

## 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2022: PLYMOUTH UNITARIANS

### Rev Kate Whyman – ‘Say what you see’

1. **PRELUDE** – The Harvest Home Suite: Autumn (Thanksgiving Hymn)  
<https://youtu.be/n2gdEzY0pHA>

2. **WELCOME & CHALICE LIGHTING**

Welcome to this morning's service, whether you are here in person or online, and however you are in this moment. We are here to worship – to give thanks and to seek guidance; to be silent and to sing; to celebrate and to offer compassion; to be ourselves and to be in community together. And to turn out attention to the divine.

And as is our custom, let us begin by lighting our chalice as a symbol of our free religious faith. (Do light a candle at home)

The theme for this month is 'being present'.

So may this flame focus our attention on this time, on this special hour.

May we each be fully present here, in this place, now.

3. **PRAYER** St Francis (for the Feast Day of St Francis' Day on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> October)

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:

where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console,

to be understood as to understand,

to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.  
Amen.

4. **HYMN 9 (G)** So simple is the human heart

A little sun, a little rain,  
a soft wind blowing from the west –  
and woods and fields are sweet again,  
and warmth within the mountain's breast.  
So simple is the earth we tread,  
so quick with love and life her frame,  
ten thousand years have dawned and fled,  
and still her magic is the same.

A little love, a little trust,  
a soft impulse, a sudden dream,  
and life as dry as desert dust  
is fresher than a mountain stream.  
So simple is the human heart,  
so ready for new hope and joy;  
ten thousand years have played their part,  
but left it young as girl or boy.

*Music from Iolo Morgannwg, words from Stopford Augustus Brooke*

5. **STORY** The cricket

Once two friends were walking down the sidewalk of a busy city street during rush hour. There was all sorts of noise in the city; car horns honking, feet shuffling, people talking! And amid all this noise, one of the friends turned to the other and said, "I hear a cricket."

"No way," her friend responded. "How could you possibly hear a cricket with all of this noise? You must be imagining it. Besides, I've never seen a cricket in the city."

“No, really, I do hear a cricket. I’ll show you.” She stopped for a moment, then led her friend across the street to a big cement planter with a tree in it. Pushing back some leaves she found a little brown cricket.

“That’s amazing!” said her friend. “You must have super-human hearing. What’s your secret?”

“No, my hearing is just the same as yours. There’s no secret,” the first woman replied. “Watch, I’ll show you.” She reached into her pocket, pulled out some loose change, and threw it on the sidewalk. Amid all the noise of the city, everyone within thirty feet turned their head to see where the sound of the money was coming from. “See,” she said. “It’s all a matter of what you are listening for.”

6. **POEM** Wendell Berry

Once there was a man who filmed his vacation.  
He went flying down the river in his boat  
with his video camera to his eye, making  
a moving picture of the moving river  
upon which his sleek boat moved swiftly  
toward the end of his vacation. He showed  
his vacation to his camera, which pictured it,  
preserving it forever: the river, the trees,  
the sky, the light, the bow of his rushing boat  
behind which he stood with his camera  
preserving his vacation even as he was having it  
so that after he had had it he would still  
have it. It would be there. With a flick  
of a switch, there it would be. But he  
would not be in it. He would never be in it.

7. **HYMN 277 (G) Autumn Ways**

I walk the unfrequented road  
with open eye and ear;

I watch afield the farmer load  
the bounty of the year.

I gather where I did not sow,  
and bind the mystic sheaf,  
the amber air, the river's flow,  
the rustle of the leaf.

A beauty springtime never knew  
haunts all the quiet ways,  
and sweeter shines the landscape through  
its veil of autumn haze.

I face the hills, the stream, the wood,  
and feel with all akin;  
my heart expands: their fortitude  
and peace and joy flow in.

*Music from John Wyeth, har. Henry Leland Clarke, words Frederick Lucian Hosmer*

8. **REFLECTION:** We come to a quiet time of reflection. Words by Richard Gilbert.  
We stop. We pause. We pay attention. We centre ourselves.  
We free ourselves from the compulsion of projects to finish, work to be done, things  
to accomplish.  
We leave ourselves alone for a time.  
We journey deep down into that quiet centre where no voice is heard.  
We live for a brief time on an island of peace.  
We apprehend the world from a quiet centre.  
Here is the centre of the world.

*Silence*

**INTERLUDE:** Richter: Autumn Music 2  
<https://youtu.be/XX4AeD3Y1JY>

## 9. ADDRESS

I have a confession to make. This week I took a speed awareness course. You can probably work out why – yes, it's because I was caught speeding.

I didn't mean to speed. I was on the A38 doing somewhere between 60 and 70, which is usually fine for that road, except that there were roadworks, and I was in a section that actually had an average speed limit of 50. I hadn't noticed it. It was twilight, there were no other cars around at the time, and I simply didn't realise.

That's no excuse, of course. It's no defence at all not to be paying sufficient attention.

So I found myself with 20 others of in a room in a featureless hotel (Futures Inn - I don't recommend it - £4 for a cup of hot chocolate) for 2 hours and 45 minutes, which did feel like a punishment. But actually I quite enjoyed it, and I learned some things – which of course is very much the point.

For eg did you know that if you're on a road with at least 3 streetlights in it, then the speed limit is always 30 (unless it's a motorway or indicated otherwise)? Very few of us in the room knew that.

The reasons people speed are what you might imagine. Mostly it's because they're late and rushing. Or because they're simply not paying attention – their mind is elsewhere, like mine was. The recommendation we were given for training our brains to stay focused on the road was to 'say what you see'. Which means literally describe everything you see as you're driving – in the distance, close by, by the sides of the road, so that you're scanning and observing all the time – consciously. I've tried this a few times since. I did it on the way down here this morning. A running commentary on pedestrians, cyclists, warning signs, traffic lights, people who might pull out, or step into the road. There's a lot going on! Try it the next time you're in a car – or even in a bus. You don't have to speak out loud. But the practice of saying what you see keeps you focused – and it's hard work. I was exhausted by the time I got here.

That morning was quite a contrast to my previous week, which I had spent walking on the coastal path between Dartmouth and Charmouth, which is about 73 miles for those who are interested. There I had been practising a very different kind of

presence. On the path everything is much slower, of course, and it's OK to let your mind wander while walking – in fact it's a great opportunity to think and reflect and just allow your body to fall into the rhythm of putting one foot in front of the other. There's a real freedom and peacefulness in that. But it's also wonderful to bring your mind back too. To be aware of feeling the ground changing under your feet – how spongy grass becomes sharp gravel, while at other times muddy steps morph into stones or slippery rocks. There is a constant adjusting to the shifting surface. And woe betide you if you don't pay attention to the signs. It sounds easy enough to follow a coastal path – just keep the sea on your right, we say, and you can't go wrong. But it's not quite that simple and the signs are often high up on a wall, or partly covered by vegetation, or frustratingly only appear after the turning rather than before it.

And if you pay attention you may spot deer, as we did in an adjacent field. I saw a weasel scuttle across the path ahead. We heard the distinctive song of a rare circl bunting, though we couldn't see it. There were buzzards overhead and I discovered turnstones, pretty little birds that were gathered in flocks near Lyme Regis. And as the weather was so good, it possible to swim in the sea at the end of each day and experience the shock of cold followed by the joy of immersion. Freedom again.

We're always present, aren't we, in this world, in this life. There's nowhere else to be, after all, except here and now. But where we choose to direct our attention is very much up to us – or if we can't always choose, we do have an open invitation to at the very least *notice* what we pay attention to and how.

When we come here I think we are choosing to direct our attention a little differently. We're acknowledging that our concerns, important though they are, exist in a context. And we choose to pay attention to that greater context, which we might call the divine. Or the universe. Or God.

We are saying, I think, look, I'm full of my own concerns, my own long list of things that urgently need doing, and my own particular hopes and fears... we all are. But I'm here because I know that's not all there is. I know that there's more – even if I can't quite understand it, even if I don't quite know what to call it, even if I sometimes doubt it. Even so. There's a bigger picture and I can make some choices about what I

pay attention to in it. I can perhaps train myself to hear the cricket in the city, I can choose to be in fully in my life rather than watching it from the sidelines, and I can lift up my gaze to the road ahead, and can scan the periphery and I can also look at what's right under my nose. Sometimes I can let my mind wander or I can draw it into sharp focus – and to exercise that spiritual muscle of shifting focus.

We are asked, I think, not just to be present, but to be aware of how we are being present. Not to get stuck in one small field of view, but to be alert and curious enough to keep shifting. And keep putting our experience in that larger context and finding the holy within it. Even when the world seems like it's collapsing around our ears. Especially then.

*Close with words by Joyce Rupp – Ambushed by attention*

'No matter how pressed my life is or how fraught with difficulty, I do eventually wake up. My desire to be aware is restored most often through finally stopping, or being stopped, by the sheer magnificence of creation. I have been ambushed by the power of the moon, held captive by fireflies dancing at dusk, bowled over by wobbly white shoots beneath a rock pushing their way out to life, moved to tears by the sight of a small finch falling from the roof. I have lain on the picnic table and gazed at the stars in sheer ecstasy until I thought the only option for my heart was to die at that moment. I have sat still, stood attentively, hiked happily, skied freely, gardened with quiet vigour, and all with the intention of becoming more aware of life around and within me. When I have freed my spirit to become aware, I have never failed to find meaning and hope, gratitude and peace, comfort and encouragement.'

#### 10. **HYMN 242 (G) For the strength of the hills**

For the strength of the hills we bless thee,  
our God, eternal God;  
thou hast made thy people mighty  
by the touch of the mountain sod;  
thou has fixed our ark of refuge  
where the spoiler's feet ne'er trod.  
For the strength of the hills we bless thee,  
our God, eternal God.

We are watchers of a beacon  
whose light can never die,  
we are guardians of an altar  
'mid the silence of the sky.  
The rocks yield founts of courage  
struck forth as by thy rod;  
for the strength of the hills we bless thee,  
our God, eternal God.

For the dark resounding mountains  
where thy still, small voice is heard,  
for the strong pines in the forest,  
which by thy breath are stirred;  
for the storm on whose free pinions  
thy spirit walks abroad,  
for the strength of the hills we bless thee,  
our God, eternal God.

The eagle proudly darteth  
on her quarry from the height,  
and the stag that knows no master  
seeks there his wild delight.  
But we, for thy communion,  
have sought the mountain sod -  
for the strength of the hills we bless thee,  
our God, eternal God.

*Music J Mannin, words Felicia Dorothea Hemans (née Browne)*

11. **CLOSING WORDS** Gretchen Haley

[As we part,]

Do not fail to be surprised

By the catching of your breath



The quickening of your heart  
The fullness of your eyes  
Wide and suddenly awake...  
[The world is] filled with wonder,  
[ready to be] born anew.  
Do not fail to notice.

12. **CLOSING VIDEO** 'Holy as the day is spent', Carrie Newcomer  
<https://youtu.be/pxzO8DyY9e8>