

26th March 2023 – PLYMOUTH

Taking risks – led by Rev Kate Whyman

1. **INTRO MUSIC** Oboe Concerto in C Minor: I. Andante spicato, Marcello. (3'11")
<https://youtu.be/RltgSHRgyks>

2. **WELCOME/CHALICE LIGHT**

Welcome and good morning to you all, here in church, joining online from wherever you may be. Well done for remembering to put your clocks forward and then getting here with an hour's less sleep. Especially those who were here last night celebrating earth hour until gone 10pm. It's like we never left. This is the last service on the theme of vulnerability and today we are 'taking risks' and I'd like to begin with words by William Arthur Ward.

To laugh is to risk appearing a fool,

To weep is to risk appearing sentimental.

To reach out to another is to risk involvement.

To expose feelings is to risk exposing your true self.

To place your ideas and dreams before a crowd is to risk their loss.

To love is to risk not being loved in return.

To live is to risk dying.

To hope is to risk despair.

To try is to risk failure.

But risks must be taken because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing.

The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing, is nothing.

They may avoid suffering and sorrow,

But they cannot learn, feel, change, grow, or live.

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

LIGHT CHALICE

We light this flame this morning for courage to do the new, the different, the difficult, the challenging, the thing we've always wanted to do. For the courage to take a risk.

3. **FIRST 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**

Tamara Lebak

Holy One who has given us the breath of life,
Today may we remember
To breathe deeply
To rest
To take in
To pause before we act...

And then to take in another deep breath poised on the edge
And risk jumping in
Risk taking action
Risk speaking up
Risk using the gifts we have been given
So that at the end of our life we can say with absolute clarity
That no part of our existence was wasted in fear of failure or fear of success.
Hold us;
Prepare us the way to begin to offer the gift of our awakened presence,
Full of love and light today.
These and the prayers of our hearts we lift up now in the silence...
Amen

Let's also take a moment in silence to bring into our hearts and our minds' eye anyone known to us who is unwell, or grieving, anxious or lonely at this time. May our thoughts be with them, may our love ripple out to them, and to all beings known and unknown to us, wherever they may be.

5. **STORY The two seeds**

Two seeds lay side by side in the fertile spring soil. The first seed said, "I want to grow! I want to send my roots deep into the soil beneath me, and thrust my sprouts through the earth's crust above me . . . I want to unfurl my tender buds like banners to announce the arrival of spring. I want to feel the warmth of the sun on my face and the blessing of the morning dew on my petals!" And so it grew.

The second seed said, "I am afraid. If I send my roots into the ground below, I don't know what I will encounter in the dark. If I push my way through the hard soil above me I may damage my delicate sprouts . . . what if I let my buds open and a snail tries to eat them? And if I were to open my blossoms, a small child may pull me from the ground. No, it is much better for me to wait until it is safe." And so it waited.

A hen, that was scratching around in the early spring ground for food, found the waiting seed and promptly ate it.

6. **READING** C.S. Lewis

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable.

Sometimes I take issue with some of the words in hymns, even in Unitarian ones!
See how you feel about this one...

7. **SECOND HYMN** 264 (G) In the spring time of the year

In the spring time of our year
Silver buds of hope appear.
Will they blossom? Will they grow?
We who plant the seed must know.
Will they blossom? Will they grow?
We who plant the seed must know.

Tender shoots thirst for the sun,
Surging with each day begun.
Banish darkness, hate and fear:
Golden fruit will soon appear.
Banish darkness, hate and fear:
Golden fruit will soon appear.

Welcome, children, welcome here,
Silver buds of our late year.
May our harvest still increase
Joys of fellowship and peace.
May our harvest still increase
Joys of fellowship and peace.

8. REFLECTION

Some words by Rev Tet Gallardo

In spring 2019, when the Rev. Tet Gallardo was elected president-executive minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Philippines (UUCP), she made history. Rev. Tet, as she likes to be known, whose election occurred on April 26, Lesbian Visibility Day, is the first out lesbian and first trans president in the church's history. She believes she may be the first out lesbian and first trans cleric in the non-Western world. Someone prepared to take a risk, I'd say...She writes:

We cast not our eyes below, we say to ourselves we are how we came, wounded from struggles, triumphant in our survival, entitled by birthright to belong to this the only humankind there is, saying I am included, I belong, I am here, and I will be and do. I will breathe joy into a desolation, I will breathe peace into conflict, I will breathe life into destruction. I will be the earth I wish to see. I am growth, and hope, and glee.

9. SILENCE

10. INTERLUDE: Recomposed by Max Richter: Vivaldi, The Four Seasons: Spring 1

<https://youtu.be/6T0MFCX9SLI>

11. ADDRESS

Sometimes it's hard to find a suitable story for a theme, but I was surprised by how many stories I found on the subject of risk. There was an abundance of riches, from different traditions. For example, those of you from a biblical background will be familiar with the parable of the talents. Let me remind you... It's about a man who was going away on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. And to one he gave five talents (silver coins), to another two, to another he gave just one, to each according to their ability. Then he went away. The servant who had received five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So, also, the one who had been given two talents made two talents

more. But the servant who had received just the one talent dug a hole in the ground and there he hid his master's money...'

And guess what happened when the man returned from his journey? It was the servants who had traded and invested their money to create more who were rewarded with yet more, whereas the one who buried his in the ground had even that taken away from him.

A talent was a coin, but has come to mean 'a gift', and the message is clear that we are meant to use our gifts, not bury them or keep them to ourselves. And that means taking risks.

Then there is the Sufi saint Shams of Tabriz, who was the great friend of Rumi, who tells the following story about himself. He says:

'I have been considered a misfit since my childhood. No one seemed to understand me. My own father once said to me, *"You are not mad enough to be put in a madhouse, and not withdrawn enough to be put in a monastery. I don't know what to do with you."* (Not much in the way of parenting skills, there ☹)

But Shams replied (somewhat obliquely), *"A duck's egg was once put under a hen. When the egg hatched the duckling walked about with the mother hen until they came to a pond. The duckling went straight into the water. The hen stayed clucking anxiously on land. Now, dear father, (Shams continues) I have walked into the ocean and find in it my home. You can hardly blame me if you choose to stay on the shore."*

And Fr Philip Chircop, a Jesuit Priest and great collector of wisdom stories and the source of this particular tale, adds questions for us to consider:

Are you living up to your original vocation - your deepest call, that is?

Are you living up to your potential or perhaps leading a mediocre, non-committed kind of life?

Are you satisfied with simply staying on the shore or bold enough to risk entering the waters?

What great questions for us to ask ourselves. And not just once, but regularly.

None of these stories are advocating taking big risks, or stupid risks. They are not asking for heroics, or grand gestures, and certainly not for recklessness. Rather they are urging us to recognise and to value what we've been given – what makes us uniquely us – and fulfil our potential, not just for our own benefit, but for the benefit of us all – for the whole – for the universe – indeed for God. We're not meant to cower timidly through life, 'hiding our lights under bushels', we are invited – called even – to throw ourselves into it wholeheartedly. We are asked to take a leap of faith – *without knowing how it will end*. That's what faith is. It isn't 'knowing'. It's believing. And trusting that even if things don't turn out the way you hoped, you're better and the world's better for you having taken the chance.

This involves being brave, but not in the way we often think of it. Not necessarily running into burning buildings, or going to battle, or climbing Everest, though all these things may well require bravery. But bravery is about overcoming *any* fear however small it may seem. It's about seeing an obstacle, a limitation, one of those barriers we talked about last week that hold us back, and plucking up the courage to walk through it anyway. Like walking through the door of a church for the first time. Or speaking to a stranger. Or offering to take on a new role. Or trying a new way of doing or being. Or telling your story, which might be scariest of all.

Just take a moment to consider what risk you have recently taken? How did it feel?

And what risk are you longing to take? What's holding you back?

These are questions to take with you into the rest of your day, your week.

Finally, a reminder that wisdom stories always work on different levels. They speak to us personally about how we might live more fully, or more kindly, or less fearfully, of course. But stories like the parable of the talents and the words of Sufi Saint Shams of Tabriz – they are also talking about the bigger picture. The risk of immersing

ourselves in the mystery, in the oneness, in the ocean, in God. The actual words used may vary, but the principle is the same. They call us towards letting go, and finding union with the divine, which is that place of transcendence and transformation, which is the greatest leap of faith of all.

Blessed be.

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 Kendyl L.R. Gibbons

There is, finally, only one thing required of us: that is, to take life whole, the sunlight and shadows together; to live the life that is given us with courage and humour and truth.

We have such a little moment out of the vastness of time for all our wondering and loving. Therefore let there be no half-heartedness; rather, let the soul be ardent in its pain, in its yearning, in its praise.

Then shall peace enfold our days, and glory shall not fade from our lives.

Extinguish chalice

14. CLOSING VIDEO 'I can see clearly now', Jimmy Cliff

<https://youtu.be/MrHxhQPOO2c>