

## 14<sup>th</sup> August 2022: PLYMOUTH UNITARIANS

### Opening space for possibility

1. **PRELUDE** – ‘Weightless’, Brian Eno (4’ 35”)

[https://youtu.be/R3Tu\\_c0AbLQ](https://youtu.be/R3Tu_c0AbLQ)

2. **WELCOME/CHALICE LIGHTING**

*Open words, adapted from Shari Woodbury*

Welcome, all who come in friendship who long for genuine community...

May you be graciously received here as your authentic self.

Welcome, those who come in curiosity, full of questions or simply open...

May you embrace wonder and encounter new delights.

Welcome, you who come heavy with fatigue, weary from the troubles of the world or the troubles of your particular life...

May you rest and be filled in this sacred space.

Welcome, if you come with joy for flowing rivers and gentle breezes, for changing skies and great trees...

May the grace of the world leave a lasting imprint in you.

Welcome, all who come with thanks for the generosity of the earth, the gift of human caring, and the blessing of spirit

May your grateful heart overflow and bless those around you.

Come, let us worship together.

3. **HYMN 33:** Enter, rejoice and come in

Enter, rejoice and come in.

Enter, rejoice and come in.

Today will be a joyful day;

enter, rejoice and come in.

Open your ears to the song.  
Open your ears to the song.  
Today will be a joyful day;  
enter, rejoice and come in.

Open your hearts everyone.  
Open your hearts everyone.  
Today will be a joyful day;  
enter, rejoice, and come in.

Don't be afraid of some change.  
Don't be afraid of some change.  
Today will be a joyful day;  
enter, rejoice, and come in.

Enter, rejoice and come in.  
Enter, rejoice and come in.  
Today will be a joyful day;  
enter, rejoice and come in.

*Words and music by Louise Ruspini*

### **PRAYER Lyn Cox**

Spirit of Life and Love, known by many names and yet fully known by none, we give thanks for this time and this place of renewal.

We give thanks for the ability to begin again: after illness, after loss, after disappointment, after meeting the challenge set before us.

Grant us the courage to continue on the journey, the courage to speak up for the well being of others and ourselves and the planet.

May we forgive each other when our courage falls short, and may we try again.  
Grant us hearts to love boldly, to embody our faith and our values in living words and deeds. May our hearts open to embrace humility, grace, and reconciliation.

Grant us the ability to learn and grow, to let the Spirit of Love and Truth work its transformation upon us and within us.

Grant us the spirit of hospitality, the willingness to sustain a fit dwelling place for the holy that resides in all being.

Grant us a sense of being at peace in the world, even as we are in motion. Let us cultivate together the strength to welcome every kind of gift and all manner of ways to be on the journey together.

To this we add the silent prayers of our hearts.

*Pause for all – including for all those who risks their lives to speak freely, and for all those who afraid.*

#### 4. **READING** From 'Reaching Out' by Henri Nouwen

Hospitality means, primarily, the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy.

Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring people over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines. It is not to lead our neighbour into a corner where there are no alternatives left, but to open a wide spectrum of options for choice and commitment. It is not an educated intimidation with good books, good stories and good works, but the liberation of fearful hearts so that words can find roots and bear ample fruit. It is not a method of making our God and our way into the criteria of happiness, but the opening of an opportunity to others to find their God and their way.

The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness where strangers can enter and discover themselves as created free; free to sing their own songs, speak their own languages, dance their own dances; free also to leave and follow their own vocations. Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt the life style of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find his [or her] own.

## **STORY Luke 5:1-7**

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding round him and listening to the word of God. He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.'

Simon answered, 'Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.'

When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

### **5. 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, though 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?

*William Caldwell's 'Union Harmony', words by Emily Lenore Luch Thorn*

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

*Judy Clement Wall, artist and author*

I'm becoming a fan of the pause. Between notes and pages and words and breaths, between thought and voice, between action and reaction. In that momentary stillness, in that space between before and after, there is possibility, a myriad of paths that can be taken, a dozen different versions of me.

7. **INTERLUDE:** 'We move lightly', Dustin O'Halloran (3'10")

<https://youtu.be/gAWCuPG94dA>

8. **ADDRESS**

'Hospitality' has come to mean cafes and restaurants, bars and hotels. Places where we can stay and eat and drink and – yes – be made welcome, we hope, though at a price. It's the hospitality 'industry' – we've become accustomed to hearing about its woes recently.

But hospitality has a deeper, more generous and more spiritual meaning too, which we heard from Henri Nouwen. He called it 'creating space, free space, where a stranger can enter and be received as a friend not an enemy'. This is the kind of hospitality that can be offered anywhere, anytime, free of charge. Yet when we create such space it does cost us something - it requires each of us not simply to be passive but to extend ourselves, to make the effort to meet people where they are, whether they are different ages, or backgrounds or cultures, whether they hold different views of the world, are differently abled, or have different skin colour, or sexuality or gender. However, they may differ from you or from me, hospitality means moving out of our own comfort zones and meeting them in theirs – or at least halfway – that idea of building bridges we have talked about. Each time we do this we open up space for possibility – for new understanding, for insight and revelation, for compassion and caring.

For me it is Nouwen's final sentence that resonates with challenge: 'Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt the life style of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find their own.' And this is something which Unitarianism is designed to do – to gift the guest the chance to find their own path to the divine. Even though this is easier said than done. It's something we can all learn to do better.

Back in 2020 I recorded some thoughts on our 3-year strategy and posted the video on Facebook. I can't say it exactly went viral. I was in Central Park at the time and it struck me how many kinds of spaces are there – children's playgrounds, tennis courts, cafes, bowling greens, a skateboard park, areas of woodland, paths for walking and cycling – and so on and so on. And I was just thinking how the park had been designed to cater for kids and adults, for walkers and talkers, for sports and exercise, for eating and drinking, for enjoying the trees and the wild meadows. It's a space that has been made welcoming for so many people with different interests and needs. And why shouldn't a church community aim to do the same? And yes we do have a café, and a poetry group, and a green team and more. But I think that, like the parable, we can also cast our nets beyond our usual places, and that this would be fulfilling and surprising for us as well as for those we might meet there.

Recently, as some of you know, I met up with a group of Cornish Unitarians in a café in Truro, and then with some young people from Bath Fellowship on Zoom. I know that Gav is meeting folk in a pub. I've been exchanging ideas with Joan Wilkinson about ways to offer space online for older people to explore their experiences of 'Eldership' (her word) together. Rather than sitting here passively waiting for people to walk through the door, or online, we too can cast our nets further out. This is powerful way of putting our spiritual beliefs into practice – of recognizing the divine in everyone – of extending ourselves towards the other, of recognizing that hospitality is not simply *saying* 'you're all welcome here', it's making the effort to open up spaces in which others may feel more at home, and which new possibilities can arise.

Which may mean casting our nets beyond the shoreline, in deeper water, in places we haven't tried before.

The parable from Luke can be interpreted in different ways of course – to go in to deeper water may be a metaphor for committing to the spiritual life more fully. At the

time of this story, Jesus was finding and recruiting his disciples, so that is what he was asking of them. Fishing in deeper water may suggest that there is abundance – everything we need in fact – but that we'll need to be willing to move out beyond our comfort zone in order to find it. It was a lesson in not doing same thing that doesn't work, over and over, and resigning ourselves to failure, but instead being prepared to try new things in new places. When we do this we find that help is at hand – God and the Universe seem to move towards us as we move towards them.

I've been reopening spaces of possibility for myself recently. I had let my morning journal and yoga routine slip when I came back from the Hebrides. I find that a change in routine – though very beneficial in many ways – quite often disrupts the rhythm and shape of my life for a while after. But now I have returned to what is an important space for me, which is the blank page. Not just for writing services, but for my journaling practice. Here there is no guidance or agenda – just white space and a pen with which to write or draw. Yet the practice of sitting - and edges of the page - hold me as I write from left to right, from the top to the bottom, picking my way through the whatever thoughts and ideas and feelings arise, and often discovering something surprising about myself that had been hidden but is unexpectedly revealed in black and white.

And then to the yoga mat. Another simple space that welcomes me and holds me, this time one on which to move. At the moment I'm following another 30-day course called 'Breath', which encourages me to move with my breath. To stretch, to fold, to balance – all in the rhythm of my own breathing. I love it because I get to imagine myself into greater flexibility, to visualize opening up space between my toes, and my organs and my vertebrae...a until it seems that I actually have. In both cases – the journal and the mat – new possibilities open up for me.

And so I ask you , as I know I have asked you before, but it seems appropriate to ask again...how do you open up spaces for *your* own spiritual exploration? How do you hold space for you and your god? Do you light a candle, do you create a shrine, do you enter a particular room or go to a special place, maybe in your mind, or in nature perhaps? Do you practice silence, prayer, mediation, mindfulness, movement? Are you aware of the way that the space holds you, and yet also sets you free? Can you sense how the space feels safe and yet at the same time opens up possibility? And

what would it take for you to go deeper into your practice? To risk leaving the shoreline?

I invite you to reflect on that next time you pray, or meditate, or do Tai Chi or sit under a tree, whatever it is you do to commune with the divine, and play with the possibility of what it would mean to go deeper.

To cast our nets beyond the shoreline and into deeper water – unknown water – takes courage. But this is what we are called to do – again and again – to both return to those known and familiar spaces that nourish us *as well as* to enter into them more deeply and even to move beyond them, for this is how we extend ourselves to reach out to God and to the stranger. Who may turn out be one and the same.

This is how we offer hospitality to ourselves, to each other, to all beings and to God.

Blessed be.

**2<sup>nd</sup> HYMN: 195 (P) We sing a love that sets all people free**

We sing a love that sets all people free,  
that blows like wind that burns like scorching flame,  
Enfolds the earth, springs up like water clear.  
Come, living love, live in our hearts today.

We sing a love that seeks another's good,  
that longs to serve and not to count the cost,  
a love that yielding finds itself made new.  
Come, caring love, live in our hearts today.

We sing a love, unflinching, unafraid  
to be itself despite another's wrath,  
a love that stands alone and undismayed.  
Come, strengthening love, live in our hearts today.



We sing a love, that wandering will not rest  
Until it finds its way, its home, its source,  
through joy and sadness pressing on refreshed.  
Come, pilgrim love, live in our hearts today.

We sing the Holy Spirit, full of love,  
who seeks out scars of ancient bitterness,  
brings to our wounds the healing grace of Christ.  
Come, radiant love, live in our hearts today.

*Music by Alfred Morton Smith © Estate of Doris Wright Smith. Words by June Boyce-Tillman © 1993  
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**9. CLOSING WORDS:** Sue Monk Kid

To be fully human and fully divine,  
in other words, fully myself;  
to accept all that I am, the parts I like as well as the parts I struggle with,  
and to embrace all that you envision for me, however wonderful, however  
scary, this is my prayer.

Walk with me, I pray, out towards the very rim of life itself,  
to a place beyond the familiar and the comfortable.  
Take me with you to that exquisite edge of courage and possibility and release  
me there,  
to become what I am.  
Amen

**10. CLOSING VIDEO:** 'Wide open spaces', Dixie Chicks (3' 44")

<https://youtu.be/dom7VlltBUc>