark Vernon, read by Christine**

2500 years ago the Greek philosopher Aristotle proposed that friendship is, at the very least, a relationship of goodwill between individuals who reciprocate that goodwill. A good starter for ten! However, as soon as he started to expand that idea, the definition seemed to unravel.

He looked around him and saw three broad groupings of relationships people called friendship. The first group are friends primarily because they are useful to each other – like the friendship between an employee and a boss, or a doctor and a patient, or a politician and an ally; they share goodwill because they get something out of the relationship.

The second group are friends primarily because some pleasure is enjoyed by being together; it may be the football, the shopping, the gossip, or sexual intimacy, but the friendship thrives insofar, and possibly only insofar, as the thing that gives the pleasure continues to exist between them. Aristotle noted that these first two groups are therefore like each other, because if you take the utility or the pleasure away, then the chances are the friendship will fade.

This, though, is not true of the third group. These are people who love each other because of who they are in themselves. It may be their depth of character, their innate goodness, their intensity of passion or their simple *joie de vivre*, but once established on such a basis these friendships are ones that tend to last. Undoubtedly much will be given and much taken too but the friendship itself is independent of external factors and immensely more valuable than the friendships that fall into the first two groups.

That there are better or higher friendships – different people may call them soul friends, close or old friends – as opposed to instrumental and casual friendships, or mere friendliness, is surely right. But to say that great friendship is defined solely by its goodwill seems to miss its essence. Goodwill certainly exists in these best kinds of friendship, but, unlike the lesser types, best friendship – arguably the quintessential sort – is based on something far more profound.

.....

Its time for some quiet reflection in silence before a little music. In the short silence, you may like to think what 'Friendship' means for you.

**SILENCE**

## **MUSICAL INTERLUDE 'Lifted in Love' by Lea Morris**

<https://vimeo.com/489421828>

### **What friendship means to me - Gav**

Presently, this is where I'm at...

Making friends sure isn't an easy thing to do...

Well, historically speaking, it isn't for me.

For those of you who are familiar with Enneagram, I identify as a three.

Or, perhaps more accurately, I identify as a recovering 3...

The heart is my landing place.

And deep within that space, are feelings of shame, worthlessness, and a perception that I am not enough.

It's been a recent revelation. A painful and yet in some ways liberating one.

And through a process of reflection and a lot of self-work, I've come to see that those feelings impacted upon my ability to make friends. Why would anyone want to be my friend?

Until recently, those feelings are ones that I've ignored or maybe swept under the carpet, and done so unconsciously, from myself and others - Mainly through performance and achieving things. I was head boy at a well renowned Grammar School, captained various sports teams, founded university societies, established alternative educational settings, lead a growing congregation, organised many 'successful' community events... The list could go on...

All gave me status, recognition and a feeling of value. If something didn't feel right, I looked for another project or cause to support.

From my then perspective, I had value in getting stuff done and in what I could, service wise, do for others. I was a classic human 'doer' rather than a human 'being'. If honest, I really hadn't much of a clue about being. I was then quite disconnected from who I really am.

In a nutshell, I got my sense of worth from what I did rather than from who am.

However, thankfully, as is the way of things, God/The Divine/The Cosmos (delete as appropriate) chucked a massive curve ball my way, in fact they chucked one in all our directions, through multiple lockdowns.

During that time, the doing, to a large extent stopped. And given that we had to physically distance, I was left alone to simply be. At first, I was glad of the rest. I was shattered!

As the tiredness gave way I felt energised to play. I journalled, read and walked more. Time for podcasting and I baked too! I make a fabulous French apple cake.

I spent more time with myself and actually found that I quite liked myself.

Without many of the old external distractions I was able to come back to myself, a homecoming of sorts.

At the same time I was able to spend a lot of time with my Guru friend Ben. He's without doubt the most enlightened soul I've ever encountered. He's incredibly kind, gentle, curious and playful. He also happens to be a toddler.

As a result of simply being in his (relatively) unconditioned presence I learnt that we are innately compassionate souls. We are, and I can't yet explain it any other way, expressions of love. To varying degrees, we get lost from time to time but that's essentially, at our essence, what we are – expressions of love.

One of things I noticed from all this is that, in my case, the more I got to know and love myself – warts and all (of which, believe me, there are many) the more I wanted to then reach out to others. I'm still exploring why that is. Maybe you might have experienced something similar and have your own thoughts but what I can say is that it's resulted in a desire to reach out, to connect and ultimately to love.

Next week I'll be in Glasgow visiting family. This is quite a big deal in that I initiated it. And, I've even organised to meet up with an old school chum along the way. Until relatively recently - unheard of behaviour. Last week I went for a walk with a chum that I've made down here and when we stopped for a break she produced an Apricot Danish and a Maple Pecan. I nearly cried. It was such a kind gesture.

Don't get me wrong, I still have my moments of doubt, times when I drift. However I'm learning to spot them early on and, with tenderness, bring myself back to centre.

I suppose what I'm learning, certainly in my case, is that being able to reach out, connect with and love another is linked to the extent to which I love myself. That the more I love me - the more I love you. They're relational. And even more interesting is now they feed each other. It's been quite an experience.

The real joy of all this is that I now gain so much more value from just being. Being with me and indeed being with you. Don't get me wrong, I still love a bit of doing but it now comes



from a different place. Its motivation is to allow me, you, us to 'be' better. It feels like a healthy place.

Thank you.

### **What friendship means to me – Kathy**

#### On Friendship

You can imagine when I was asked to contribute some thoughts regarding friendship, my imagination sped way and I had a lovely time thinking of ships and friends in ships, sailing the high seas, experiencing turbulent times, calm times, going into harbours and then enjoying different cultures, the richness of life –and it makes me smile now.... as friends do accompany us through our living in all its mixed variety, the ups and the downs and at different stages we make different friends. Like ships, some stay and some go, some are light craft some for the long haul—but friends leave their colour, something of themselves upon our lives—no connection is ever lost .. But it is not just human friends, but our animal friends, our gardens, our books, our paintings ----- whatever enriches our lives---giving that feeling of vibrancy, the message of friendship, of recognition and affirmation.

We're born into a family but not into a friendship network. It is a creative life force and does not happen by magic and yet, by attention, we build friendship networks from school days, our work lives, our various connections, be it from church, interest groups, a whole range of activities----but it needs our engagement. We can attend, be there, wherever “there” may be, with other folk and yet not engage---as engagement can mean vulnerability—we are reaching out---

And I thought about how I began to make friends from many years ago-- somewhere along the line there were pen friends with ?World friends, the ethos being that if we made friends with someone overseas then there would be networks of friendship that would make it impossible to go to war---This then led me to recognise our common humanity –our one world and this linked into being Friends with the earth---I also recall reading from Shirley Conran where she said we need at least 10 friends as it is no good having one best friend as that is an impossible task for any one ---we need someone to go to the cinema, theatre ,share an interest with .....

But what does engagement mean?

For me, as I thought about this subject then and now---I recall reading from the Prophet—  
“seek with her always the hours to live .....and let there be no purpose in friendship save the deepening of the spirit “

This linked with the words of Martin Buber—his essay on the I –Thou relationship---- recognising the uniqueness of the other and that the space between is sacred-----which is so Celtic in its understanding of the holiness of our living—and which is echoed in our lighting of the chalice, recognising and honouring the light which is in all of us. And here the story of the burning bush came to mind ---where Moses recognised the ground on which he was standing was/is holy ground-----something we forget -so woven into my awareness of friendship is not only that of being with other folk but how we are within the world that we are living— friends and family, church life, social life ,paying our taxes ,recognising the value and uniqueness of every life---at home and in our one world .But not just human lives but friends with our environment, with our pets, with nature ,the rich diversity that surrounds and supports us every day of our living-----

And yesterday—The Respect festival was held in the Guildhall and here we saw, heard and tasted the offerings of the various communities in and around Plymouth. Colourful in every aspect----as is the concept of friendship.....

### **3rd HYMN:** 90 (P) Let us give thanks

Let us give thanks and praise for the gifts which we share,  
for our food and our friendship, for water and air,  
for the earth and the sky and the stars and the sea,  
and the trust we all have in God's love flowing free.

Give a shout of amazement at what life can bring,  
put your heart into raising the song all can sing.  
What a world we could build with our minds and our hands  
where the people live freely and God understands.

Let us give of our best with the tools we shall need,  
use our eyes, hands and brains so that we may succeed.  
Inspire us to cultivate what we have sown  
so that nature and nurture make a world we may own.

We adore you, great Mother, O help us to live  
with a love for each other that each one can give.

Let the pain of our brothers and sisters be faced  
and the healing of all souls on earth be embraced.

*English traditional melody, arr Ralph Vaughan Williams, words © Peter Sampson*

**CLOSING WORDS** Celtic blessing

Lord, give me a few friends  
who will love me for what I am,  
and keep ever burning  
before my vagrant steps  
the kindly light of hope...

And though I come not within sight  
of the castle of my dreams,  
teach me to be thankful for life,  
and for time's olden memories  
that are good and sweet.  
And may the evening's twilight  
find me gentle still.

**CLOSING MUSIC** 'Stand by me'

<https://youtu.be/Us-TVg40ExM>