

## Congregational Service (Simple Gifts) Sunday 18th June 2023

Co-ordinated by Gav Howell

Opening music - 'Dawn' by Ola Gjeilo

[https://youtu.be/0\\_F76RY7BGU](https://youtu.be/0_F76RY7BGU)

Opening words, by Rev Dr Linda Hart- spoken by Gav

"We enter into this time and this place to join our hearts and minds together.

We come to this place: the doors open, the heat comes on, biscuits are laid, the water heats, and you all come.

What is it that we come here seeking? Many things, too many to mention them all.

Yet, it is likely that some common longings draw us to be with one another:

To remember what is most important in life.

To be challenged to live more truly, more deeply, to live with integrity and kindness and with hope and love.

To feel the company of those who seek a common path, To be renewed in our faith in the promise of this life.

To be strengthened and to find the courage to continue to do what we must do, day after day, world without end.

Even if your longings are different than these, you are welcome here. Even if you do not have the strength and the courage to pass along, you are welcome here.

You are welcome in your grief and your joy to be within this circle of companions. We gather here. It is good to be together."

### **Chalice Lighting**

#### **Welcome and Introduction of service theme**

"And so we are here. Good morning and welcome to Plymouth Unitarians, an inclusive and open minded spiritual community here in the heart of the city. I'm a regular attender here . Our theme today is 'Simple Gifts' and over the next hour or so, we'll share how this phrase speaks to us.

**1<sup>st</sup> Hymn:** 133 in 'Hymns for living' (aka the Green Book) 'How can I keep from singing'

#### **1<sup>st</sup> invitation for congregation to read/share**

**From Joan Wilkinson**, who joins our Services via Zoom. Gav read Joan's contribution, her response to a piece from Emerson's 'Wild Dreams - Meditations for every day of the year'. this was about people offering as gifts their own personal contributions, often something they made themselves, rather than merely buying an item from a shop.

Joan wrote: "My sister, who died some years ago, was very talented with her hands, and she always made me something special for my Birthday and Christmas. When she visited from her home in Canada, she would bring her delicious homemade chocolate.

Unlike my sister I'm not talented with my hands, but towards the end of her life, when we went on Skype each week, she would want me to play the violin for her. I'm not really much good at all, but she was just happy to hear me play some simple pieces. I think it took us back to our childhood, when she was drawing or painting and I scraped away on the fiddle.

The important thing was that she appreciated the gift from her little sister, as I had been in awe of her talents. This giving and receiving by each of us was a giving of ourselves, whatever our gifts were, that they came from who we were made us very happy indeed.”

**David's Contribution:** “The Wizard of Is” by Tom Rapp, 1969 of ‘Pearls Before Swine’, a folk rock group of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

‘The Wizard of Is’

Everything you see all around you  
Will roll away on wheels of tomorrow  
Down misty willow rivers of because  
Into the land of was.

You know you only have to be my friend.  
The world outside can teach and astound you  
Build a wall it will only surround you  
Walls were only built to fall, my friend  
They'll never shelter anyone you've been.

Just enjoy the spell that you're under  
Look around, sunshine's around you  
It has always had to hide  
But its just been waiting there inside you.

Be strong as love, soft as flowers  
Walk like the wind walks when it walks through flowers  
My friend, you don't have to hold back the sea  
You only have to be, oh, be my friend.

**Thelma's contribution:** ‘Smile’ a poem by Spike Milligan

Smiling is infectious,  
you catch it like the flu,  
When someone smiled at me today,  
I started smiling too.

I passed around the corner  
and someone saw my grin.  
When he smiled I realized  
I'd passed it on to him.

I thought about that smile,  
then I realized its worth.  
A single smile, just like mine  
could travel round the earth.

So, if you feel a smile begin,  
don't leave it undetected.  
Let's start an epidemic quick,  
and get the world infected!

**Steve's contribution:** 'Simple Gifts' – its really nice that the church can open up to its congregation in a way like this. I think it is a gift which isn't displayed by many churches or people in this day and age. I appreciate the church doing this, that's a gift.

As my anecdote, I want to share this. I saw a married couple and the man bent down to the woman, gave her a little peck on the cheek and said, "You alright, Love?" That's all it took – it cheered her up and it cheered me up, to see it as well. The simple gift of showing his wife love, also passed it on to me. I saw love too. The simple gift of giving love is contagious.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Hymn:** 151 in the Green hymn book – 'Be Thou My Vision'

**2<sup>nd</sup> invitation for congregation to read/share**

**Steve F's contribution, read by Gav:**

Gav, " I have a real treat for you. Our dear friend Steve, who holds our Zoom space, offers his reflection, and its beautiful"

'A hug is a simple gift' by Steve.

I love hugs.

As primates, we are wired to express affection through hugging. Even chimps do it.

I regularly hug several church members every week.

They're what are termed hello hugs.

This type of hug is usually employed when greeting a friend you have not seen for a while.

It's the standard and most common type of non-intimate hug, usually lasting just a few seconds and can be performed using one arm or two.

I didn't get many hugs growing up. Not sure if it was a generation thing, but my parents just weren't huggers.

Many people consider hugging a feminine act and this is part of the reason why it is so acceptable for women to hug other women. I think this is why my parents generation didn't hug their boys.

My dogs however loved hugs or acted like they did. I still love hugging animals, mainly dogs and a few friendly cats.

However, be aware that not all animals and people like a hug, or want one from you.

This could be due to a variety of reasons, including their space issues, how well they know you, their age, gender, sexuality, even religion where physical contact can be a no no.

I worked for my current employer years ago in Bolton near Manchester consolodating newly trained staff.

Many of the staff were Muslim women, and even though I got on well with them and they knew they were safe with me, I was conscious not to have any physical contact, even a handshake.

As with humour, you have to know your hugging audience as getting it wrong can cause offence and embarrassment to both parties.

There is actually a hug etiquette. Always respect another person's space. Always ask permission, unless you're on intimate terms as there's a huge difference between a friendly hug and a passionate embrace.

Never assume that it is okay to hug someone, even if you have hugged the person many times before.

Be aware that in some countries showing affection in public is frowned upon, and can get you into diplomatic hot water.

The hug that I find hilarious to watch is called the pound hug. This is performed between two heterosexual men, and is the combination of a handshake and a one armed hug. The two men aggressively pound each other on the back whilst embracing, emphasising their masculinity and complete heterosexuality. These hugs last about a tenth of a second and no waists or crotches come within a mile of each other. You'll laugh the next time you see a pound hug, as you'll remember this.

I work hybrid, two days office and three at home. There's a few friends in the office I hug when I see them, but you REALLY need to know your audience in the workplace as you could end up in HR with a sexual harassment complaint filed against you.

Shaking hands is more acceptable in the workplace and less likely to make someone feel uncomfortable.

I definitely don't recommend hugging a manager or a customer!!

When we hug, our bodies release feel good hormones called oxytocin, dopamine, and serotonin, sometimes called happy hormones.

These create feelings of happiness, relaxation, improved mood, and lower levels of depression.

According to a study, 25 million people in the UK reported feeling lonely or disconnected during the pandemic. We thrive on physical connection, with hugging being one of the most powerful ways to show support and love."

**Gav:** There you go, from the Man behind the screen!

**Sheila's Contribution:** I found this while looking on the internet for worship material for another service. It seems to fit in here and I hope you enjoy it:

This was Posted on the internet by AB Basir Basirat, who I believe is a vet

'The Three Guests'

"Once in a village, a woman saw three old men sitting outside her house. They were sitting there for quite a while. The woman went outside and said,

'I don't know you, but I saw that you are sitting here for long time, you must be hungry. Please come in and have something to eat.'

One of them asked,

'Is the man of the house at home ?'

She replied, 'No.'

'Then we cannot come in.', said the men.

The woman went inside. In the evening when her husband came, she told him about the people sitting outside and all that had happened. He told his wife to go and ask those men to come in and have some food.

She went out and told them, 'My husband is home. He is inviting you all. Please come inside and have some food with us.'

They replied,

'We do not go inside a house together.'

When she asked why, one of the old men explained. Pointing to one of his friends, he said :

'His name is Wealth. If he goes with you, your home will be filled with wealth always.'

Then pointing to another old man he said : 'He is Success. If he goes with you, you will always be successful in any endeavour you start.'

He then introduced himself as Love. 'If I go with you, then your home will be filled with love always.'

Then he told her to go in and discuss with her husband which one of them they want in their home.

Her husband was overjoyed hearing about it and said, 'Let's invite Wealth. Let him come and fill our home with wealth.'

His wife disagreed and said, 'Why don't we invite Success?'

Their daughter-in-law was listening to this. She came to them and suggested, 'Wouldn't it be better if we invite Love in our home ? Then our home will be filled with love forever.' The husband and wife agreed. The woman again went out and said, 'Which one of you is Love ? Please come in and be our guest.'

Love got up and started walking toward the house. Just then the other two also got up and started following him. The woman asked, 'You said you can not all can come together. I invited only Love. Why are you all coming in?'

The old men replied, 'If you had invited Wealth or Success then the other two would have stayed outside, but since you invite Love, wherever he goes, we go with him.' Wherever there is Love, Wealth and Success will follow."

**Gill's Contribution:** "I loved Sheila's story. During Lockdown I was coming along Citadel Road, 3 bags of shopping –trot, trot, and coming towards me was an Asian family, Mum, Dad and a child in a pushchair who was facing the father. I stepped into the road to give them space in the pandemic, to make sure they had plenty of room and mum and dad said 'thank you' and I said 'Your'e welcome' . As I passed, this dear little girl put her head round the hood of the pushchair and she waved to me, and she waved to me until they turned the corner and she made my day, and she stil makes my day when I think of that beaming little face. I nearly wore my arm out waving back. That made me very happy in a bad time"

**Delphine's contribution:** "Its all so beautiful, I can't follow it really! You feel as though you're being hugged by everybody, its really lovely. Gill talked about what good things come to you in a bad or worrying time. I'd prepared this, by Wendell Berry, my true hero. A farmer in Kentucky, he's nearly 90 now. He wrote against the Vietnam War back in the day. He gave up being a writer in New York because he felt his place was where he grew up, and that's where he went back to. He spent the rest of his life looking at the broken land, because that's what the European settlers had done to it, and healing it. And able to be himself in his place and being alive were the simple gifts, the best we have.

This poem is about a father lying awake, worrying about what the world is like, the world into which he's brought children.

The Peace of Wild Things By Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

*Wendell Berry, "The Peace of Wild Things" from The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry. Copyright © 1998. Published and reprinted by arrangement with Counterpoint Press.*

**3<sup>rd</sup> Hymn: 146 Green– 'True Simplicity'**

**Prayer: Read by Gav:**

**"Here to love"** Written by Rev Cliff Reed:

We are here to love –  
to love each other,  
to love our frail, wounded selves,  
to love our broken world,  
and to love its suffering people.  
Let us worship so that  
Love will flow.

**Silent reflection**

followed by music: 'In memory of a honey bee' <https://youtu.be/B7ee-iW48Ik>

### ***Christel's Contribution;***

I was listening very carefully to what Steve had to say about Hugging. Well, I had a very sad experience, like never before in my life, and that was when I was visiting my Tunisian husband's family. They live in the mountains in Tunisia. He said his mother had never shown him any affection. I thought, how can that be? He said 'Watch' He went up to her and gave her a hug and the woman stood there, stiff as a lamp post, her hands by her side, no reaction whatsoever! That scene has never left me. The coldness of that woman towards her own child, eventually left an indelible mark on him, made him mentally sick. A Hug is a blessing, if done in the right way, at the right moment.

Anyway, we were talking about blessings. . . the theme of our service is today is gifts. Yes, I'm sure we all have gifts, some can paint, some cook, make beautiful cakes, crochet, gardening. Painting – ooh yes, I can paint my face, the patio, I can paint walls, many people can do that.

Best of all, I love dancing. Give me the right music and I can dance. Dancing is a gift. \its very beneficial, exercises the mind and the body. If you've got problems, you concentrate on the dancing and they disappear, (they may come back later) It gets the circulation going, very good for the brain, which should be stirred up.

Many people have talents, which makes me think of God the Creator. He created us, apparently in his own image, according to the Bible. Our character, not so much our looks. He's given us all a gene, a talent, we all have that inside us and we should make use of it.

### ***Poppy's Contribution:***

When Gav said today's theme was Simple Gifts there was just one thing that came straight to mind and it was this (holds up a plastic card). This is my Cornish Library Card – a simple gift which gives so much. Anyone can use a library whether you have a fixed abode or not and it isn't just books. It is community events, information, connection, access to the internet etc. I certainly wouldn't have read half the books I have if it wasn't for the library – libraries mean a lot to me.

I am greedy as I actually have two things to share with you, one is a quote and one is a poem. Here goes, the first is a poem by American author, Libba Bray: -

"The library card is a passport to wonders and miracles, glimpses into other lives, religions, experiences, the hopes and dreams and strivings of all human beings, and it is this passport that opens our eyes and hearts to the world beyond our front doors, that is one of our best hopes against tyranny, xenophobia, hopelessness, despair, anarchy, and ignorance."

The poem is by American poet Alberto Rios called 'Don't go into the library[': -

The library is dangerous—  
Don't go in. If you do

You know what will happen.  
It's like a pet store or a bakery—

Every single time you'll come out of there  
Holding something in your arms.

Those novels with their big eyes.  
And those no-nonsense, all muscle

Greyhounds and Dobermans,  
All non-fiction and business,

Cuddly when they're young,  
But then the first page is turned.

The doughnut scent of it all, knowledge,  
The aroma of coffee being made

In all those books, something for everyone,  
The deli offerings of civilization itself.

The library is the book of books,  
Its concrete and wood and glass covers

Keeping within them the very big,  
Very long story of everything.

The library is dangerous, full  
Of answers. If you go inside,

You may not come out  
The same person who went in.

Thank you 😊

**David's second contribution:** As well as the poem David read earlier, he also contributed this:  
"Hello again. This is a book called 'Radiant Sutra's", an ancient Hindu text translated not so long ago. Its theme is Presence and how it comes to us.

'Holiness permeates everywhere.

Senses cannot grasp it,

Riches cannot represent it.

It is totally free; free to appear as F, free to be Beyond Form.

Heart and Body and Mind in union attend to the Unimagineable.

In the intercourse of Unknowable and Known, an Awakening will be born in you, as you join  
That Reality which you already are – Being"

**4<sup>th</sup> Hymn:** 44 from the 'Sing your Faith' (Purple Book) 'Give Thanks for Life'



Christel's Tunisian dance: to music On CD (unfortunately, the poor sound quality on recording meant this item had to be cut from final version)

**Closing words: spoken by Gav:** Thanks to all of you for contributing. Thank you!

**Closing music/video** - Over the Rainbow/Simple Gifts

(Piano/Cello Cover) - The Piano Guys [https://youtu.be/jzF\\_y039slk](https://youtu.be/jzF_y039slk)