

**Service 8th Oct - do you think there's an afterlife?  
Led by Ann Kader**

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Opening music - It is well with my soul by Darren Jacobus 4.46 mins  
Opening Words and chalice lighting by Celia Cartwright

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This is our meeting house for worship, here we are a community connected by ties of faith and fellowship.

May the diversity of our beliefs be a blessing to share;

That all May grow in harmony with the divine.

1st hymn purple book no 186 - We are travellers on a journey

reading by Rumi

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If anyone were to tell a baby in the womb " Outside is an ordered world.

A pleasant earth, wide and open, brimming with thousands of delights and many things to eat;

Mountains and seas and plains, fragrant orchards,

Gardens and fertile fields.

A lofty sky alight with sunshine, moonbeams and innumerable stars;

It's wonders are beyond description: why do you stay drinking blood in this cramped cell.

The baby, being what it is, would turn away in utter disbelief.

It has never experienced anything beyond the womb, and cannot visualise such a place.

So, in this world, when the saints tell of a world beyond.

Nobody listens to them. Attachment to this physical world is a huge barrier.

Just as the baby's craving for the blood that nourishes it in it's mother's womb

Prevented it from perceiving the external world, since it knows no food but blood.

Prayer

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From Benedictus - John O Donahue

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May the Angels in their beauty bless you.

May they turn towards you streams of blessing.

May the Angel of Awakening stir your heart  
To come alive to the eternal within,  
To all the invitations that quietly surround you.  
May the Angel of Healing turn your wounds  
Into sources of refreshment.

May the Angel of the Imagination enable you  
To stand on the true thresholds  
At ease with your ambivalence  
And drawn in new directions  
Through the glow of your contradictions.

May the Angel of Compassion open your eyes  
To the unseen suffering around you

May the Angel of Wildness disturb the places  
Where life is domesticated and safe.  
Take you to the territories of true otherness  
Where all that is awkward in you  
Can fall into its own rhythm.

#### Alternative Lord's Prayer by Sue Woolley

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Spirit of life and love, here and everywhere  
May we be aware of your presence in our lives.  
May our world be blessed.  
May our daily needs be met.  
And may our shortcomings be forgiven.  
As we forgive those of others.  
Give us the strength to resist wrong doing,  
The inspiration and guidance to do right.  
And the wisdom to know the difference.  
We are your hands in the world;  
Help us to grow.  
May we have compassion for all living beings,  
And receive whatever life brings  
With courage and trust  
Amen

2nd hymn purple book no 212- Where my free spirit onwards leads

## Reading - Water bugs and Dragonflies

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Down below the surface of a quiet pond lived a little colony of water bugs. They were a happy colony, living far away from the sun. For many months they were busy, scurrying over the soft mud on the bottom of the pond.

They did notice that every once in a while one of their colony seemed to lose interest in going about with it's friends. Clinging to the stem of a pond lily, it gradually moved out of sight and was seen no more.

"Look!" said one of the water bugs to another. " one of our colony is climbing up the lily stalk. Where do you suppose she is going?"

Up, up, up it went slowly. Even as they watched, the water disappeared from sight. It's friends waited and waited but it didn't return.

"That's funny!" said one water bug to another.

"Wasn't she happy here? asked a second water bug.

"Where do you suppose she went?" wondered a third.

No one had an answer. They were greatly puzzled.

Finally, one of the water bugs, a leader in the colony, gathered it's friends together. "I have an idea. The next one of us who climbs up the lily stalk must promise to come back and tell us where he or she went and why."

"We promise" they said solemnly.

One spring day, not long after, the very water bug who had suggested the plan found himself climbing up the lily stalk. Up, up, up, he went. Before he knew what was happening, he had broken through the surface of the water, and fallen onto the broad, green lily pad above.

When he awoke, he looked about with surprise. He couldn't believe what he saw. A startling change had come to his old body. His movement revealed four silver wings and a long tail. Even as he struggled, he felt an impulse to move his wings. The warmth of the sun soon dried the moisture from the new body. He moved his wings again and suddenly found himself up above the water. He had become a dragonfly.

Swooping and dipping in great curves, he flew through the air. He felt exhilarated in the new atmosphere.

By and by, the new dragonfly lighted happily on a lily pad to rest. Then it was that he chanced to look below to the bottom of the pond. Why, he was right above his old friends, the water bugs! There they were, scurrying about, just as he had been doing some time before.

Then the dragonfly remembered the promise:

"The next one of us who climbs up the lily stalk will come back and tell us where he or she went and why."

Without thinking, the dragonfly darted down. He hit the surface of the water and bounced away. Now that he was a dragonfly, he could no longer go into the water.

"I can't return!" he said in dismay. "At least I tried, but I can't keep my promise. Even if I could go back, not one of the bugs would know me in my new body. I guess I'll just have to wait until they become dragonflies too. Then they'll understand what happened to me, and where I went."

And the dragonfly winged off happily into its wonderful new world of sun and air.

2nd reading - Book Jesus the Healer by White Eagle

This will lead into a short silence, candles for people that have passed followed by reflective music.

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Treasures of Heaven

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You are living an outer life in a physical world. But side by side with this outer life there is an inner life. This inner life is a world of thought, and thought promotes action. Now, as a man thinks, so he becomes - he is creating his inner world. From that inner world come his speech and action. When the time comes for the spirit to finally leave the body, it goes into what may be described as an inner world, which has been created by thought. Thought is the impetus, is the seed of action. So obviously, if you look for a heaven world that is beautiful and peaceful, you must try to attain that world of beauty and peace within yourself, within your soul, in your thoughts; because this is the world that one day awaits you.

Short silence/ candles

Reflective music - Silence by Bliss 5.36

3rd hymn purple book no 199 - Weaver God creator

Do you wonder what happens when your body dies, do you think about life after. I've always been someone who believes in continuation of life after death or as Jesus says- eternal life. I think I've always known in my heart or soul since I was small that there was more after death since, despite the fact that all my family were atheists.

In this life we live several little lives so we have several little deaths eg. we may move several times, our bodies are different throughout our life, so this just carries on in a different place and a change of body, just like the dragonfly in the story earlier.

I first saw spirit when I was 11. It was in the early hours of the morning. I woke suddenly and saw my cousin standing at the end of my bed looking so peaceful. I thought why is she standing at the end of my bed saying nothing. I found out the next day that it was the time she had died giving birth to a beautiful baby girl.

Unfortunately, when I told my mum, she hit me all round the room, obviously thinking I'd made it up and she was probably scared.

Since then I've seen, smelled or heard spirit. Sometimes there is just a particular silence. These don't happen to me on a regular basis but at different times in my life.

You may say it's imagination, but what is imagination. Some of you have had these

experiences too, and told me about them, but we often keep quiet about them or we don't recognise them.

In fact even this week, a friend's relative passed at a relatively young age. He was in hospital in a different town to her. She had been feeling that strange, tangible silence around the time of his death.

Mark Travers who writes about world psychology, states that a survey done in 2021 found that in the United States 83% of adults believed in some form of an afterlife including individuals who did not identify with any particular religion.

Just think of all those things we know are there but we can't see them. Think of a ship in the sound which we see clearly and as it sails it gets smaller and smaller, we can't see it anymore, but it gets to its destination and those in that country see it as we had originally seen it.

Who would have thought years ago that we would have hand held small mobile phones that we could see and talk to loved ones in far off countries or even our church friends being able to join a service on zoom. We would never have believed that could happen. I joined a spiritualist church when I was about 50 after going to a mind/body fair in the local library. I have to say at that point I didn't know they existed, but I felt I'd come home. Like all trades, there were good and bad mediums but I did have some very meaningful messages, not just for me but for me to pass on.

I came to this church after moving from London. The sign said "everyone welcome" . I walked in and said, "can I come here, I'm a spiritualist" and I've been here ever since. About a year after coming to this church, I joined the Unitarian Psychical Society which has had many famous names looking into psychical research. It has a very good website if you want to look further.

Sir Alistair Hardy was a Unitarian and a member of the Psychical Society. He is now well known for setting up the Religious Experience Research Centre in Oxford. The archives are now based at The University of Wales Trinity St. David in Lampeter.

Sir Alistair Hardy was unusual for his time, he was a marine biologist and believed that science and spirit were linked. This was at a time when science was meant to end thoughts about the supernatural.

A very learned man Michael from our congregation who worked at Plymouth Marine Labs on plankton, he first told me about the Alistair Hardy archives.

In this centre there are thousands of experiences recorded from near death experiences , premonitions, spirit messages, near death experiences etc. You can now read these online.

Mark Fox, a researcher writes in the Psychical Studies journal Spring 2023.

In his piece titled Many Voices; Sacred Spaces, he writes about testimonies while researching at the archives.

"One is titled: A Scent of Violets."

The account that follows describes an experience of a Sister in a neo natal Theatre, some fifty or so years ago. She was 23 at the time, and had just been listening to the words of

a surgeon who had been holding a dead baby's heart while trying to explain what it was - a failed operation to repair a Fallots Tetralogy - that had led to such a tragic and untimely death. In her own words, the Sister describes what happened next:

Suddenly the room and theatre were permeated with the scent of violets and an almost tangible sense of peace. The surgeon, a hard bitten Australian, comments on the scent. No source could be found.

Since this time I have felt no pain at any death. I am sure of the presence of - who knows? Love, peace, God?

I have no personal fear of death despite threats of hell and purgatory in my life prior to this event.

I am married, have three children, work as a Sister in a neo natal Theatre. In fact, a hard headed professional woman. The peace is still in me.

I have never discussed this "experience" with anyone other than the staff present at the time. All had smelled the perfume. This has always puzzled me, not obsessed me, but has upheld faith in love."

I too, have had that strong smell of woodbines when my dad is around me.

I quote from the Unitarian Society for Psychical Studies leaflet which celebrated 50 years of the Society

"Unitarianism is a liberal and creed less faith, rooted in the Christian tradition, yet on a spiritual adventure in search of truth. Unitarians are a faith community, for those on a spiritual journey, for those who believe there is still more to be discovered in religion. They believe in religious exploration - through the intellect and through the spirit. Unitarians are known for their liberal attitudes to spirituality and embrace many different world views. If anything, this is the strength of a Unitarian approach to psychical research. Lack of dogma means that psychic experiences are approached in a truly sceptical way - with an open mind, following where the evidence leads. And if you hold different views to other members, then that is fine, in fact it is positively encouraged.

Mark Travers, who I quoted above also concludes in his writing

"our beliefs about life after death can impact on our well being, our commitment to environmental sustainability, our identities and even our treatment of others. Our views on the afterlife are not only confined to the spiritual realm, but also play an integral role in shaping the way we navigate the complexities of existence on earth. After life beliefs may offer solace, provoke reflection or challenge conventional wisdom, shaping our perspectives and life experiences in ways that we are only beginning to understand.

I don't know about all that, but I do know I am comforted by my belief in an afterlife and as the great man Shakespeare said in Hamlet "There are more things in heaven and earth, than are dreamt of in your philosophy ."

Final hymn purple book no 167 - There is a place I call my own

Benediction - John o Donahue

May you live this day

Compassionate of heart

Clear in word

Gracious in awareness

Courageous in thought

Generous in love

May it be so

Closing music - My wish - Rascal Flatts