Service on Prayer in all its forms -8th October 2023

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Opening music - the prayer instrumental 2.53 by Matthew Todd

Welcome and opening words by Rev. Wayne Arnason

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We light our chalice to remind ourselves of our highest aspirations, to inspire us to bring our gifts of love and service to the altar of humanity. May we know once again that we are not isolated beings, but connected, in mystery and miracle, to the universe and to each other.

1st hymn green book no.26 Spirit Divine attend our prayer.

Short story - anon

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An old farmer was standing motionless in the middle of his hayfield one late afternoon in October as the colours of the sunset were spreading across the sky. Some tourists happened to be driving by and saw him as he took three steps to his right and stood there, motionless , facing west. Their curiosity was aroused so they slowed the car down to watch him further. After another minute, the farmer took three more steps to the right and stood there, facing west. Wondering what kind of ritual they might have chanced upon, the husband could no longer contain himself and rolled down the car window, shouting to the farmer,

“ hello there, could you tell us what you’re doing?”

Whereupon the farmer slowly turned round and in his own loquacious way replied “ Noticin!”

Reading by Caroline

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Barely the day started and it’s already six in the evening.

Barely arrived on Monday and it’s already Friday.

- and the month is nearly over

- and the year is almost over.

- and already 40, 50 or 60 years of our lives have passed.

- and we realise that we lost our parents, friends

And we realise it’s too late to go back

So ….. Let’s try, despite everything, to enjoy the remaining time

Let’s keep looking for activities that we like

Let’s put some colour in the grey

Let’s smile at the little things that put balm in our hearts.

And despite everything, we must continue to enjoy with serenity

This time we have left.

Let’s try to eliminate the afters …..

I’m doing it after

I’ll say after

I’ll think about it after

We leave everything for later

Like “ after” is ours.

Because what we don’t understand is that

Afterwards, the coffee gets cold

Afterwards, priorities change

Afterwards, the charm is broken,

Afterwards, health passes

Afterwards, the kids grow up

Afterwards, parents get old

Afterwards,promises are forgotten

Afterwards,the day becomes the night

Afterwards life ends

And then it’s often too late

So… let’s leave nothing for later

Because still waiting see you later, we can lose the best moments,

The best experiences, the best friends, the best family.

The day is today.. the moment is now

We are no longer at the age where we can afford to postpone what needs to be done right away.l

Green book no. 32 Kum ba Yah ( Come by here)

Prayers from Christel in Arabic and Hebrew

Prayer in song - I think most people like hymns - some really touch the soul. One of the favourites, here at this church and Unitarian churches around the world is Spirit of Life written by Carolyn McDade.

She was born in 1935 and raised in Louisiana to a Southern Baptist family rooted in a rural America of farming communities and small towns. Her mother was a teacher and a homemaker. Her father worked with farmers through the department of Agriculture. It meant they moved around a lot.She lived in a series of small towns, which was hard because she was shy. It made it hard to make friends, but her sister was an important source of support and companionship.

One day something remarkable happened. It was the day a piano was delivered to her house. She did not come from a singing family, so the piano’s arrival was something of a mystery. She didn’t ask why, she just began playing with the piano . The sounds and songs she made up were a quiet source of joy. Her parents didn’t force her to play or practice, nor did they complain about her playing. Time at the piano became precious, a gateway to another world, a space to explore both music and herself.

She loved to play the piano and sing. There was a freedom in doing this that she didn’t experience in church. It was as if she was creating her own religion.

When she finished high school and began attending a small state college to become a teacher, she stopped singing and playing piano. For some reason she thought they were childish things and had to be put away in order to become an adult.

Her life was affected growing up during World War 11, which the United States entered when she was six. Seeing the horror of the newsreels and war movies, she became a peace activist. Her views were further shaped by the racism and economic justice that she witnessed growing up in the South.

She and her husband discovered Unitarian Universalism when they began attending the UU church in Austin, Texas. When they moved to Boston in the mid 1960’s, they began attending the Arlington st church, where she also worked for a time as a secretary. A student minister there was planning a worship service for women and asked her to help select the music for the service. Frustrated , she couldn’t find many songs written by women, she stayed up late one night and sang what she wanted to say to her three daughters, who were asleep upstairs. That experience became the song , “ Come daughter”.

Years later, in the 1980’s she became involved in opposing US policies in Central America. One evening after attending a meeting on Central American solidarity at a college, she finally arrived home exhausted and discouraged. Walking through her house in the dark,she arrived at her piano and started playing. Slowly a tune and words emerged. Looking back she realised it wasn’t composed, it was prayed into being. She doesn’t even call it a song, she calls it a prayer.

Let’s now sing this beautiful prayer and as is our custom , we will sing it twice. Purple hymn book no.148

Prayer by Suzanne which will be followed by a short silence and reflective music - signed video of Make me a Channel of Your Peace ( by Hazel)

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A prayer from me to you

Can also be sent from you

Reaching me with warmth and understanding,

You cannot see or even touch

But feel the Grace throughout

A prayer is sent in many languages

It travels near and far,

With good intent and reassurance

Sends messages to support sudden times

Full of sorrow or maybe happy too

Whatever is in the prayer,

I am sure it will reassure you

Address

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Do you find it hard to pray? Does your busy mind distract you? Do you even believe in God? Can prayer in all its forms, change our lives?

Mary Oliver, in a single sentence teaches us how to begin to pray:

It doesn’t have to be the blue iris, it could be a few weeds in a vacant lot, or a few small stones, just pay attention, then patch a few words together and don’t try to make them elaborate, this isn’t a contest but the doorway into thanks and a silence, in which another voice may speak.”:

Perhaps by doing this you will hear the voice of the Divine Spirit.

I’ve always prayed but a while back I struggled , I hadn’t been great physically , mentally or emotionally. I was recovering from a major operation which was taking longer than I thought, two friends died , one very recently and my sister died. So my prayers became a rant at my God .

A friend ( not a Unitarian) bought me a Unitarian Universalist

prayer bracelet to cheer me up. I’m wearing it today.She knew all through the years I had used beads to pray - rosary beads, Muslim prayer beads and a few years back we even made some here at church as part of a prayer course.

Gradually , over time while meditating and praying on each bead I came back to prayer.

Slowly through small things like looking at an insect or playing with my twin great grandsons or just reading a paragraph in a book which just stuck in my mind. Through these I realised my prayers were being heard, maybe not being answered always the way I wanted but maybe in a better, different way.

Prayer has many forms, the traditional form, a hymn, a piece of music, a poem, a walk in the Park and more. We start to see the Holy everywhere and we may feel deep emotion welling up inside us.

Prayer says Katherine Norris , “ is not asking for what you think you want, but asking to be changed in ways you can’t imagine.”

Prayer can help us on our journey ( sometimes called our soul journey), sometimes it is a struggle to pray , to get through the dark to the light .

Prayer is often asking for something but a simple thank you prayer is often enough.

We didn’t have prayer in my home when I was little as my mum, dad and sister didn’t believe in God but I loved those prayers we learnt by rote at school and I bet like me, you all still remember them.

Rev. Gary Smith - A Unitarian Universalist minister asks of God

“ Are you an eternal parent or are we eternal partners?” This was during his time of growing and questioning. He did grow in his understanding and found a prayer that was a transformational moment for him.

Rheinhold Niebuhr said:

“ prayer does not change things, prayer changes people, and people change things…..Prayer is not hearing voices, prayer is acquiring a voice.”

Rabbi Daniel Aronsen, sees prayer as helping us change and improve. It gives us the space and time to look deep within ourselves and to look far beyond ourselves toward the realm of mystery.

He says , we enter the prayer space with whatever thought and feelings we bring - concern, gratitude, worry, joy, despair and sadness and if we’ve been intentional and present in our prayer,

we leave that space having taken a step toward putting everything in order.

People pray in every religion , maybe in different ways and I believe the world needs our prayers.

Thank you for listening.

Our next hymn is green book no. 151 Be thou my vision .

 I didn’t choose this , it was chosen for me. I dropped the book on the floor and it opened at this hymn. Two little prayers fell out as well. One I will read for the Benediction.

 Benediction

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Based on psalm 145.18

Dear God

I don’t know you

But being here is making me think

I want to discover more about you

Help me to sense you near me

Not just when I’m in the peace

And beauty I feel and see here

But in my everyday life

Closing music - Josh Groben - The prayer