

**Service on 'Count Your Blessings' July 2nd 2023 by Ann Kader**

**Opening Music: 'Powder your face with Sunshine'**

[https://youtube.com/watch?v=\\_iVC-eVoiT8&feature=share](https://youtube.com/watch?v=_iVC-eVoiT8&feature=share)

**Chalice lighting and opening words: 'Welcome to the Gathering' by Peter Adams**

" In uncertainty we come and we become certain.  
In fear we come and become safe.  
In mistrust we come and discover trust.  
Alone we come and we become one.

In our openness we receive blessings.  
In offering ourselves we receive each other.  
In our gentleness together we become powerful.

In our gathering, life comes to know itself.  
In our activities life creates itself.  
In our singing life praises itself.  
In our dancing life celebrates itself.  
In our silence life speaks to us.  
In our presence, spirit comes to us.

In our prayers we create the future.  
In our longing for holiness, we become holy.  
Seeking mysteries, mysteries appear beside us.

As we dance, we see ourselves in each others' eyes.  
As we sing, we hear love in each others' hearts.  
As we listen, we hear the wisdom of our own voices.

**1st hymn purple no 24 'Come Sing a Song with me'.**

**Words of Doestoevsky:**

Love all God's creation, the whole and every grain of sand in it.  
Love every leaf, every ray of God's light.  
Love the animals, love the plants, love everything.  
If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things.  
Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better everyday.  
And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all embracing love.

### **Prayers:**

**This is a prayer by Sarah Tinker - Unitarian minister Kensington and it's from the book 'Fragments of Holiness'**

"Open our eyes so we may recognise that of God in all those we meet...

Open our ears to hear other People's life stories and, through hearing, understand them better.

Open our mouths to speak words of kindness and friendship to strangers....

Open our arms to help tear down the barriers of fear that divide one group from another

Open our minds to think bigger, braver thoughts and go beyond our narrow prejudices....

Open our hearts so love May flow through us, creating this world as one community which rejoices in People's diversity and encourages the inclusion of all."

**Also from 'Fragments of Holiness', a prayer by the late Unitarian minister A. Powell Davies:**

"O God, from whom we ask so much and in our hearts expect so little, show us that most of what we need is ours already, if only we would take it..... Remind us often, O God, how much of our lives we are not living."

**2nd hymn purple book no. 147 'Spirit of Earth , Stone and Tree'**

**'The Secret to counting your blessings': A Jewish Story By Rabbi Evan**

Counting our blessings is not something that always comes naturally. Often it's easier to count our problems.

We are late on a project. Our house needs work. If, God forbid, we have a health problem or lose our job, it can consume us.

Focussing on our problems, we sometimes overlook our blessings. As a father, I know I do this. I complain that my kids do not go to sleep on time much more than I express gratitude for being blessed with happy kids.

Sometimes we need a little push to remind us of our blessings.

That is the lesson of a beautiful Yiddish story about a man who lived in a one room hut with his mother, his wife and six children. The hut, as we can imagine, was filled with crying and quarrelling. It was noisy and hard to live. One day, when he felt he couldn't

take anymore, the man went to his rabbi.

“Rabbi” he said “ things are bad and getting worse. I live in a one bedroom house with my mother, wife and six children. It is too crowded and noisy. Help me find some peace Rabbi, I’ll do whatever you say.

The Rabbi thought for a moment. “ Do you have a chicken?” he asked. “ yes of course I do,” the man replied. “ Good” said the Rabbi “ take the chicken and bring it into your home”. “ Well ok” said the man, though he was a bit surprised.

Imagine what the house sounded like now. In addition to the man, his mother, his wife and six children, there was a chicken clucking incessantly. Frustrated, the man returned to the Rabbi. “ Rabbi, I did what you said, and it’s much worse than before. Help me please.”

“Tell me,” the rabbi asked, “ do you have a goat?”

“ yes, I do” the man replied. “ Excellent “ said the Rabbi. “ Go home and bring him in to live with you”.

A couple of days later, the hut was even worse. There was crying, quarrelling, clucking and a goat pushing and butting everyone with its horns.

The man returned to the Rabbi. To his shock, the rabbi then instructed him to bring his cow into the hut. This rabbi must be crazy, the man thought. But he did as he was instructed. The house became utter chaos.

When he returned to the rabbi for the fourth time, the man screamed. “ Help me rabbi, the end of the world has come. There is no room in my house even to breathe”.

The rabbi listened and said “ Go home now, my friend and let the animals out of your hut”

The man rushed home and did just that.

That night was the sweetest and most relaxing night he ever had. Every member of the family slept comfortably and peacefully.

When he returned to the rabbi, the man said “ Rabbi, you have made life sweet for me. With just my family in the hut, it’s so quiet, so roomy, so peaceful....what a blessing”

### **We turn once again to prayer.**

This is a slightly adapted prayer by Spiritual teacher Mirabai Starr which will be followed by a short silence leading into a Hebrew hymn based in psalm 118

Beloved one

Mother heart

Please come flowing into every open window in our souls right now,

As we call to you.

Infuse every cell of our bodies with your fierce and tender Mother wisdom.

Give us strength to speak truth to power in these fractured times.

Give us the tenderness and humility to listen deeply to those to those we are conditioned to otherwise.

And remind us again and again when we forget that we belong to each other,

And we belong to you. Amen

### **Reflective music - Adonai Liv'Lo Ira**

[https://youtube.com/watch?v=veqScwrX\\_wE&feature=share](https://youtube.com/watch?v=veqScwrX_wE&feature=share)

### **'Be Grateful and Count your blessings' by Devika**

Bozo, Mrs. Smith's pet Labrador, looked out of the window to watch Sally, a street dog, play with her friends. Just then, Mrs. Smith called Bozo for breakfast. He thought, "Oh no, milk again!" Same old breakfast every day. He sadly licked the bowl and thought, "I want to eat something tasty, but how?"

Mr. and Mrs. Smith went out to the market. It was a golden chance for Bozo to sneak out for a while. Looking at the blue sky, hearing the birds chirp, and feeling the cool breeze, he walked happily.

He was enjoying himself a lot and did not realise two hours had passed. Suddenly, he heard the clouds thunder. Soon, it started raining. Bozo got scared and wanted to run back home. But, he realised he had lost his way.

The tensed Bozo looked for help. Sally, from under a garbage bin, called him, "hey you, come wait here until the rain stops." Bozo, runs and takes shelter.

"Thank you. My name is Bozo. What is yours?"

"My name is Sally. Do you stay with Mr and Mrs Smith?"

"Yes, how do you know?"

"It's such a beautiful house. I have always wondered what it looks like inside."

“ There’s nothing so great. I have lived there ever since and seen nothing new. You are so lucky. You can go anywhere, anytime and eat anything you feel like. I get only milk every day (sighs)”.

Sally (surprisingly): “ milk! Wow, that’s wonderful! I have to search for food every day. Sometimes I do not get anything to eat?”

“ it’s so boring, eating the same food daily.“

“ at least, you do get a healthy food to eat,” said Sally.

The rain stopped. Bozo walked back home, thinking about what Sally said and he felt happy.

### **3rd hymn purple book no 21- ‘Come and find the quiet centre’**

#### **Address**

I thought after all the tragedies that have happened in the world recently and apart from my own health problems, I’ve had some personal problems as I’m sure some of you have.

So I thought maybe I should visit this service again which I first did in 2019 . I’ve kept some of it the same and added other things as life has moved on.

I think it’s time to look at all the good things in our lives.

Sometimes our lives seem challenging and we feel that the grass is greener on the other side. I think the hot weather has been lovely but tiring but my Taiwanese friend has said it has been 40 degrees there.

Do you get annoyed when someone says to you “:you should count your blessings”. I know I do .

I remember a time when I really did count my blessings. This was a couple of years ago. I came in quite early to get the cafe ready, I knew Christina, my partner in crime would be in soon and what suddenly happened was - the electrics went off. Talk about panic. I am the most impractical person you could meet. Strange how me being so impractical, absolutely loves hardware stores. Oh all those things, the smell of them. When I’m in East London, I have to go to one called The In and Out Shop. It’s tacky and messy and lovely and what a blessing when Rob bought and lent me his new book, even before he has read it - it’s called Rivets, Trivets and Galvanised buckets and it’s about life in the village hardware store. Oh bliss. It’s cheered me up no end. Anyway I digress.

Well, I pulled stuff out the cupboard, pressed loads of buttons on the electricity board or whatever it's called.

I thought what would we do if the urn or the kettles were not working.

No cafe.

Anyway , as luck would have it , Myron wandered in and sorted it in a few minutes. So that day I did count my blessings.

I have had some very bad times in my life, but now I'm grateful that I experienced these as I became more empathetic to other people going through difficult situations.

Memories can be beautiful blessings, when I was about nine, my mum, dad and myself used to wander around an empty city of London ( my sister was a lot older so she was off doing other things. There was a fruit stall down one of the streets. We didn't have much but this day, my dad had saved some of his money to buy me what seemed a huge peach. I'd never seen a peach and I bit in it and the juice just ran down my chin. I can still taste it 70 years later and I can revisit that memory whenever I want.

A blessing indeed.

If we think about it, our life is full of blessings but we hardly recognise this as we lead such busy lives, even if some of us are retired.

A lot of you love listening to birdsong. Aren't you lucky that you can hear when many people live in a silent world. Do you count your blessings when you see a rainbow or a beautiful sunset. Probably you just take them for granted but others may never be able to see these.

We have enough to eat and drink, but many others, even in this city don't.

I can remember being in Cyprus one year and water had to be shipped from Greece. It was only for a day or so because there had been a drought. We were lucky as there was still bottled water or drinks such as coke, but it was quite scary. Think of all the countries that suffer regularly through droughts.

Most of us have friends and/or family or someone who cares about us but many people have never experienced love and care.

The great Puritan Matthew Henry was once robbed of his wallet. After pondering the incident, he wrote the following words in his diary:

I thank thee first because I was never robbed before; second because although they took my purse, they did not take my life; third, because they took my all, it was not much and fourth it was I who was robbed and not I who robbed.

He obviously didn't like being robbed but he realised he was alive so he counted his blessings.

Every life is a picture with shadows and light, the glass can be half empty and half full, the one does not negate the other as you can see from what Matthew Henry said.

I read a book back along called " If cats disappeared from the World".

It's about a young man who is terminally ill, the devil tempts him by saying he could live one more day if he made something disappear from the world. He lets go of phones, the movies, then he has his cat.

Can he let cats disappear to give him yet another day.

When thinking about giving up the movies, he thinks about the film Limelight.

In the film, the little tramp , played by Charlie Chaplin tries to stop a ballet dancer, whose hopes have been dashed, from committing suicide. He tells the dancer.

This is what he says:

Life is a beautiful thing, magnificent thing, even to a jellyfish"

The young man then realises:

" he was right, even jellyfish are here for a reason, they have meaning. And if that's the case, then movies and music, coffee and tea and pretty much everything must have some kind of meaning too"

Once you start down this path, then even all those unnecessary things turn out to be important for some reason or another. If you are trying to separate the countless, meaningless things in the world from everything else, you'll eventually have to make a judgement about human beings and our very existence.

He goes on to say " in his case, all the movies he's seen and the movies from them gave his life meaning and helped make him who he was."

To live means: to cry, to shout, to love, to do silly things, to feel sadness and joy, to even experience frightening tings.

Beautiful songs, beautiful scenery, us singing here in church.

Be thankful and count your blessings for all these which are part of us.

Just love your life, the dark and the light and be grateful for it.

I keep a jar with scraps of paper on which over the year I write what I'm grateful for, so when I'm low I pick one or two out to realise I have so much.

Otis Moss , a minister says:

Even in the darkest night, when we see no light at all, the light is still there. The sun is still shining over Earth even when our side of Earth rotates away from it. The stars still shine above us not no matter ... how thick the clouds above our heads and that we need love to restore us.

He says a lot more than this but thinking back to Christel's dance - he also tells his congregation to dance through the dark.

I end with a few lines from Lee Anne Rimes Song - I hope you dance.

“ I hope you never lose your sense of wonder

I hope you still feel small when you stand beside the ocean

May you never take one single breath for granted

When you get the choice to sit it out or dance

I hope you dance”

**4th hymn purple book no 193 – ‘We laugh, we cry’.**

### **Benediction**

May we take with us some of the joy of this gathering.

May we go forward in hope.

May we live rightly, in peace with one another

And may we know the blessing of God until we gather here again.

Amen

**Closing music - Try a little kindness by Montana**

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=ZvQXzI9CSDA&feature=share>