

**Opening Music:** 'River Flows in you', by Yirumi (piano)  
Youtube <https://youtu.be/NPBCbTZWnq0>

**Welcome:** Good morning and welcome. All are welcome here, whether you are a regular attender, or a new-comer, whether you join us in person or via Zoom. Whatever you bring in your heart: whether you come in sadness, or joy or out of curiosity, what-ever your faith or none, you are welcome!

I hope you enjoyed our opening music. It was 'River flows in you' by Yirumi, appropriate for the theme of our service today, which is 'We are Nature', offered by our church Green Team. This Thursday, 30<sup>th</sup> November, COP28, the 28th annual United Nations climate meeting opens in Dubai, and runs until 12<sup>th</sup> December. COP stands for "Conference of the Parties", where the "parties" are the countries that signed up to the original UN climate agreement in 1992. Governments will discuss how to limit and prepare for future climate change. These meetings will surely involve much serious debate, for this is a serious subject, affecting not only human beings, but **every** living being on our planet - the only planet where we know for sure, that life in all its rich and incredible diversity, exists. This is some-thing to be celebrated! We don't know how much celebration will be at COP28, so this morning, **we** are celebrating all the richness, abundance and interconnected-ness of life. Call it 'Nature' if you like, and we humans **are** part of Nature. We will celebrate in song and story, poetry and prayer. We offer our service to you with our love.

First, we start as is our custom, by lighting our chalice flame as a symbol of our free religious faith, and if you are at home, and have a candle, you may like to light it now.

**Chalice Lighting:** Marianne to light flame, and then read:

**'Litany of celebration' by Rev.Cliff Read**

We celebrate the essential unity of the world –  
May there be an end to systems of distrust and enmity.

We celebrate the glorious diversity of the human species –  
May there be an end to injustice and prejudice.

We celebrate the web of life enfolding this good earth-  
May there be an end to all that destroys our global home.

We celebrate and give thanks for the resources of our planet –  
May we put an end to hunger, poverty and wasteful husbandry.

We celebrate the divine Spirit, at work within us and sustaining our one world  
May the one world vision be ours,

(P A U S E for a count of 20 seconds)

May we celebrate our unity here together. May what is true for us now be true for more and more people everywhere - until the whole world knows it is one.

**1<sup>st</sup> Hymn: Green no 280 'Morning has broken'**

Morning has broken  
Like the first morning,  
Blackbird has spoken

Like the first bird,  
 Praise for the singing!  
 Praise for the morning!  
 Praise for them springing  
 Fresh from the Word!

Sweet the rain's new fall,  
 Sunlit from heaven,  
 Like the first dewfall  
 On the first grass.  
 Praise for the sweetness  
 Of the wet garden,  
 Sprung in completeness  
 Where his feet pass.

Mine is the sunlight!  
 Mine is the morning  
 Born of the one light  
 Eden saw play!  
 Praise with elation,  
 Praise every morning,  
 God's re-creation  
 Of the new day!

**Prayers:**

A Prayer for today;

Let us pause and hold in our thoughts & prayers those of our own church community, their loved ones, all in our city, and in the wider world, who are experiencing sadness, worry and difficult times, whatever the causes.

We hold in our thoughts & prayers all whose lives have been lost or changed forever through violence due to political and social unrest, natural disasters, accident or plain misfortune. We think today especially of the continued conflicts in Ukraine and in Gaza. May those fleeing conflict, most of them vulnerable: the young, the sick, women and the elderly, find sanctuary and peace. May the places to which they flee somehow find the strength and resources to provide what they need. May those claiming to be the leaders of all countries be blessed with compassion and wisdom to prevent further destruction. May the first fragile signs of a more peaceful future flourish and prosper.

Let us pray that the tensions within our own society, may be resolved through dialogue, and discussion, so that everyone, whatever their differences may coexist peaceably.

As we pause just for a moment in the quietness of our own thoughts, let us consider both the blessings and the trials of our own lives, and dedicate ourselves to sharing our blessings and to doing what we can to ease the trials of others.

We pause in shared silence ..... *AMEN*

'Our Best Expectations' by Maryall Cleary

Knowing that we do not always live up to our best expectations of ourselves, let us in quietness seek the good within, which some call the 'Inner Light' and some 'A Spark of the Divine'..... {Silence}

Knowing that we live in a society that falls far short of the ideal, let us resolve to do one thing this week to aid those suffering from want or injustice..... {Silence}

Knowing that the earth is our home and that humankind is making it a dirty and even poisonous home, let us in quietness consider how we might be a part of making it more healthful for living things.....{Silence}

Knowing that each of us has some sorrow or worry hidden within, let us consider in quietness how we may reach out to one another with our smiles, our handclasps, and our encouraging words..... AMEN

### **Reading:**

"NATURE by Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, chosen and read by Marianne

"Nature! We are surrounded and empowered by her; powerless to separate ourselves from her, and powerless to penetrate beyond her....

She has always thought and always thinks, though not as man, but as Nature...

She causes an endless succession of new capacities for enjoyment to spring up, that her insatiable sympathy may be assuaged.....

The spectacle of Nature is always new, for she is always renewing the spectators. Life is her most exquisite invention: and death is her expert contrivance to get plenty of life!"

**Reading:** *from 'Learning the Grammar of Animacy'* by Robin Wall Kimmerer , slightly adapted. Chosen and read by Delphine

"Imagine seeing your grandmother standing at the stove in her apron and then saying of her, " Look, it is making soup. It has grey hair."

We might snicker at such a mistake, but we also recoil from it. In English, we never refer to a member of our family, or indeed, to any person as 'it'. That would be a profound act of disrespect. 'It' robs a person of selfhood and kinship, reducing a person to a mere thing. So it is in Potawatomi and most other indigenous languages; we use the same words to address the living world as we use for our family. Because they are our family. To whom does our language extend the grammar of animacy, of living Language?

Naturally, plants and animals are animate, but as I learn, I am discovering that the Potawatomi understanding of what it means to be animate diverges from the list of attributes of living things we all learned in Biology. In Potawatomi, rocks are animate, as are mountains and water and fire and places. Beings that are imbued with spirit, our sacred medicines, our songs, drums, and even stories, are all animate. The list of the inanimate seems to be smaller, filled with objects that are made by people. Of an inanimate being, like a table, we say, "What is it?" and we answer "*Dopwen yewe*", "Table it is." But of an apple, we must say, "Who is that being?" And reply, "*Mshimin yawr*", "Apple that *being* is.

'Yawe' - the animate 'to be' I am, you are, she or he is. To speak of those possessed with life and spirit we must say yawe. How much of a coincidence is it that 'Yahweh' of the Old Testament and 'yawe' of New World language are spoken by the reverent? The language of both reminds us, in every sentence, of our kinship with all of the animate world."

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Hymn: Purple 147 'Spirit of earth, root, stone and tree'

Spirit of earth, root, stone and tree,  
water of life, flowing in me,  
keeping me stable, nourishing me,  
O fill me with living energy!

*Spirit of nature, healing and free,  
spirit of love, expanding in me,  
spirit of life, breathe deeply in me,  
inspire me with living energy!*

Spirit of love, softly draw near,  
open my heart, lessen my fear,  
sing of compassion, help me to hear,  
O fill me with loving energy!

*Spirit of nature, healing and free,  
spirit of love, expanding in me,  
spirit of life, breathe deeply in me,  
inspire me with living energy!*

Spirit of life, you are my song,  
sing in my soul, all my life long,  
gladden and guide me, keep me from wrong,  
O fill me with sacred energy!

*Spirit of nature, healing and free,  
spirit of love, expanding in me,  
spirit of life, breathe deeply in me,  
inspire me with living energy!*

**Reading:** 'Spirits' by Rev Cliff Read

chosen and read by Sheila

Are there spirits in the trees?  
Are there spirits in the streams?  
Are there spirits in the hills?  
Are there spirits all around us,  
Wishing us well,  
Awaiting our prayers? Awaiting our offerings?  
Spirits to worship? Spirits to fear?

We thought so once – but not now, not really,  
Though poetry and myth remember them.  
Ours is a universe without spirits.

But we breathe life's breath,  
And so do all the myriad creatures.  
Among the crags, across the fens,  
out over the heaving seas, is the whispering, howling wind,

The breath of Earth –  
 the Spirit of Life.  
 One breath, one Spirit  
 In all things,  
 Filling dust with life,  
 Filling life with love.

'And God is spirit'.

**Reading:** *from 'Entangled Lives'* by Merlin Sheldrake, chosen and read by Delphine

Microbes cover every inch of the planet. In the last four decades, new technologies have granted unprecedented success to microbial lives. The outcome? For your community of microbes – your 'microbiome', your body is a planet. Some prefer the temperate forest of your forearm, some the tropical forest of your crotch or armpit. Your gut (which if unfolded would occupy an area of 32 square metres), ears, toes, mouth, eyes, skin and every surface, passage and cavity you possess teem with bacteria or fungi. You carry around more microbes than your 'own' cells. There are more bacteria in your gut than there are stars in our galaxy.

For humans, identifying where one individual stops and another starts is not generally something we think about. It is usually taken for granted – within modern industrial societies, at least – that we start where our bodies begin and stop where our bodies end.

We are ecosystems, composed of – and decomposed – by an ecology of microbes, the significance of which is only now coming to light. The 40 trillion-odd microbes that live in and on our bodies allow us to digest food and produce key minerals that nourish us. Like the fungi that live within plants, they protect us from disease. They guide the development of our bodies and immune systems and influence our behaviour. If not kept in check, they can cause illnesses and even kill us.

We are not a special case. Even bacteria have viruses within them (a nanobiome?). Symbiosis is a ubiquitous feature of life.

**Poem:** 'A Prayer' by Jeni Couzyn chosen and read by Delphine

There are some creatures living in my body. I bid them Welcome. Let them feed off me, as I off wild creatures that run free.

Let my veins and bones be to them rivers and mountains and baobabs let  
 cells be huge valleys, let gigantic landscapes  
 roll and change, as I flex my nerves.  
 O I wish them an excellent universe, such a one  
 as I inhabit, mountains and wind and  
 a lot of stars. Nor let them  
 pollute and destroy what they find - let my rivers of blood  
 flow clean, my flesh be fertile and multiply, nor cloud with stale chemicals.  
 The clear windows of my eyes.

**Candles of Joy & Concern**  
 followed by 2 minutes of silence  
 then play **video of stream**

**5 mins 52 secs**

**Readings:**

'The Moment' by Margaret Atwood chosen and read by Edgar

The moment when, after many years  
of hard work and a long voyage  
you stand in the centre of your room,  
house, half-acre, square mile, island, country,  
knowing at last how you got there,  
and say, I own this,

is the same moment when the trees unloose  
their soft arms from around you,  
the birds take back their language,  
the cliffs fissure and collapse,  
the air moves back from you like a wave  
and you can't breathe.

No, they whisper. You own nothing.  
You were a visitor, time after time  
climbing the hill, planting the flag, proclaiming.  
We never belonged to you.  
You never found us.  
It was always the other way round.

**Words of Hildegarde of Bingen "I am that great and fiery force"**

Kate's choice read by Edgar

I am that great and fiery force  
sparkling in everything that lives,  
in shining of the river's course,  
in greening grass that glory gives.

I shine in glitter on the seas,  
in burning sun, in moon and stars.  
In unseen wind, in verdant trees  
I breathe within, both near and far.

And where I breathe there is no death,  
And meadows glow with beauties rife.  
I am in all the spirit's breath,  
The thundered word, for I am Life.

**Reading:** *from* 'The Living Mountain' by Nan Shepherd, Delphine's choice, read by Sheila

Idea: Being as an experience, an interaction of love.

The book it is taken from is her account of getting to know by exploration, walking the Cairngorm mountains, through the senses we have; in love; to an understanding through experiencing which is mutual becoming; with so called inanimate place, the mountain itself.

"My journey into an experience began. It was a journey always for fun, with no motive beyond that I wanted it. But at first I was seeking only sensuous gratification – the sensation of height, the sensation of movement, the sensation of speed, the sensation of distance, the sensation of effort, the sensation of ease: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, the pride of life. I was not interested in the mountain for itself, but for its effect upon me, as puss caresses not the man but herself against the man's trouser leg. But as I grew old and less self sufficient, I began to discover the mountain in itself.

Everything became good to me, its contours, its colours, its waters and rock, flowers and birds. This process has taken many years, and is not yet complete. Knowing another is endless. And I have discovered that man's experience of them enlarges rock, flower and bird. The thing to be known grows with the knowing.

I believe that I now understand in some small measure why the Buddhist goes on pilgrimage to a mountain. The journey is itself part of the technique by which the god is sought. It is a journey into Being; for as I penetrate more deeply into the mountain's life, I penetrate into my own. For an hour I am beyond desire. It is not ecstasy, that leap out of the self that makes man like a god. I am not out of myself, but in myself. I am. To know. Being, this is the final grace accorded from the mountain".

**3<sup>rd</sup> Hymn:** Purple 183, 'we are daughters of the stars'

We are daughters of the stars, we are sons of the earth;  
we are spinners and weavers in this web of life;  
and the joy that we weave reaches out beyond the stars  
and deep within the centre of our being.

We are daughters of the orchards, we are sons of the field;  
we are planters and reapers in this web of life;  
and the vision that we weave reaches out beyond the stars  
and deep within the centre of our being.

We are daughters of tomorrow, we are sons of our dreams;  
we are planners and builders in this web of life;  
and the future that we weave reaches out beyond the stars  
and deep within the centre of our being.

### **Reading: 'I am Nature' by Rev Kate, read by Sheila**

"There was a time when we humans wouldn't have been able to conceive of ourselves as being apart from nature. Throughout our long history as hunter-gatherers we seemed as one with it all. But once we began to farm and put down roots, and particularly when we started to 'own' land, which we then felt we had to defend, things changed. We began to have 'dominion', as the Bible puts it. At our best we became stewards and collaborators, at our worst exploiters.

Even in our own lives, as infants we took time to learn that we were separate from our mothers and our surroundings.

To return to 'unknowing', that unselfconscious state of union with nature, is probably impossible now. It feels like we left Eden. There was a moment – or more likely a gradual process – during which we lost innocence and realised we had the power and intelligence to control and manipulate our environment, for better or worse. At least up to a point.

It's as though we ate the metaphorical apple, and saw that we were different, that we had been given a different kind of agency from the rest of the nature. There was no going back.

And yet, underneath it all, we are still one. And finding ways to remember our at-oneness with nature is no different, surely, from seeking communion with the divine, with God, Life, the Universe.

Of course, we celebrate the miracle of being fully human, with all that entails. But within our humanity lies a deep yearning to experience ourselves in union with creation once more. We long for the relief of realising we're not in charge, as we had thought, but merely a part of the great unfolding. This is part of our spiritual journey.

Sometimes it takes a tragedy, an accident, a death, or a near miss to awaken us.

I have never felt more helplessly part of nature than when I was ill with pneumonia, or dragged out of my depth in the sea, or watching my mother die of a brain tumour; nor more gloriously part of it than when standing on top of a snowy-capped mountain in the Dolomites or drifting down the Zambezi river at sunset. There are times when we wake up. And then – for an instant anyway – we know we are home.”

**Final Hymn: Purple 216, 'Wide green world, we know and love you'**

Wide green world, we know and love you:  
clear blue skies that arch above you,  
moon-tugged oceans rising, falling,  
summer rain and cuckoo calling.  
some wild ancient ferment bore us,  
us and all that went before us:  
life in desert, forest, mountain,  
life in stream and springing fountain.

We know how to mould and tame you,  
we have power to mar and maim you.  
Show us by your silent growing  
that which we should all be knowing:  
we are of you, not your master,  
we who plan supreme disaster.  
If with careless greed we use you  
inch by extinct inch we lose you.

May our births and deaths remind us  
others still will come behind us.  
That they also may enjoy you  
we with wisdom will employ you.  
That our care may always bless you  
teach us we do not possess you.  
We are part and parcel of you.  
Wide green world, we share and love you.

**Shared Reading** by Chief Dan George read by Sheila, Marianne, Delphine, Sheila, Edgar  
Sheila reads



Chief Dan George OC (July 24, 1899 – September 23, 1981) was born Geswanouth Slahoot; He was a chief of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation, a Coast Salish band whose Indian reserve is located on Burrard Inlet in the southeast area of the District of North Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. He was also an actor, musician, poet and author. The Chief's best-known written work is "My Heart Soars". As an actor, he is best remembered for portraying Old Lodge Skins opposite Dustin Hoffman in 'Little Big Man' for which he was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor, and for his role in 'The Outlaw Josey Wales', as Lone Watie, opposite Clint Eastwood.

### Marianne

The beauty of the trees  
the softness of the air,  
the fragrance of the grass,  
speaks to me.

### Delphine

The summit of the mountain,  
the thunder of the sky,  
the rhythms of the sea,  
speaks to me.

### Sheila

The faintness of the stars,  
the freshness of the morning,  
the dewdrop on the flower,  
speaks to me.

### Edgar

The strength of fire,  
the taste of salmon,  
the trail of the sun,  
and the life that never goes away,  
they speak to me....  
and my heart soars.

**Closing Words:** by Celia Cartwright read by Sheila

Let us go in peace –  
To live together in harmony,  
To see beauty in everything,  
To know wonder in each passing moment,  
And to walk gently with our God. *AMEN*

### **Extinguish Chalice**

**Closing video: 'We are stardust' Crosby, Stills and Nash**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nivr4yZzzME>