

## 15<sup>th</sup> October – Come, come, whoever you are

Led by Rev Kate Whyman

### 1. **INTRO MUSIC** 'Come', Shimsai (5'40")

<https://youtu.be/d0a8cC1OihM?si=tMnJFKrnccN7Z1Zg>

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

Welcome to you all, those of you here in the church and all of you joining us online this morning. You are welcome here, just as you are. In fact the title of today's service is 'Come, come, whoever you are', based on words by the Sufi Saint, Jallaludin Rumi. And rather than just me saying 'welcome' I'm going to invite you to sing it so we can all join in with the welcoming. You might like to imagine you're singing this to each other.

223 (P) Come, whoever you are

Come, come, whoever you are  
wanderer, worshipper, lover of leaving  
Ours is no caravan of despair.  
Come, yet again, come.

And now, as is our custom, let us begin this time of words, music and contemplation by lighting our chalice as a symbol of our free religious faith.

(Do please light one with me if you are able to do so.)

#### *LIGHT CHALICE*

May this flame burn brightly, drawing us in, holding us together, in this sacred space and time. Whoever you are, and wherever you have come from, it says to each one of us, 'you are welcome here'.

### 3. PRAYER

Divine Spirit

We come here for different reasons

Perhaps to find something to hang on to in the storm

or to share our experiences of what it feels like to be us;

to be seen, and heard, and valued

and to find friendship and a sense of belonging.

Or to work together for a better world.

And to connect with something greater that is still, and simple, and silent.

That might anchor us, and shine a light, and guide us along the path, if we allow it.

God of all

Help us find our way.

May we be what we are meant to be, and do what we are meant to do, no more and no less. And to know that it is good.

Amen

Today we will be celebrating our willingness to welcome all, our desire to be an open church that encourages each of us to be ourselves as we also learn how to allow others to be themselves too. It's this skill, this balancing act, of being ourselves and helping others be themselves too that is part of our spiritual practice here.

As part of this celebration we will be welcoming Linda into full membership of our congregation. And this morning there will also be space for quiet reflection and candle-lighting for the people of Israel and Gaza, and indeed for all of us.

*But first a story about seeing the Divine in each other*

### 4. 1<sup>st</sup> Hymn 43 Gather the spirit

Gather the spirit, harvest the power.  
Our sep'rate fires will kindle one flame.  
Witness the mystery of this hour.  
Our trials in this light appear all the same.

Gather in peace, gather in thanks.  
Gather in sympathy now and then.  
Gather in hope, compassion and strength.  
Gather to celebrate once again.

Gather the spirit of heart and mind.  
Seeds for the sowing are laid in store.  
Nurtured in love and conscience refined,  
with body and spirit united once more.

Gather in peace, gather in thanks.  
Gather in sympathy now and then.  
Gather in hope, compassion and strength.  
Gather to celebrate once again.

Gather the spirit growing in all,  
drawn by the moon and fed by the sun.  
Winter to spring, and summer to fall,  
the chorus of life resounding as one.

Gather in peace, gather in thanks.  
Gather in sympathy now and then.  
Gather in hope, compassion and strength.  
Gather to celebrate once again

*Words and music © Jim Scott*

5. **STORY** The Rabbi's Gift – from Doorways to the Soul

Once there was a monastery that had fallen upon hard times. Some of the younger monks had left in dissatisfaction, and no new men were joining. There were but a handful of monks and their leader, the abbot, remaining. They began fighting among themselves, each blaming the hard times on the faults and failings of the other.

One day a travelling rabbi stopped at the monastery for a night's rest. He ate, and prayed alongside the other monks. The next day, as the rabbi prepared to continue on his journey, the abbot drew him aside. He told him of the problems of the monastery and asked him for his observations and for some advice to share with the other monks.

Upon hearing the abbot's woes, the rabbi was quiet for some time.

'Can't you give me some advice to help my monastery to thrive again?' the abbot begged.

'Your monks will not listen to my advice, the rabbi replied. But perhaps they would benefit from an observation. The Messiah dwells among you here at the monastery.'

'One of us?' asked the abbot astonished, 'Which one?'

'Oh, that I cannot say,' he answered. 'Share this with your brothers and in time it will be revealed to you.'

The abbot thanked him and sent him on his way. He then gathered the monks together, who listened in amazement to the news.

'One of us! But who?' each one asked out loud. Then to themselves they wondered,

'It couldn't be brother Robert – or could it?'

'Surely not Brother Henry, but there are times when...'

'Not the youngest, well, maybe...'

'The abbot himself!'

'Could it be me?'

Soon things began to change at the monastery as each began to see the Messiah in the other and to hear the Messiah's words in each word spoken.

Soon people began to wander back to the monastery, and in time new men joined and the monastery thrived.

## STORY

*And a children's story about learning to put up with each other's foibles*

It was the coldest winter ever. Many animals died because of the cold. The porcupines, realizing the situation, decided to group together to keep warm. This way they covered and protected themselves; but the quills of each one wounded their closest companions.

After awhile, they decided to distance themselves one from the other and they began to die, alone and frozen. So they had to make a choice: either accept the quills of their companions or disappear from the Earth.

Wisely, they decided to go back to being together. They learned to live with the little wounds caused by the close relationship with their companions in order to receive the warmth that came from the others. This way they were able to survive.

Source | Jacky Ford

### 6. **2nd HYMN** 68 (P) I dream of a church

I dream of a church that joins in with God's laughing  
as she rocks in her rapture, enjoying her art:  
she's glad of her world, in its risking and growing:  
'tis the child she has borne and holds close to her heart.

I dream of a church that joins in with God's weeping  
as she crouches, weighed down by the sorrow she sees:  
she cried for the hostile, the cold and no-hoping,  
for she bears in herself our despair and dis-ease.

I dream of a church that joins in with God's dancing

as she moves like the wind and the wave and the fire:  
a church that can pick up its skirts, pirouetting,  
with the steps that can signal God's deepest desire.

I dream of a church that joins in with God's loving  
as she bends to embrace the unlovely and lost,  
a church that can free, by its sharing and daring,  
the imprisoned and poor, and then shoulder the cost.

God, make us a church that joins in with your living,  
as you cherish and challenge, rein in and release,  
a church that is winsome, impassioned, inspiring;  
lioness of your justice and lamb of your peace.

*Traditional melody, arr. David Dawson, words © Kate Compston*

## **7. READING** Henri Nouen

"Hospitality means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy.

Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place.

It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines.

It is not to lead our neighbour into a corner where there are no alternatives left, but to open a wide spectrum of options for choice and commitment.

It is not an educated intimidation with good books, good stories, and good works, but the liberation of fearful hearts so that words can find roots and bear ample fruit"

I didn't want to ignore the situation in the Middle East, but neither do I wish to say anything about it. There is enough being said already, and I don't wish to add further words or opinions. In any case they are inadequate. Sometimes it feels the most helpful thing to do in the midst of tragedy is simply to 'be with', weep with, and pray with, quietly and compassionately. So I invite you to light a candle if you would like to, in the silence and the music, which is entitled Shalom, salaam, which are the Hebrew and Arabic words for peace. You might like to hold the dead, the grieving, the frightened, the suffering in the light and love of your hearts.

## **8. REFLECTION/SILENCE – Use candles video**

## **9. INTERLUDE 'Shalom, salaam', Fantuzzi**

[https://youtu.be/il5BI51eRdU?si=cx5yf\\_BKf0UO7av0](https://youtu.be/il5BI51eRdU?si=cx5yf_BKf0UO7av0)

## **10. ADDRESS**

Each one of us brings our special gifts to this place. No single one of us is the messiah – but then again, each of us is, in our own way, especially if we're given the chance to be. The Rabbi's Gift was simply to point that out, in his subtle way, to the abbot, and lo and behold when the monks began to consider each other in this new light, and started to treat each other with kindness and curiosity and respect, then each of them began to blossom, and flourish, and grow into themselves. And miraculously, so did the monastery itself.

When we see the possibility in each other – rather than dwell on the irritations – miracles can happen. We begin a beneficent circle in which we each shine a little more brightly, and then a little more brightly still.

I love the idea of porcupines cuddling up together to keep warm. Ouch! But then we can all be a bit spikey sometimes, can't we? A little bit cross, a little bit put out, a little

bit miffed, or hurt or defensive. And protective of our vulnerabilities, which is only natural. But of course being prickly and defensive can keep us apart, and well, in the end, it can be a cold and lonely world out there by yourself. Surely it's worth putting up with the odd annoyance – and hoping others put up with our own funny little ways too. Then we can support each other in the tough times.

And I really love the piece on hospitality by Henri Nouwen. It calls us into greatness, I think, it asks us to be the very best of ourselves, and to see the very best in others.

He begins: "Hospitality means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy'. What does he meant by a 'free' space?, do you think? Is it a space where anything goes?

I was pondering this when I came across these words just yesterday in a book called 'Spilling the light'...

To be free, you must embrace  
the breadth of your own existence  
without apology, even if they try to take  
it from you. You must know, not that you  
can do whatever you want; you are not  
a kudzu vine, eating entire hillsides for  
the purpose of feeding your own lush life. You  
must know instead, that inside you are entire  
Universes – milky blue, magenta, and gold \_  
expanding. But to actually, be free, you must  
know and you must fight for the entire  
Universes inside of everyone else.  
Being free is not a license, but  
A promise.

I thought that was a wonderful image. I think it maybe what Nouwen means by a free space. Not somewhere where we can do whatever we like, regardless of the needs



of others. But a space in which we know that inside each of us is an entire universe.  
Wow!

And then the rest follows...

*Of course* we wouldn't want to bring them over to 'our side', we want to offer people freedom to explore their own spirituality

*Of course* we wouldn't want to lead anyone into a corner where there are no alternatives, we want to open a wide spectrum of possibilities.

And *of course* we don't wish to intimidate anyone with good books, good stories, and good works. What we too yearn for is the liberation of fearful hearts and fulfilling of potential.

People often ask me what it means to be a Unitarian. Well Henri Nouwen was a Catholic, but I'd definitely sign up to all that.

What I want for you all is what I want for myself. Freedom to explore our own personal relationships with the divine, in community with others. Not to do whatever we want regardless of the needs of others – that extraordinary respect the monks developed for each other is crucial. But rather to be fully and wonderfully ourselves, as God wishes us to be.

This vision of hospitality – of welcome – of saying 'come, come whoever you are – is not, then, just about greeting people at the door, or inviting them in, or talking to them and showing an interest in them, or offering coffee, although it's all of those things, of course. But it's also so much more. It is, I believe, about creating a space in which anyone coming in can share their gifts and flourish and grow, and that will inevitably help us *all* flourish and grow too.

**Welcoming Linda into membership**

***Read Linda's card***

So Linda, today we thank you for coming and for bringing your unique gifts – and foibles - to this congregation. We welcome you just as you are into what I hope will be a ‘free space’ in which you can flourish in your own unique way, and grow in your spiritual life, and come to know yourself more fully and, in so doing, contribute to the flourishing and growth of others.

We believe you are a child of the universe, a child of God, and we hope you will see those things in each one of us too.

Flowers, book, badge

Signing of book

### **11. THIRD HYMN 192 (G) A new community**

We would be one as now we join in singing  
our hymn of love, to pledge ourselves anew  
to that high cause of greater understanding  
of who we are, and what in us is true.

We would be one in building for tomorrow  
a greater world that we have known today;  
we would be one in searching for that meaning  
which binds our hearts and points us on our way.

We would be one in living for each other,  
with love and justice strive to make all free;  
as one, we pledge ourselves to greater service,  
to show the world a new community.

*Music by Joseph Barnby, words from Samuel Anthony Wright*

**12. CLOSING WORDS** Barbara Cheatham

Before we gather here again--

may each of us bring happiness into another's life;

may we each be surprised by the gifts that surround us;

may each of us be enlivened by constant curiosity --

And may we remain together in spirit

til the hour we meet again.

**13. CLOSING MUSIC** 'Always be humble and kind', Tim McGraw

<https://youtu.be/awzNHuGqoMc?si=LID7EaAaMJlqiemU>