

11th September 2022: PLYMOUTH UNITARIANS

Rev Kate Whyman - Taking Stock

1. **PRELUDE** – ‘Violin Partita No 1’, JS Bach (2’53”)

<https://youtu.be/Q2eit2dbvmc>

2. **OPENING WORDS**

Welcome to this morning’s service, whether you are here in person or online.

It has been a momentous week. The death of the Queen on Thursday afternoon in Balmoral, and the simultaneous end of her 70-year reign, is most certainly the end of an era, the Elizabethan era. Whether you are a fan of the monarchy or not, she has symbolised service, dedication, duty and perhaps above all constancy for all or most of all our lives.

Before we begin our service today, then, I would invite you to stand (or sit) as you are able and willing for one minute’s respectful silence.

SILENCE

Thank you.

I had called this service ‘Taking Stock’, and wondered whether I should change it. But then, listening to some of the coverage over the past few days it seemed to me that we find ourselves at a turning point with a new Prime Minister and a new King within just a few days of each other. And this does – I think – prompt us, our country, the commonwealth, and even to some extent the wider world, to pause and take stock. So I have kept the theme, even though I have changed the content a little.

But let’s begin by a call to worship by Susan Maginn

From beyond the playful summer clouds,
beyond the earth's thin blue line,
from beyond the bright moon and meteor showers,
we hear the call to look and listen carefully,
to turn away from a world that buys and sells happiness,

to fully experience the luring whisper of your heart's truth.

Why not today, why not now?

We are here and together at home in this evolving place,

home in this ever changing breath and body,

home in this dewy morning even as it reaches toward high noon.

We hear the call from far beyond and deep within and we do not hear it alone.

Come, let us worship 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)

May this flame itself be a symbol of constancy for us in the midst of much change.

May it remind us that at the essence of life is the eternal divine light that always

shines, always guides, is forever a beacon of hope, and is always, always present.

3. HYMN 62 (P) Here we have gathered

Here we have gathered, gathered side by side;

circle of kinship, come and step inside!

May all you seek here find a kindly word;

may all who speak here feel they have been heard.

Sing now together this, our hearts' own song.

Here we have gathered, called to celebrate

days of our lifetime, matters small and great;

we of all ages, women, children men

infants and sages, sharing what we can.

Sing now together this, our hearts' own song.

Life has its battles, sorrows, and regret:

but in the shadows, let us not forget:

we who now gather know each other's pain;

kindness can heal us: as we give, we gain.

Sing now in friendship this, our hearts' own song.

Words © 1979 Alicia S. Carpenter

4. PRAYER

Divine Spirit, Ground of All Being

At this time we offer our prayers of gratitude for the extraordinary life and work of Queen Elizabeth II. May she now rest in well-earned peace. And we pray for the Royal Family, who have lost a beloved mother, grandmother, great grandmother. May they find strength and comfort in their grief. We ask that our new King, King Charles III, be given the courage, grace and steadfastness he needs at this enormous time of change. And we pray that both he and our new Prime Minister will accept the enormous responsibilities given to them with wisdom, clarity, honesty and compassion.

Let us turn to those in our own midst who may be grieving, those who are unwell, those who feel anxious. And we remember those, wherever they are in the world, who are affected by conflict, by poverty, by homelessness and migration, by flooding and other effects of a changing climate.

And we also give thanks. For lives that have inspired, and have been well lived. We give thanks for those who work to bring change for the better. And we are eternally grateful for the gifts of beauty, joy, compassion and kindness wherever they blossom, which they always do. Above all we give thanks for life and love and the miracle of being alive here, now.

Amen

Karem Barratt

I rest in you, Spirit of Life.

I place in you my feet, my legs, my torso, my arms, my shoulders, my head and allow you to support all that I am.

I rest in you, Spirit of Life, and give to you my worries, my fears, my doubts, my hopes, my joys, my pains, my anger, my love, my hate, and allow you to take in all that I am.

And as I give all that I am, I find the place of truth, stillness, still, eternal where you and I are one.

I breathe in, deep, deeply, down, up, all that we are, as I stand on my toe at the edge of the universe, in oneness.

And all that we are expands, until forever.

Blessed be

5. STORY

A horse suddenly came galloping quickly down the road. It seemed as though the man had somewhere very important to go.

Another man, who was standing alongside the road, shouted, "Where are you going?" and the man on the horse replied, "I don't know! Ask the horse!"

6. READING Elizabeth Gilbert, 'Eat, Pray, Love'

"If you are brave enough to leave behind everything familiar and comforting (which can be anything from your house to your bitter old resentments) and set out on a truth-seeking journey (either externally or internally), and if you are truly willing to regard everything that happens to you on that journey as a clue, and if you accept everyone you meet along the way as a teacher, and if you are prepared – most of all – to face (and forgive) some very difficult realities about yourself... then truth will not be withheld from you. Or so I've come to believe."

7. HYMN: 21 (P) Come and find the quiet centre

Come and find the quiet centre
in the crowded life we lead,
find the room for hope to enter,
find the space where we are free:
clear the chaos and the clutter,
clear our eyes, that we can see
all the things that really matter,
be at peace, and simply be.

Silence is a friend who claims us,
cools the heat and slows the pace;
God it is who speaks and names us,
knows our being touches base,
making space within our thinking,
lifting shades to show the sun,
raising courage when we're shrinking,
finding scope for faith begun.

In the Spirit let us travel,
open to each other's pain;
let our lives and fears unravel,
celebrate the space we gain:
there's a place for deepest dreaming,
there's a time for heart to care;
in the Spirit's lively scheming
there is always room to spare.

Traditional melody, arr. John Bell, words by Shirley Erena Murray © Hope Publishing Company

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

I invite you to take a moment to take stock of your own life at this moment.

Your blessings

Your challenges

Your hopes

Your fears

All that limits you and

that which sets you free.

Let us be still.

Silence

9. **INTERLUDE:** September morning, Gerard Fahy

<https://youtu.be/C7zZju0f7n8>

10. **ADDRESS** 'Taking Stock'

When did you last take stock? By which I mean, when did you last take a good long look at your life, consider all aspects of it – and perhaps open yourself to the possibility of some changes, big or small?

Perhaps it was after bereavement, or a major illness, maybe at the end of a relationship, or after losing a job, or becoming a grandparent. Any significant life change is likely to prompt reflection, including this moment in our country's history. Any major upheaval is a chance to take stock of where we find ourselves now, in a new and unfamiliar and unsettling situation, one which has probably thrown up all sorts of stuff from the past – old fears that suddenly resurface, forgotten hopes unexpectedly awakened, and so on. Taking stock is an opportunity to consider, thoughtfully, where and how we are right now, and to allow new possibilities and directions to emerge. It is the silver lining in every cloud.

But what about the rest of the time? The 'ordinary' times, if you like?

The story about the man on the horse amuses me. It's a funny image, of a man racing along on his horse at full pelt, apparently with great purpose and direction. And yet, when asked by an innocent bystander, 'where are you going', the answer comes: 'I've no idea. You'll have to ask the horse.'

I wonder whether you ever feel you are simply being swept along by the current without much idea where you're going or why? It's very easy to get caught up isn't it, not just busyness, but also just doing stuff because we've always done it, or because we think it's expected of us, or because everyone else is doing it (or not doing it), or because it's a habit we've got into without even noticing. I know I'm guilty of this at times. The calendar rolls round more and more quickly, and sometimes I feel I can't keep up with it. There are times I'm not even sure the horse knows where it's going or why, let alone me.

It's a wonderfully spiritually mature thing to take stock, not just in a crisis, but regularly, as a way of life. To regularly pause and consider with honesty and clarity, and to ask the difficult questions of ourselves: Where am I *now*? How am I *now*? And what am I being called to do *now*? To value the pause itself – the act of taking stock – as much, if not more, than whatever action may follow it. For it is the pause in which clarity arises and from which right action naturally unfolds.

We know from the examples and teachings of our religious prophets, that it is when we pause and reflect we are most likely to experience moments of insight and enlightenment. It is in stillness and silence that we are more likely to suddenly 'see' what's obvious ...yet what we simply hadn't noticed or thought of before.

The Buddha famously finally saw the truth after sitting alone under the Bodhi Tree, when he was awakened to the reality of existence. All became clear to him in the stillness.

Jesus saw what was happening in the garden of Gethsemane, and knew what was going to befall him. And he took time to say to his disciples "Sit here while I go over there and pray." Sit here while I go over there and pray.

And the prophet Muhammed was reportedly meditating in a cave on a mountain when he was visited by an angel and found himself beginning to speak the words of God. Revelation appeared to him out of the silence.

These are stories of momentous divine connection and revelation, of course, recorded for posterity in the scriptures. But they didn't come from nowhere. They came from lifetimes spent pausing, praying, meditating, and allowing understanding and wisdom – and then right action – to emerge out of stillness. These revered holy men lived by building a habit of pausing, and taking stock, without fear or judgment, by opening their minds and hearts to the spirit, to the Universe, to God - and following their call.

This regular stocktaking – done with clarity and honesty – is part of slowing our lives down and bringing ourselves back, time and time again, to truthfulness, honesty and

a greater perspective. It's about breathing a little more deeply, shutting out the clamour and the noise for a while, and trusting that deeper insight and intuition.

There are many spiritual practices which can help us with this, of course. But the Ignatian Spiritual practice of the Daily Examen comes to mind. It's a practice that invites us to take time at the end of each day to reflect on what have been our moments of 'consolation and desolation'. In other words, to pay attention to what brings us joy and connection, and what leaves us feeling fragmented and dissatisfied. In fact we practise a similar process as part of our Heart & Soul gatherings, noticing those moments when we feel fully alive and connected and those when we feel alone and apart.

Or you might find it helpful to use a visual tool, such as a simple 'wheel of life'. Here is one now. You have probably seen similar before, and you can certainly make your own. It's an aid for looking at the whole of our lives and reflecting – taking stock – of different aspects, such as health, family and friends, and so on. Some aspects may not be scoring highly, or featuring much at all in your own life at the moment. And that's OK. Other aspects may be more nourishing and fulfilling for you right now. The idea is not to criticise your life, but simply to notice and take stock of what's going on, a process that may or may not quite naturally lead to change. But either way, allows you to step back for a moment and consider.

I invite you to take a copy and reflect on it when you have a moment of quietness.

Pausing and taking stock, with compassion for ourselves rather than self-criticism, is part of living a thoughtful and considered life. It allows us to get off the horse for a while and see what is truly going on for us, and develop some perspective on it. It's a way of waking up. Which is surely an essential part of the spiritual journey for us all.

And, as Elizabeth Gilbert puts it: if you are prepared – most of all – to face (and forgive) some very difficult realities about yourself... then truth will not be withheld from you. Or so I've come to believe."

May it be so for us all. And also for our country.

Amen.

HYMN 186 (P) We are travellers on a journey

We are travellers on a journey
which brought us from the sun,
when primal star exploded
and earth in orbit spun;
but now as human dwellers
upon earth-planet's crust,
we strive for living systems
whose ways are kind and just.

We are travellers on a journey
which grows from human seed,
and through our birth and childhood
goes where life's path may lead;
but now we are delving deeper
in quest of greater worth
and reaching unknown regions
and planets of new birth.

We are travellers on a journey
through realms of inner space
where joy and peace are planets
that circle stars of grace;
and when we find the stillness
which comes at journey's end,
there'll be complete refreshment,
a resting place my friend.

Music Henry Hugh Bancroft, words © Andrew M. Hill

Our closing video today will be the song 'Turn, turn, turn' sung by Judy Collins and Pete Seeger – and includes a little exchange between them at the beginning and end. The song reminds us there is a time and a purpose for everything.

CLOSING WORDS Eric Williams

Blessed is the path on which you travel.

Blessed is the body that carries you upon it.

Blessed is your heart that has heard the call.

Blessed is your mind that discerns the way.

Blessed is the gift that you will receive by giving.

Truly blessed is the gift that you will become on the journey.

May you go forth in peace.

11. **CLOSING VIDEO:** 'Turn! Turn! Turn!', Judy Collins & Pete Seeger

<https://youtu.be/n0xzyhoeu1Y>