

## **24<sup>th</sup> October 2021 – Membership service**

Led by Rev Kate Whyman

### **GATHERING MUSIC 'I belong', Namoli Brennet**

<https://youtu.be/1UkVY7vGs9w>

### **WELCOME AND CHALICE LIGHTING**

Welcome to you all, all of you here in the church and all of you joining us online. This morning we extend an extra special welcome to anyone joining us for the first time, and to our new members Gill, Poppy, Jacquie, Joan, Steve and Suzanne, who are here in person or online in spirit. And to you all I share Rumi's words...

Come, come whoever you are  
wanderer, worshipper, lover of leaving.  
Ours is no caravan of despair.  
Come, yet again come.

So let us begin, as is our custom, by lighting our chalice candle as a symbol of our free religious faith. *If you're at home I invite you to light a candle with me now.*

May this flame be a symbol for us of the rich warmth of togetherness and the bright light of celebration. May it mark a new moment in our journey and the start of this hour together.

May it be so.

### **HYMN 62(P) Here we have gathered**

Here we have gathered, gathered side by side;  
circle of kinship, come and step inside!  
May all who 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*

## **PRAYER**

Divine Spirit  
Be with us now.

We have each arrived here with our own fears and hopes, our own burdens and blessings.  
May we trust that we are each held by this beloved community, just as we are.  
Help us to be fully present to this time and this space  
and to every one of the blessed beings we share worship with today.  
May we offer ourselves to this precious moment without pretence or expectation,  
but honest and open to what unfolds within us and without us.

And let us pause to bring into our hearts and minds those known and unknown to us who are  
struggling and suffering in various ways at this time.

I'd like to mention Tony Bennett, who died this week. Tony was the husband of Rachel, one  
of our long-term members who, though she no longer attends in person, continues to  
support us from a distance.

May we hold them and all beings in the light and send them our blessings.  
Blessed be.

## **STORY 'Rivers', by Christopher Buice**

Once upon a time there were two rivers flowing side by side. Both rivers liked to argue about who was the best.

"The water in my river is better than the water in your river!" said one.

"No, the water in my river is better than the water in your river!" said the other.

The two rivers would flow along all day arguing about which river was the best. Both were quite sure they were the greatest.

"Doesn't my water make a joyful sound as it runs over the smooth, polished pebbles on my bed? And look at the way the sun reflects off the ripples and eddies that form around the granite boulders at my edge. These things are so beautiful. Surely, I am the best river!" said the first.

The other river replied, "Ah, but look at all the fish that swim in my clear, cool water. And have you heard the frogs singing at night? They live in the reeds and lilies that grow at my banks. I am home to so many wonderful creatures. Surely, I must be the very best river!"

The two continued to argue until, one day, something strange and unexpected happened. The rivers rounded a bend, slid down a small falls, and suddenly saw that they were flowing toward something much bigger and greater than themselves. Up ahead were big, crashing waves, and water everywhere for as far as they could see. They continued to rush, faster and faster, until the water from both rivers churned together into the vast and enormous ocean.

Then a sound came from the sky. It came from a cloud that chuckled for a moment and then said, "Now you see how foolish you have been arguing about who is the best. There is no highest or lowest. There is no greatest or least. All things are one and all are joined together like rivers in the sea."

## **CONTRIBUTIONS FROM GILL AND JOAN**

**GILL:** Good morning everybody. First of all thank you all for accepting me into your lovely church. I've always loved churches but for the last 70 years I liked them without the vicar in

them... till I came here. After I'd lost my lovely Reverend Denny in Perivale Free Church I was never the same again, but when I came here I was a little bit weary and more than sad underneath. There's a lot of family problems, I lost my sister-in-law and I told her she couldn't die. She kept saying 'I'm going to die, I'm going to die shortly.' I said 'You can't. I haven't got the gravitas to be the family matriarch.'

But I got the job. So there was... I was a little bit down when I came but I found here, I found peace and friendship. And I was thinking, I was thinking a poem I used to know years ago. For some reason I thought Laurence Binyon wrote it and I was looking for it this morning. He didn't, or at least I can't find it in my poetry book, and it sort of sums up how this little place has helped kick start me because it says: And life is colour and warmth and light with a continual striving after these. And he is dead who will not fight and who dies fighting has increase. I always used to think it was warlike. Now I realize it's not, I can apply it to my own life and this little place has helped me...just go. So thank you all,

**JOAN:** Hello Plymouth! I saw you at the beginning at the opening but I presume you're all there and you're all here with me in our spare bedroom, and thank you so much for welcoming me into your number

I was a member of the NUF and still am because I feel that Unitarians network. They link, they recognize that we are all one in spirit.

And when the pandemic came we could no longer go out and film, which we used to love doing. We would go to different churches and we'd film. But I couldn't really worship because I had to make sure the camera was focused. I dare not make a mistake because I'm technically inept, so I have to make sure I've got my camera pointed and focused in the right way. The pandemic came, we could no longer film, so connection with a church or a chapel left me. But fortunately Myron was trying to do something very special at Plymouth and he joined the UKUTV team,

not as an official member, but he came to learn and for us to learn from him. And so I came to Plymouth to see what he was doing, to cast not a critical eye, but to see if there was anything we could learn or we might be able to suggest. He's way ahead of us now, way ahead, and I'm glad about that because it allows me to be with you in Plymouth all the way from here from Castle Donington in the East Midlands, so I hope our friendship will continue. I'm sorry I can't be with you in person but/and I'm glad you're all meeting afterwards to share lunch and I hope it's a beautiful lunch and I wish all the new members and all the old members the very best here from Castle Donington, and thank you again.

## **REFLECTION/SILENCE**

Let's take some time in silence for our own prayer and meditation. And this quiet time will be followed by reflective music.

## **INTERLUDE Anam Chara**

<https://youtu.be/cUL5Las3I1I>

## **CONTRIBUTIONS FROM POPPY AND SUZANNE**

**POPPY:** I'm a little bit nervous. It's nice to see all of your faces um in person having just seen them before on zoom, thanks to Myron and his wondrous technology. Hi, I'm Poppy. um I'm from Cornwall, so just across the bridge, and um yes it's a real honour to be here with you all and to be welcomed into the church. I guess I discovered Unitarianism last spring when I was doing some research into the religious beliefs of Charles Dickens um for my master's thesis at the time, and I noticed lots of similarities with some of his, at the time, liberal progressive views around inclusivism and obviously um the idea of us all being interconnected and kind of removing the what I would call the standing blocks I have to maybe some aspects of faith around original sin um and things like that. And it really spoke to me. I realized a lot of my spiritual beliefs and the principles and the exploration of the self and divine as a community, I really thought it was something I should look into, so I did over the summer and was hiding behind the recordings around like June time, and then actually came live to a service I think in November. But I really wanted to join as a member because I felt it's uh basically an expression of how important I feel exploring my spirituality is with like-

mindful people in a community that feels welcoming and safe and kind of like a home, if that makes sense, so yeah, thank you.

**SUZANNE:** Hello everyone. Thank you for welcoming me back.

You do know me, I've been uh here and in a way and back again and everything, but I'm here to stay now folks, so uh you know you, uh you've had it! I'm here. So I've written down what I'm going to say to you, and as a driver all my adult life I have traveled along many roads. I don't always know the way to my destination, so I will refer to the the roadmap book and this morning's service makes me think of my Christian journey and where the roadmap might be driving home. Last Tuesday at 10 p.m from Cornwall it was very misty and wet. Thank goodness for the cat's eyes and clear white lines. Like my Christian journey, not able to see the road ahead, but I can refer to the past as a signpost and in 1992 September the 13th I was baptized, fully submerged into five different churches at Christchurch ecumenical church at Estover in Plymouth. There are people who were there almost 30 years ago in this church now, Kathy and Chris and Brenda who was the methodist preacher that morning is here with her husband Michael, a prominent Methodist. That experience left me with a responsibility but I hope to realize.

Professor Adrian Thatcher wrote 'God's love requires transformation not just in our lives but in church and world alike'. And if you can bear with me another minute I've written a poem for this time explaining a little how I see God, and it's called 'The God I know'. The God I know.

When an artist steps aside to share their creation they leave some of themselves within that creation.

I sense God in the silence after a wave has smashed against the rocks, the sun that beams down touches warmly my face,

the blackbird song after a storm,

and the lambs dancing with delight on the moor,

in the music softly playing when I am sad. The God I know. Yeah it's there. Thank you for this.

## SHORT ADDRESS

In the book 'Earth Prayers' Elizabeth Roberts writes:

'Belonging is the basic truth of our existence. We belong here. Life belongs here. Likewise, at the heart of gratefulness, in its deepest sense, we also find an expression of belonging. When we say "Thank you" we really are saying "We belong together." That is why we sometimes find it so difficult to say "Thank you"—because maybe we don't want to acknowledge our interdependence. We don't want to be obliged. But in a healthy society that is exactly what we seek: mutual obligations. Everyone is obliged to everyone and everything else; we all belong together, we are of each other. In this awareness we are freed from self-preoccupation—and only then, emptied of self, can we be filled with thanks. '

I don't know about you, but obligation is not a word I immediately warm to. It sounds heavy and rather irksome. And yet of course I recognize the truth that we are anyway - whether we like it, or know it, or not – we are obliged to each other. And that in a healthy community what we need – and what helps us actually feel we belong – is a kind of mutual obligation, not one that's grudging or coerced, but one which is freely and willingly and lovingly entered into.

I think we all know that it is important to feel needed and useful, just as it is encouraging to feel appreciated and accepted. These are the very conditions that help we humans flourish. And it is true, isn't it, that we yearn to belong – even though we already do belong.

'Belonging is the basic truth of our existence', says Elizabeth Roberts, and as our two competing rivers discovered in the story, and as Namoli Brennet sang in our opening music with the words:

I belong to fields and skies and plains

I belong, I belong, I belong

I belong to numbers without name

I belong, I belong, I belong

And it's true – we do. And yet still, locked in our individual minds and bodies (as we inevitably experience life) it can be hard to believe that we belong. We can – and we often do - feel as though we're alone and separate. And so perhaps we come here, partly at least, seeking connection, yearning to feel we are part of something bigger than ourselves, wanting to give and to receive, and to offer and to accept. And gradually, along the way, if

we allow it, we begin to find we quite naturally develop some healthy mutual obligations. We discover that we are each, in fact, obligated to each other, in a good way. A way which helps every one of us address some of that existential aloneness we're all familiar with; a way that reconnects us, over and over again, with the underlying truth of our togetherness, both with each other as well as with the divine; a way that reminds us once more that we belong, to fields and skies and plains, to life and God and to the universe which hold us all.

And so today, Gill, Poppy, Jacquie, Joan, Steve and Suzanne, we welcome you all as full members of this community. We embrace each of you just as you are. Thank you for being you in all your beauty and originality and quirkiness. You each bring the unique gift of yourselves, a gift which only you can bring, and we are honoured you have chosen to join us. I think I speak on behalf of everyone here when I say we will do our best to support you on your spiritual journey, and to be there for you in times of sorrow and of joy. That we look forward to walking life's path alongside you, encouraging you in your trials, celebrating you in your triumphs, and working together with you to build inclusive spiritual community here. Above all we hope you will feel you belong.

And so now I invite you to come forward in turn to sign our membership book, and to receive a small gift to mark this moment.

## **PRESENTATIONS AND SIGNING OF MEMBERSHIP BOOK**

### **2<sup>nd</sup> HYMN: 167 (P) There is a place I call my own**

There is a place I call my own, where I can stand by the sea,  
and look beyond the things I've known and dream that I might be free.  
Like a bird above the trees, gliding gently on the breeze,  
I wish that all my life I'd be without a care and flying free.

But life is not a distant sky without a cloud, without rain,  
and I can never hope that I can travel on without pain.  
Time goes swiftly on its way; all too soon we've lost today,  
I cannot wait for skies of blue or dream so long that life is through.

So life's a song that I must sing, a gift of love I must share;  
and when I see the joy it brings my spirits soar through the air.



Like the bird up in the sky, life has taught me how to fly.  
For now I know what I can be and now my heart is flying free.

*Words and music by Don Besig © 1979 Shawnee Press, arr. David Dawson.*

**CLOSING WORDS** For Belonging, by John O'Donohue

May you listen to your longing to be free.  
May the frames of your belonging be generous enough for your dreams.  
May you arise each day with a voice of blessing whispering in your heart.  
May you find a harmony between your soul and your life.  
May the sanctuary of your soul never become haunted.  
May you know the eternal longing that lives at the heart of time.  
May there be kindness in your gaze when you look within.  
May you never place walls between the light and yourself.  
May you allow the wild beauty of the invisible world to gather you, mind you, and embrace you in belonging.

**CLOSING MUSIC** 'Home', Boyce Avenue

<https://youtu.be/cUL5Las3I1I>