

## **'Holding Space' 28th August 2022**

Led by Jennifer Sanders

**Prelude** 'Who knows where the time goes', Sandy Denny

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=RSABfJWqh38>

**Opening words** 'We are glad you are here', Amanda Schuber

If this is your first time here or your one-hundred-and-first time; we are glad you are here.

If you carry the weight of a weary world on your shoulders, or you entered through the doors with a song in your heart and a skip in your step;

We are glad you are here.

If you are the loudest voice in the town square or the subtle hand behind the scenes;

We are glad you are here.

If you have failed once or a thousand times;

We are glad you are here.

If you sing like angels, or mumble behind the hymnal;

We are glad you are here.

This community is what it is because of your presence. So welcome; welcome into this space of love, support, justice, compassion, fellowship and worship.

We are glad you are here.

## **Chalice lighting**

'A chalice lighting for liminal times' by Summer Albayati

In betwixt and in between  
We move in the liminal spaces  
that show shades of  
what can become  
what can be  
We light this chalice  
as a symbol of courage  
to move into that time of  
this and that  
and not this  
and not that  
With patience and faith  
and love  
and hope  
that this time will pass  
Like the sun that moves  
in between  
rising  
and setting  
Reminding us that  
beauty resounds  
In betwixt  
and  
In between

## **Prayers**

‘Here in this space we are gathered’ by Maureen Killoran

Here in this space, we are gathered, called by our sense of urgency, or duty, or the longing for community, called to be together on this day...Here, in this space, we are gathered...called to hold ourselves accountable to our values...to remind ourselves of those hopes and dreams and possibilities for which sometimes in the rough-and-tumble world it can be hard to hold on to belief.

Here, in this space, we are gathered, called to do our part in weaving a web of human community.

Here, in this space, some of us have come in pain. [Give both general and specific examples]. To those who are dealing with issues of health, we pray, we wish, for courage and healing. May we pause, and hold gently all the concerns, named and unnamed, that are gathered in this room, this day.

And in the complexities of community, it is right that in this space some have come with joy bubbling in their heart...May we rejoice together, remembering the wisdom that says joys are multiplied when shared...May we remember gratitude for warmth...thankfulness for sunshine...appreciation for the simple tastes of whatever food our lives and bodies let us choose.

Here, in this space, we are called to weave the web of human community. May we pause, and in our silence, may we lift up at least one blessing, one joy, no matter how small, that has touched our life this week.

May our shared silence be a blessing on our hearts, on this community, and may this blessing extend outward to grace the wider world.

Stillness

### **Hymn 14 Bring many names**

This sanctuary that we create together is a container for all our stories – the ones we share and the ones we hold close and quiet in our hearts; the stories that bring us joy and fulfillment and the stories that break us open; the stories that change and grow with us, and the stories we outgrow and leave behind. Each and every one of you carries a lifetime of stories every time you enter this space.

**Reading** 'Holding space for truth to bloom' by Lisa Bovee-Kemper

"I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal, and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood."

—[Audre Lorde](#)

There is a moment—a moment when all eyes turn to you: the minister, the lawyer, the teacher, the surgeon. It will happen thousands of times in a career. Years in, I surely can't count how many. But no one forgets first time: the first argument in court, the first class, the first cut. There is a moment after all the training and practice when we have to move out of the abstract and put what we've studied into concrete action.

The wee hours of the morning were dark and still when I was awakened by the jarring and incessant beep. It was the very first page of my very first overnight on call as a hospital chaplain. I composed myself quickly and made my way to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, where a set of prematurely born twin girls had been living for several months.

One of the girls had taken a turn; she was not expected to survive the night. Medical staff rushed back and forth, trying everything they knew to keep her alive. Eventually, it was time; there was nothing more they could do medically. The baby was wrapped in a soft blanket, a rocking chair moved out of a corner. Mom and dad wept and cradled her as she slowly faded away. All I could do was watch and pray: I had no medical expertise, and the family was tangled in that faraway place of shock and grief.

After a while, the parents handed their little girl back to the nurse, who reverently placed her back in the bassinet and wheeled it over to her sister's side, arms waving and legs kicking energetically. "They should be together for this," she said, to nobody in particular. Slowly, everyone on the unit circled around the two sisters, their parents, and me. Everyone had a hand gently touching someone else. It was silent, save the distant beeps and trills of medical machinery.

Someone whispered to me, "Can you pray?" All eyes turned to me.

I had no earthly clue what to say. It was a profound gut-level panic, the knowledge that nothing I could say could alleviate the indescribable wrench of losing a child, a patient, a sibling. It all came down to a single empty moment of inexplicable loss.

There is a moment. For me, it was the moment I learned to tell the truth. A space opened in my heart and in the room, and the light of truth shone in. “Lord, we are lost,” I prayed. I couldn’t fix it. I couldn’t bring her back. I couldn’t do anything but name the pain and hold space for it. I don’t remember anything else that I said that night, but what I learned in that moment has remained the foundation of my ministry: To name and hold space. To speak the truth as best I understand it, and to hold space for it to bloom.

### **35 Hymn Find a stillness**

**Reading** ‘What it means to “hold space” for other people and how to do it well’ by Heather Plett

When my mom was dying, my siblings and I gathered to be with her in her final days. None of us knew anything about supporting someone in her transition out of this life into the next, but we were pretty sure we wanted to keep her at home, so we did.

While we supported mom, we were, in turn, supported by a gifted palliative care nurse, Ann, who came every few days to care for mom and to talk to us about what we could expect in the coming days. She taught us how to inject Mom with morphine when she became restless, she offered to do the difficult tasks (like giving Mom a bath), and she gave us only as much information as we needed about what to do with Mom’s body after her spirit had passed.

“Take your time,” she said. “You don’t need to call the funeral home until you’re ready. Gather the people who will want to say their final farewells. Sit with your mom as long as you need to. When you’re ready, call and they will come to pick her up.”

Ann gave us an incredible gift in those final days. Though it was an excruciating week, we knew that we were being held by someone who was only a phone call away.

In the two years since then, I’ve often thought about Ann and the important role she played in our lives. She was much more than what can fit in the title of “palliative care nurse”. She

was facilitator, coach, and guide. By offering gentle, nonjudgmental support and guidance, she helped us walk one of the most difficult journeys of our lives.

## **Reflection**

We are now entering a period of quiet reflection. After the ripples of shuffling coughing sighing and rustling, we are finally comfortable so please do what you need to get yourself into a space to receive the gifts of silence.

As we sit together we drop into that space where nothing more needs to be done and we feel the sacredness of silence spread throughout this sacred space knowing we are held by something intangible but ever loving

Lets sit together for a few minutes

## **Interlude** 'Holding space', Eric Henry Andersen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=hh3anIbXF30>

## **Prayers**

## **Address**

So what is this holding space what does that even mean ?

Holding Space is what we do when we walk alongside a person or group on a journey through liminal space. We do this without making them feel inadequate, trying to fix them, or trying to impact the outcome. We open our hearts, offer unconditional support, and let go of judgement and control.

—Heather Plett, Author of The Art of Holding Space

At the heart of holding space is a willingness to sit with ambiguity, loss, struggle, darkness, uncertainty, joy, anger, fear, anticipation — all of the complexity of what it means to be human. It's about having the courage to peer into shadows, while not getting in the way of the light. It's about letting go of dualism and sitting in the place in between.

A liminal space is a threshold, the space of ambiguity or disorientation that occurs when we find ourselves transitioning from who we once were to who we are becoming.

In our earlier reading and perhaps some of us have been in this situation of being with a loved one and not now what exactly to do we wanted to be there for them but there were also times we had to peel our ices away and tend to the daily tasks.

Does that mean that just because we weren't physically there we were not supporting ` / but perhaps what brings us the strength to sit in these liminal spaces is a knowledge that something else is holding us . As we hold someone else holds us

That overall thing that can hold us is spirit god love, that feeling when we are in the dead of night and afraid there is a power greater than ourselves that can offer some hope.

A hospice carer talks about the holding bowl and that helped her hold her mum as she transitioned from life to death. Intake a slot to the person that holds the bowl but doesn't interfere but is a subtle presence to allow us to feel comfortable and make decisions based on the experience unfolding in front of us.

At some point in our lives each of us has been given the opportunity to be a bowl for someone else it might be a death or it might be a birth it might be a career change or it might be a divorce it might be a car accident or it might be a coming out it might be a faith-shaking moment when someone no longer knows what they believe in or it might be someone's emerging realisation that they don't identify with the gender they were assigned at birth it could be any number of moments in a life when old identity is taken away or no longer serves a purpose

Holding space is a gift we give and receive again and again throughout our lives sometimes we do it well and sometimes we fail sometimes it requires much of us and sometimes it requires only a simple phone call

Holding space is what we do when we walk alongside a person or group on a journey through liminal space we do this without making them feel inadequate without trying to fix them and without trying to impact the outcome we open our hearts offer unconditional support and let go of judgement and control

It's what we do when a friend is lost in a sea of grief; it's what women do when a relationship is in crisis; it's what we do when we're trying to decide the future of a business; it's what we do when our community is in conflict; it is what we do when we need to work through big issues like racism, classism, sexism, or able-ism. Holding space is the way we show up, the way we release control, the way we learn to trust in each other's wisdom and autonomy, and the way we stay present in the midst of disruption

We all hold space for each other in different ways - gifting a cup of tea and sitting beside someone after worship is a way to hold a space they can fill. It may be filled with each others stories or one story.

We hold space for each other in worship by being here we are part of the larger picture. As service leaders care we all do it but do we hold space for ourselves too?

I was hoping and praying that I would be fit to travel to you this weekend. It wasn't looking too hopeful at the start of the week but I thought I had a few days to look after myself.

Sometimes try as you might things don't always work out the way you wish. There I was on Friday morning absolutely knowing that I couldn't do a 6 hr journey and then shopping cooling etc etc but I so wanted the story to be different.

I hold space for others in the work I do and turning to do but is it so easy to do it for myself?. Why can't I just make a decisions and then get on with it ?

The lesson in this is that no matter who or where you are, you can do the beautiful and important work of holding space for other people. swinging like a pendulum away from a place of isolation and individualism to a place of deeper connection and love.

It is not selfish to focus on yourself. In fact, it's an act of generosity and commitment to make sure that you are at your best when you support others. They will get much more effective, meaningful, and openhearted support from you if you are healthy and strong.



I need to be prepared to encounter and host in myself first. In order to prepare myself for conflict, frustration, ego, fear, anger, weariness, envy, injustice, etc., I need to sit with myself, look into my own heart, bear witness to what I see there, and address it in whatever way I need to before I can do it for others. I can't hide any of that stuff in the shadows, because what is hidden there tends to come out in ways I don't want it to when I am under stress.

AND just as I am prepared to offer compassion, understanding, forgiveness, and resolution to anything that shows up in the room, I need to offer it to myself first

I don't want to let anyone down I so wanted to see you all lets just push on through it will be fine. But I needed to hear myself come back to myself. I needed someone to hold space for me who wasn't going to fix me, tell me what to do or make a judgement of my process. I made a call I heard myself and at the end gave myself the permission to say no. I laid on the floor and had a good cry sobbing and then something changed. The door opened to that compassion to treat myself gently

I'm still sad I cannot see and hug you all but in the process of someone else holding space for me I can now hold space here.

I'm sure many of us have held space for someone in distress or dying, someone in the congregations who's upset - often there is no answer or that the answer is just to sit .

We know all this stuff but there is something quite sublime about being with another and nothing more

I spoke to a friend whose partner's mum has dementia. I offered her some help with this and then the conversation went silent and in the silence I heard the tears – I'm scared she said - I don't know what to do

Can you hold her hand and stroke her face today when you visit - yes she said

We sat for a while and then I realised that she has a job to do I can't take the pain away but I can hold the space whilst she does the work and Saskia can hold the container for me to make gentle decisions and so on .....

So how do we know when we are doing it?

She talks about being a bowl - we hold the emotions but in a space separate from ourselves something that we can put down and something that contains them. If we don't we can start to hijack the conversation - talk too much get then to see our point of view and start rebuilding the contents of the bowl. We may think we know best ?

It's so hard just to hold the bowl ! Not interrupt, ignore, control, dismiss, subtly make it all about us !

Had I been with you in person I would've brought my lovely bowl here it is. So we are still going to do the exercise but in silence and magically

I want you to think about what you need this congregation to hold for you at this time and place it in the bowl

God of all love we ask that you give us the courage to hold space for these writes concerns pain and stuff

We ask that you can show us what needs holding and when

And we ask for the courage to accept the help from others in order that we can continue to hold for others

Some times holding space is doing nothing and yet it really isn't . Going back to the first reading and that a panic of what do we say and feeling like we may not know how to do it reminded me when I sat with a congregant recently who was crying. There was no word, I just sat quietly.

No big gestures are required

But what about our church

It takes a lot of courage to walk through the doors of a new church - we all want to belong and be welcomed and fit in learn the protocol quickly so we don't stick out !. See want to chat a lot some want to be invisible at the back - please don't ask me for tea!

Some want to know all about Unitarianism straight away. Some are just looking for a reprieve but what we all want is somewhere where we feel welcome

A smile and a good morning - a clean space a feeling that whatever we ask is ok

To share something meaningful - but we can't do that all the time - I'm sure some of our service leader have left us bait confused bored or jus switched off

As worship leaders, we have a mission. It's not to satisfy individual preferences in the illusion that we can make everyone happy. Rather, it's to be effective in holding space for people to find their center, or fill their spiritual tanks, or find a little mercy and courage to take with them into the week. (If you want to set a secondary goal of "be fabulous every single Sunday," be my guest... but that's a high bar.)

When we create and offer our communities to seekers, we're inviting them—and ourselves—to be changed. The impulse that carries newcomers through our doors might evolve as the layers of community reveal themselves. It's up to us, as congregational leaders (especially on Sunday mornings) to do all that we can to create the conditions for relationships of belonging to flourish. But its up to us all and that level of being able to hold space will change dependant on what is going on for each of us at any one time

Erica Hewitt talks about this holding peace in terms of her starting to use the local gym  
Erika Hewitt is the UUA's Minister of Worship Arts.

### The Takeaway

I joined my gym with a narrow purpose: to be able to walk up and down stairs without panting or pain. I accomplished that goal a while ago. Am I leaving anytime soon? Not a chance: I'm having fun. Only now am I beginning to grasp the depth of that community, and to make new friends. I'd like to think that if I disappeared, people would miss me. (Is that not the definition of relationship?) I was held as I recovered and now in turn I can pass this onto the next new comer that walks through the door

It's not rocket science but past of today is to recognise the worth of us all as individuals and in loving community with each other. Today could nit happen without a whole host of people holding bowls ! Steve, Kate, cleaners, flowers, bringers biscuits, tea makers, the list is endless, the committee, the trustee. So next time we take a cuppa or sit in a chair we are reminded that each of us is dong a small part in the greater landscape to bring this sacred bowl of holding together for us all

You have held a space for me for which I am truly grateful. It perhaps hasn't been the most consistent of placements - there are a few miles between us but I feel honoured and privileged to have been part of this church for the past 10 months and will take many wonderful memories of you all with me.

I am aware this is my last service in my role in placement but do hope it won't be my last service as I have grown rather attached to Plymouth and all of you and we will find an alternative date that I can return and hug you all and share the communion of tea and cake

You have held space for me to explore try things out you gave your friendship support and grace for which I am truly thankful.

But for now blessing upon all of you.

You have and continue to create a beautiful, unique and loving place for worship

#### **44 Hymn Purple – Gives thanks for life**

#### **Blessing**

Holy One we call by many names, and sometimes by no name at all, surround us with love and compassion, with comfort and strength. Remind us that there is no place we can go that you have not already been. May we speak your truth when we are called. Amen, and blessed be.

*When we hold space well, we serve the liberation and sovereignty of ALL people.*

**Postlude** 'Going Home', theme from 'Local Hero'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6pR1cVgk7Is>