

7th May 2023 – PLYMOUTH

Time to Blossom, led by Rev Kate Whyman

1. **INTRO MUSIC** Appalachian Spring: XI. Thema & Variations - The Gift to be Simple
3'15"

WELCOME/CHALICE LIGHT

Isaiah 25 verses 1-2

The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, And the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, Even with joy and singing.

Welcome to you all. You are welcome whoever you are, and however you're feeling. You are welcome here today, just as you are.

This is the last service I will lead for a while, and I've chosen the theme 'Time to blossom' because this is May and blossoming is what happens at this time of year in nature, as we can see all around us, and it's wonderful, but also because I hope that I – and also all of you – will take this opportunity of my sabbatical to blossom and flourish, to find new ways to be, and to be together. And maybe today our new King and Queen may also seize the moment to find new ways to serve and to lead and to help to bring our people and nations together.

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 Sharon Wylie

Let this be the place you consider what you've never considered;

Let this be the place you imagine for yourself something new and unthinkable.

May this hour bring dreams of new ways of being in the world...

2. **1st Hymn 267 (G) We sing the roses waiting**

With words written by our American Unitarian, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who espoused the spirituality of nature, the immediate connection with creation as the way to God, available to us all, always. A cornerstone of our Unitarian faith.

We sing of golden mornings,
we sing of sparkling seas,
of fenlands, valleys, mountains,
and stately forest trees.

We sing of flashing sunshine
and life-bestowing rain,
of birds among the branches,
and springtime come again.

We sing the heart courageous,
the youthful, eager mind;
we sing of hopes undaunted,
of friendly ways and kind.

We sing the roses waiting
beneath the deep-piled snow;
we sing, when night is darkest,
The day's returning glow.

Music Alexander Ewing, words from Ralph Waldo Emerson

3. PRAYERS

Divine Spirit, Ground of all being

Let us begin our worship by giving thanks. For all that we have and all that we receive in this our remarkable life. Let us be grateful for our interdependence, which brings us the rewards both of needing others and being needed ourselves; of appreciating and being appreciated; of giving and receiving. And as we gather here may we give thanks for this precious time together to worship both in freedom of conscience and in the warmth of community. Let us take a moment to be grateful.

Let us be awake to ourselves. May we gently acknowledge those moments when we find ourselves being small and defensive, or less kind than we might be, as well as the times we feel able to be generous and warm and more expansive. Let us take this opportunity to be awake to how we are, right now.

In the quiet of this place, may we listen to the divine within us and around us. May we become aware of our breathing, may we pay attention to the sound music of this space, may we be conscious of the touch and the feel of our bodies and the environment that supports us. For a moment let us be still.

And may we know ourselves to be loving. May our love for life spread outwards from our hearts to our friends and loved ones as well as to those less known and unknown to us. And may our love extend further still, to the countryside and the sea that surrounds us, to the whole of our beautiful and suffering world, and to the glorious universe of which we are part. May it be so. Amen.

Today I wanted to share hymns, music, words that suggest a few thoughts to keep in mind over the coming weeks, that may be helpful perhaps.

- 4. STORY** 'Noticing the strawberry' is story from the Zen Buddhist tradition. It is open to different interpretations, one of which is about noticing the joy in the moment, regardless of the difficulties in life. So when situations seem challenging, rather than focusing on the problems, look for the opportunities, those sudden appearances of moments of grace and wonder and possibility that you perhaps wouldn't normally notice.

There was once a man who was travelling across a field when he encountered a tiger. The man fled, but the tiger chased after him. As he came to the edge of a cliff the man managed to grab hold of the root of a wild vine, and he swung himself down over the edge. The tiger sniffed at him from above. Trembling the man looked down

to see whether he could jump to safety. But there, far below, was another tiger waiting to eat him. Only the vine sustained him. Just then, two mice, one white and one black, little by little began to gnaw away at the vine. Things were looking bad for the man. But then he noticed a luscious strawberry near him. Holding on to the vine with one hand, he plucked the strawberry with the other. How sweet it tasted!

5. READING Rev Victoria Safford, UUA minister, about what makes Beloved Community

'The Beloved Community [is] not a goal or destination, and it [is] not any kind of idealistic, Christian utopian dream, but instead a way of being - spiritually, politically, economically, emotionally, intellectually. Beloved Community is an attitude, an orientation of the heart; it's a disciplined understanding of your own relationship to other people, to everyone else on the planet, to every living thing. If you are religious, this is a religious discipline, and it goes by many names. If you are seeking spiritual wholeness, spiritual balance, it is a spiritual discipline. If you are an ethical humanist, it is a deliberate moral stance. It is a daily practice, a spiritual politics [if you will], that requires inclusivity, nonviolence, and the hard discipline of radical hospitality. It requires love, agape.'

Beloved Community is a way of being, an attitude, an orientation of the heart, she says. An understanding of your own relationship to other people, to everyone else on the planet, to every living thing. It is a daily practice that requires inclusivity, nonviolence, and the hard discipline of radical hospitality. It requires love, the kind of love we call 'agape', which is divine love, that transcends our likes and dislikes, love that is transcendent. Whatever happens, then, if you are feeling lost or confused or anxious about your own life or the life of the church, come back to this daily practice, this orientation of the heart, this agape. It is at the core of who we are and what we do.

6. 2nd HYMN 26 (P) Dancing sweet heart

This is a hymn that also reminds us of some of the essentials of what it means to live a spiritual life, a good life, a Unitarian life. Notice the words 'May your kindness be to one another shown'. I hope – I know – that you will take care of one another, because you already do anyway, but this break might be a chance for that inclination to blossom even more fully and more consciously. That whenever you find yourself in a group of people – maybe it's the poetry group, or the café, or the green team, or online – wherever you gather, be aware of not so much the priesthood of all believers, as the pastorhood of all souls. The congregation is the pastor. This is something you can all contribute to, perhaps in a more intentional, deliberate way.

Dancing sweet heart, may your kindness
be to one another shown;
and when human hearts are aching
may true human love be known.
Sweet heart calm us. Sweet heart heal us.
Sweet heart let your love be grown.

Beating small heart in the bodies
of all living things on earth,
pumping life blood through their systems
until death from day of birth.
Small heart cleanse us. Small heart feed us.
Small heart give us joy and mirth.

Pulsing great heart of the cosmos
beating in the depths of space,
keeping suns and planets turning
placing earth in rightful place.
Great heart warm us. Great heart keep us.
Great heart hold us in your grace.

Music by J. Neander, words by Andrew McKean Hill

And that hymn ends, doesn't it, with the crucial reminder that we each exist in a much larger context than merely ourselves – we are each part not only of this community but also of the great pulsing heart of the cosmos in which we are held, always.

Remembering this can help ground us, and bring perspective and expansiveness to our lives and our way of being in community.

7. REFLECTION

Take this time to reflect on why you are here. What do you hope to receive from coming to church. What do you think other people here might hope for? What do you give when you come to church? What contributions do you notice others making to the life of the church? Our community is formed by the twin interactions of giving and receiving. Each tiny interaction is a vital two-way exchange that helps bring us into alignment with the great ebb and flow of the universe. I open to you, you open to me. When we are engaged in giving and receiving then we are flourishing, we are blossoming, and we are creating the conditions in which spirit moves. In fact we *become* spirit moving. We enter sacred relationship with each other and therefore also with the divine.

We have a chant that sums this up. Let's sing: 226

From you I receive, to you I give, together we share, and from this we live.

8. SILENCE

followed by...

9. INTERLUDE: Wherever it may take us, The Stockholm Quartet

<https://youtu.be/RQVJIK9EDMk>

This piece of music is entitled 'Wherever it may take us'. I think I'm going on a journey and so are you as a congregation, and we don't know where it will take us. And that's the point of it, as far as I'm concerned anyway. I have a plan, we have a plan, we have done our preparation, we've tied up our camel, if you like, but still we

don't know. And the call of this piece is two-fold I think. On the one hand it is to be willing to open ourselves to change, and on the other to be willing for whatever happens to be to be OK. To have faith, in other words, that though even if our best laid plans don't work out quite the way we'd hoped, there will be other blessings we hadn't anticipated. There will be more strawberries to discover. I hope you enjoy The Stockholm Quartet 'Wherever it may take us'.

THANK YOU

I don't have an address, but I do have a list of thank yous.

Thanks to all of you who have stepped up:

Thank you...

To the committee: To Poppy for taking on the role of Chair, to Elizabeth for taking on H&S, to Sheila and Maz who continue their work as Secretary and Treasurer. They need all the help and support and appreciation you can give them.

To the service leaders who have come forward: Sheila, Poppy, Edgar, the Poetry Group, Gav, Mary and Ann who will all be appearing up here in that order, I think, sometimes leading their own services, sometimes holding space for you to bring your own contributions. At my induction back in 2014 Bill Darlison encouraged you to come to my services and laugh at my jokes (!) So I encourage you now to please support them, come to their services, join in, and bring your offerings when you're invited to do so. And laugh at their jokes.

To the those who've taken the time and trouble to learn various aspects of the technology: Sheila, Poppy, Elizabeth, Joan W on Zoom and Yana who will all be helping, and to Steve for continuing to be such a stalwart and John W who you don't see but who edits our YouTube videos and makes our hymn videos, and also for Myron who has offered support too when needed.

To those of you who've already signed up – or will sign up very soon, I'm sure – to help with flowers, with tea and coffee, and with setting up the church on Sunday mornings, with gardening and all the other small but vital jobs that help keep a church community alive and flourishing.

To Linda for keeping the café open with Rob, and for printing out newsletters for us too.

To all of you who have taken on responsibilities of any kind – thank you. Many go unseen.

If it takes a village to raise a child, as the saying goes, then it definitely takes a whole congregation to build and nurture a community.

Ann Kader said something nice the other day, about our church being a very Christian church, not in the sense of its theology, but in the way that we try to be with each other, that we do strive to be warm, welcoming, accepting, forgiving, thankful, appreciative, inclusive. It matters so much more *how* we are, I think, than what we believe. Those values we hold of treating all people with dignity and respect, of recognising the divine in everyone and everything, and our caring for the earth – these are foundational values. They matter. They are precious. Remember them well.

And finally, remember this: you are loved, you matter, and you belong to this amazing, terrible, wonderful, broken, beautiful, chaotic and astonishing world. You have the chance every day to bring healing, and love, and light into this life we share, in your own inimitable way, and to be your own unique and brilliant self.

And finally, all shall be well, all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.

I will miss you. But I'll see you again soon.

It's time for us all to blossom.

Blessed be.

10. **THIRD HYMN 186 (P)** We are travellers on a journey

How wonderful this world of thine,
a fragment of a fiery sun,
how lovely and how small,
where all things serve thy great design,
where life's adventure is begun
in God, the life of all.

The smallest seed in secret grows,
and thrusting upward answers soon
the bidding of the light;
the bud unfurls into a rose;
the wings within the whole cocoon
are perfected for flight.

The migrant bird in winter fled,
shall come again with spring, and build
in this same shady tree;
by secret wisdom surely led,
homeward across the clover field
hurries the honey bee.

O thou, whose greater gifts are ours -
a conscious will, a thinking mind,
a heart to worship thee -
O take these strange unfolding powers,
and teach us through thy Word to find
the life more full and free.

Words by Frederick Pratt Green, music by David Dawson

11. CLOSING WORDS John O'Donohue

May all that is unforgiven in you,

Be released.

May your fears yield

Their deepest tranquilities.

May all that is unlived in you,

Blossom into a future,

Graced with love.

12. CLOSING MUSIC Blooming Heather

<https://youtu.be/IVycY5jlyAo>