

## 5<sup>th</sup> February 2023 – PLYMOUTH

### The earth awakes – led by Rev Kate Whyman

#### 1. **INTRO MUSIC** Earth song: Frank Ticheli (3'49")

[https://youtu.be/VKm\\_NwFroH4](https://youtu.be/VKm_NwFroH4)

#### 2. **WELCOME/CHALICE LIGHT**

Welcome and good morning to you all. To those of you here in church, and those of you joining us online today.

We gather, as we do each Sunday, to remember who we truly are, to build community together, and open our hearts and minds to the divine as we understand it - to that ultimate mystery of life, of love, of God.

And so it is February already, and the days are noticeably lengthening, while the ground almost but not quite imperceptibly begins to stir with life, and growth as the first tentative shoots appear. From sunset on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> to Sunset on Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> was Imbolc, the pagan celtic festival of fire, hearth and home, which marks the mid-point between the winter solstice and the spring equinox. This Sunday is also known as Seedy Sunday – the time to swap seeds and start chitting potatoes (Joan Frost). I have called this service 'The earth awakes' (but in brackets I'm adding – and so might we).

But let's begin our service, as is our custom, by lighting our chalice as a symbol of our free religious faith. (Do please light one with me if you are able.)

#### *LIGHT CHALICE*

We light this flame today as a symbol of new life flickering into being, and renewed hope springing eternal. Amen

#### 3. **PRAYER** Our first prayer leads us through some of the aspects of praying, with

pauses, and you may like to join me in the refrain 'Help us to pray'

Prayer is an opportunity...

To honestly reflect on our lives

- *help us to pray*

To contemplate our deepest values and concerns

- *help us to pray*

To be still and listen to the person we truly are and the divine spirit within us

- *help us to pray*

To access the well of renewal, healing & forgiveness, which is always available to us

- *help us to pray*

To gain the courage to step beyond our comfort zones and to love more fearlessly

- *help us to pray*

To give thanks for the wondrous gifts we have been given

- *help us to pray*

To share our hopes and concerns with other seekers of the truth

- *help us to pray*

To be silent and empty our minds, and allow ourselves to be filled with love and joy

- *help us to pray*

To let the divine spirit flow through us

- *help us to pray* Amen

The Christian festival of Candlemas coincides with Imbolc. Here is an Anglican prayer for Candlemas

[Divine Spirit] give us the eyes of faith,

to see your presence in the world.

Where fear closes our eyes, help us.

Where tears blind us, heal us.

Where busyness keeps us from noticing, slow us.

Where pride gets in the way, release us.

Set us free to see your love at work in the world.

Amen

4. **FIRST HYMN 181 (P)** Wake now my senses

Wake now my senses, and hear the earth call;  
feel the deep power of being in all;  
keep with the web of creation your vow,  
giving, receiving as love shows us how.

Wake, now, my reason, reach out to the new;  
join with each pilgrim who quests for the true;  
honour the beauty and wisdom of time;  
suffer thy limit, and praise the sublime.

Wake, now, compassion, give heed to the cry;  
voices of suffering, fill the wide sky;  
take as your neighbour both stranger and friend,  
praying and striving their hardship to end.

Wake, now, my conscience, with justice thy guide;  
join with all people whose rights are denied;  
take not for granted a privileged place;  
God's love embraces the whole human race.

Wake, now, my vision of ministry clear;  
brighten my pathway with radiance here;  
mingle my calling with all who would share;  
work toward a planet transformed by our care.

*Music © Barry Brown, words © Tom Mikelson*

5. **STORY** 'The Garden', American Arnold Lobel, author of 'Frog and Toad' stories.

Frog was in his garden. Toad came walking by.

“What a fine garden you have, Frog,” he said.

“Yes,” said Frog. “It is very nice, but it was hard work.”

“I wish I had a garden,” said Toad.

“Here are some flower seeds. Plant them in the ground,” said Frog, “and soon you will have a garden.”

“How soon?” asked Toad

“Quite soon,” said Frog.

Toad ran home. He planted the flower seeds. “Now seeds,” said Toad, “start growing.”

Toad walked up and down a few times. The seeds did not start to grow.

Toad put his head close to the ground and said loudly, “Now seeds, start growing!”

The seeds did not start to grow.

Toad put his head very close to the ground and shouted, “NOW SEEDS, START GROWING!”

Frog came running up the path. “What is all this noise?” he asked.

“My seeds will not grow,” said Toad.

“You are shouting too much,” said Frog. “These poor seeds are afraid to grow.”

“My seeds are afraid to grow?” asked Toad.

“Of course,” said Frog. “Leave them alone for a few days

Let the sun shine on them, let the rain fall on them. Soon your seeds will start to grow.”

That night Toad looked out of his window. “Drat!” said Toad. “My seeds have not started to grow. They must be afraid of the dark.”

Toad went out to his garden with some candles. “I will read the seeds a story,” said Toad. “Then they will not be afraid.” Toad read a long story to his seeds.

All the next day Toad sang songs to his seeds.

And all the next day Toad read poems to his seeds.

And all the next day Toad played music for his seeds.

Toad looked at the ground. The seeds still did not start to grow

“What shall I do?” cried Toad. “These must be the most frightened seeds in the whole world!” Then Toad felt very tired, and he fell asleep.

“Toad, Toad, wake up,” said Frog. “Look at your garden!”

Toad looked at his garden. Little green plants were coming up out of the ground.

“At last,” shouted Toad, “my seeds have stopped being afraid to grow!”

“And now you will have a nice garden too,” said Frog.

“Yes,” said Toad, but you were right, Frog. It was very hard work.

6. **SECOND HYMN 147 (P)** Spirit of earth, root, stone and tree

Spirit of earth, root, stone and tree,  
water of life, flowing in me,  
keeping me stable, nourishing me,  
O fill me with living energy!

*Spirit of nature, healing and free,  
spirit of love, expanding in me,  
spirit of life, breathe deeply in me,  
inspire me with living energy!*

Spirit of love, softly draw near,  
open my heart, lessen my fear,  
sing of compassion, help me to hear,  
O fill me with loving energy!

*Spirit of nature, healing and free,  
spirit of love, expanding in me,  
spirit of life, breathe deeply in me,  
inspire me with living energy!*

Spirit of life, you are my song,  
sing in my soul, all my life long,  
gladden and guide me, keep me from wrong,  
O fill me with sacred energy!

*Spirit of nature, healing and free,  
spirit of love, expanding in me,  
spirit of life, breathe deeply in me,  
inspire me with living energy!*

*Arr David Dawson, words © Lyanne Mitchell*

## 7. **READING** Rumi

Those who don't feel this Love  
pulling them like a river,  
those who don't drink dawn  
like a cup of spring water  
or take sunset like supper,  
those who don't want to change,  
let them sleep.

This Love is beyond the study of theology,  
that old trickery and hypocrisy.  
If you want to improve your mind that way  
sleep on.

I've given up on my brain.  
I've torn the cloth to shreds  
and thrown it away.  
If you're not completely naked  
wrap your beautiful robe of words around you,  
  
and sleep.

## 8. REFLECTION

Of course Rumi must have loved words – he was a prolific poet. But he was also a Sufi mystic who wanted nothing more than to become ever closer to his Beloved, to God, through direct experience. So he also shuns words that merely describe, and debate, and distract from that intimate union with the divine, as trickery and hypocrisy. And in this poem he decries those people who don't feel Divine Love 'pulling them like a river', who don't 'drink dawn like a cup of spring water', or 'take sunset like supper'. His descriptions are visceral, he speaks of his overwhelming , or desire, his thirst and hunger for God who he sees living in and through the beauty of the earth. Of creation. You can't think, or argue your way to God, he says. You can only surrender yourself to God.

We can also surrender ourselves to the divine, however we understand it, through silence, which opens up space for Love and Spirit, peace and at-oneness to enter in and flow through us. Let's take a couple of minutes of quiet time together now, followed by the Taize Chant 'Nunc Dimittis' which is associated with Candlemas, which celebrates the infant Jesus being presented for the first time at the temple 40 days after his birth, and being recognised as the messiah by Simeon and Anna – who were alert and watchful for his arrival.

## 9. SILENCE

## 10. INTERLUDE: 'Nunc dimittis', Taize

<https://youtu.be/XkVoRt73-4U>

## 11. ADDRESS

The earth – creation – is a great teacher and it knows how to pace itself. It understands that there is a time to withdraw and rest, a time to lay low and to mull, to regroup and prepare. And then there is time to stir and emerge – as now. Nothing too obvious yet – just the first signs of some movement and life. A few tentative forays

out of the darkness that signify things are waking up around us. Snowdrops flowering and camellias budding, for example, while much remains, for now, buried in the womb of the earth, still gestating, hidden from view.

And we may feel similarly as though we are just beginning to come out of our shells after the darkest weeks of the year. That maybe we have been hibernating to some extent, going inwards, perhaps finding the cold and the dark difficult. Perhaps there has been a sense of nothing much happening, just a hunkering down and a waiting. And yet, we too have been mulling and re-forming, much of the work being done hidden from our consciousness minds, but going on all the same. And now something new, or maybe something old but subtly altered, can venture forth. Perhaps a different slant, a new angle, a shift in perspective, the sense of a door opening or a pathway revealing itself. (Which reminds me that I saw yesterday that an ancient Roman road has been uncovered in the ongoing Sherford works near Plymouth, and how amazing that such things can come to light after so much time – 2000 years – and how they might add to - or change - what we thought we knew about that era.)

And although I like to think I'm like Frog, I find I do empathise with Toad in Arnold Lobel's story. I also sometimes feel impatient and expect immediate results, and want any seeds I plant, whether real or metaphorical, to come up NOW. But as Kay Millard shared with me this week, her grandfather used to say "there are better ways of catching a rabbit than by running after it shouting." Which made me smile.

Do you have times when you feel stuck and impatient – maybe long fallow periods in which you feel you're stagnating, like nothing is happening and you don't know what to do, or how to change anything? But then, eventually, there is a chink of light. And that can be enough to start a tiny flame, and all the waiting, and wondering and stuck-in-the-mudness turns out to have been preparation after all! In that still and quiet empty time, actually there was loads was going on in the background, it just wasn't yet quite ready to manifest.

I've had this experience myself recently. I've been thinking about my sabbatical and what to do with it. And initially there were lots of possibilities – too many really – but



none of them felt quite right, or I just wasn't ready to commit to anything, in case it would rule out other opportunities that might arise. But then, out of the blue, a friend of a friend recommended going to a tiny island at the northern tip of Orkney called Papa Westray. And I looked it up, and it has a really good hostel, which looks lovely, so I rang them, and they said yes, of course I could stay there for a week, and they have a Fairtrade community shop, and you can get boats out to other islands, and there's a little museum and some Neolithic remains, and lots of birds to watch, and ... well that was it. Suddenly this place – which I'd never even heard of – emerged out of the mulch of uncertainty and announced itself as 'This is it!'

And then everything began to take shape, not easily, not without some stress and false starts and changes of plan, and not everything is sorted out yet, but the mists have cleared and a plan has more-or-less revealed itself. Or that's how it feels, much more than that I've *made* a plan, though of course I've been part of the process. And I think Frog and Toad's story also shows how you can't force or control life, but you can plant seeds and then faithfully wait and see what happens. And it won't necessarily be what you expect, or when you expect it, or even what you thought you wanted, but that won't matter. The garden of your seedling hopes and ideas will nevertheless begin to sprout and take root when they're ready – or at least some of them will.

The parable of the sower also comes to mind. You will remember that some seeds fell on fallow, or rocky ground, and withered. But others fell on fertile soil and flourished. And our spiritual life helps us prepare our minds and hearts to be that fertile ground – for our hopes, for our imaginations, and for the divine spirit to work through. And you will have your own ways of preparing that ground, through your own prayer practice, or meditation, or yoga, or poetry, or silence, or by following the wordless teachings of nature. By letting Love pull you like a river.

And so, what I want to say is that as our world seems to awaken, so might we. And that this is a wonderful time of the year to be alert and watchful, not only to delight in the first signs of spring, which are always a joy, but also notice and to nurture the gentle stirrings of our own reawakening. Of our own spirits. May it be so.

## 12. THIRD HYMN 42 (P) From the light of days remembered

From the light of days remembered burns a beacon bright and clear,  
guiding hands and hearts and spirits into faith set free from fear.  
when the fire of commitment sets our mind and soul ablaze;  
when our hunger and our passion meet to call us on our way;  
when we live with deep assurance of the flame that burns within,  
then our promise finds fulfilment and our future can begin.

From the stories of our living rings a song both brave and free,  
calling pilgrims still to witness to the life of liberty.  
when the fire of commitment sets our mind and soul ablaze;  
when our hunger and our passion meet to call us on our way;  
when we live with deep assurance of the flame that burns within,  
then our promise finds fulfilment and our future can begin.

From the dreams of youthful vision comes a new, prophetic voice,  
which demands a deeper justice built by our courageous choice.  
when the fire of commitment sets our mind and soul ablaze;  
when our hunger and our passion meet to call us on our way;  
when we live with deep assurance of the flame that burns within,  
then our promise finds fulfilment and our future can begin.

*Music Jason Shelton, words Jason Shelton and Mary Katherine Morn, music and words © 2001*

## 13. CLOSING WORDS John O'Donohue

In out-of-the-way places of the heart,  
Where your thoughts never think to wander,  
This beginning has been quietly forming,  
Waiting until you were ready to emerge.

For a long time it has watched your desire,  
Feeling the emptiness growing inside you,

Noticing how you willed yourself on,  
Still unable to leave what you had outgrown.

It watched you play with the seduction of safety  
And the gray promises that sameness whispered,  
Heard the waves of turmoil rise and relent,  
Wondered would you always live like this.

Then the delight, when your courage kindled,  
And out you stepped onto new ground,  
Your eyes young again with energy and dream,  
A path of plenitude opening before you.

Though your destination is not yet clear  
You can trust the promise of this opening;  
Unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning  
That is at one with your life's desire.

Awaken your spirit to adventure;  
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk;  
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm,  
For your soul senses the world that awaits you

*Extinguish chalice*

14. **CLOSING VIDEO** 'Ola Gjeilo - The Lake Isle' ft. Tenebrae

<https://youtu.be/ao11wqXm2d4>