

**Plymouth Unitarian Church, Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> 2023 - Service on Advent, by Ann Kader**

**Opening music: 'The Heart always wanders' by Kjell Magne Robards** 3.38 mins

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=Sdy3O0LzLHY&si=40filfp0Lx3Smeicz>

**Opening words and chalice lighting by Rev. Laura Dobson**

We light our chalice candle as a symbol of  
Hope, peace, joy and love.  
The light reminds us that love is the greatest power in the world,  
The love we share and bless each other with,  
Here in our beloved community;  
The love we take out into the world,  
Bearing and sharing the light,  
Wherever we are and whoever we are with,  
Every day of our lives.

It is the first day of advent so this is the theme of the service today. It is a time of waiting and preparing, it can also be a time of sorrow and joy for most of us.

**1st hymn green book no.3 – 'The joy of living'**

We sing the joy of living,  
We sing the mystery,  
Of knowledge, of science,  
Of truth that is to be;  
Of searching, doubting, testing,  
Of deeper insights gained,  
Of freedom claimed and honoured,  
Of minds that are unchained.

We sing the joy of living,  
We sing of harmony,  
Of textures, sounds and colours,  
To touch, to hear, to see;  
Of order, rhythm, meaning,  
Of chaos and of strife,  
Of richness of sensation,  
Of the creating life.

We sing the joy of living,  
We sing of, ecstasy,  
Of warmth, of love, of passion,  
Of flights of fantasy.  
We sing of joy of living,  
The dear, the known, the strange,  
The moving, pulsing, throbbing,  
A universe of change.

## Story- Why Holly Berries are Red as Roses ( adapted and shortened)

By Philippa Gregory

No one plants a Holly tree, so darkly green and prickly. So where do they come from? They grow everywhere, every park and hedge had a Holly, as if the day-to-day park and hedge and neglected garden need such a night time mystery, embedded in the ordinary. I look around my little winter-blasted garden and feel powerless at the sight of the Holly tree that leans against my house, reaching nearly to the roof, grey bark as smooth as a slow-worm, leaves impenetrable as a hedgehog, green, green as death.

I shall have to get a tree surgeon to prune it; better still, grub it up. It's great head is pressed against my bedroom window, it's stringy roots wind like snakes around the foundations of my little town house. I live here alone now, nobody cares for me, I cannot be enwrapped in living wood.

The sorrow started without reason at the end of the summer and it makes me slow and stupid now, like a chilled bee lost without flowers.

My friends say I must make an effort, as if happiness comes when called.

Tomorrow I shall telephone for a man to come and cut down the Holly tree, tomorrow I will force myself to go somewhere bright and noisy drag myself into the light. I must fell my sorrow and tear out it's roots.

That night I dream of the Holly tree, he is King Holly with his scratchy leaves, strong roots and red berries. In my dream he is both pain and joy.

In the morning I wake early, as the winter light shines in my window, I know myself to be different. A Robin is singing in the boughs of the Holly tree, singing as if for joy inside the darkness of the leaves, eyeing the scarlet berries with his bright eager gaze. It is so early that the moon still sits on the rooftops like a circular mirror of the rising white sun. The round moon and the round sun face each other. in the pale arc of the sky, as if night and day are the same thing - either side of the same sky like the same coin, as if sorrow and joy are one.

And I understand this at last.

### 2nd hymn purple book no 24 – 'Come sing a song with me'

Come, sing a song with me,  
come, sing a song with me,  
come, sing a song with me,  
that I might know your mind.

And I'll bring you hope, when hope is hard to find,  
and I'll bring a song of love and a rose in the winter time.

Come, dream a dream with me,  
come, dream a dream with me,  
come, dream a dream with me,  
that I might know your mind.

And I'll bring you hope, when hope is hard to find,  
and I'll bring a song of love and a rose in the winter time.

Come, walk in rain with me,  
come, walk in rain with me,  
come, walk in rain with me,  
that I might know your mind.

And I'll bring you hope, when hope is hard to find,  
and I'll bring a song of love and a rose in the winter time.

Come share a rose with me,  
come share a rose with me,  
come share a rose with me,  
that I might know your mind.

And I'll bring you hope, when hope is hard to find,  
and I'll bring a song of love and a rose in the winter time.

### **Prayer or meditation by Alan Ruston**

Eternal Spirit, in dwelling in us all, may we never forget the significance of advent as a time of preparation, not just for Christmas, but for the passing of the old year and the welcoming of the new.

Christmas, for most of us, means the buying and receiving of presents, the decoration of our homes with greenery...and much else.

Many of these customs are very old, their origin lost in antiquity- further back than the coming of Christianity.

At midwinter, when the hours of daylight were fewest, the warmth of the Sun weakest, and life itself seemingly at a low ebb, our ancient ancestors kept festivals by lighting bonfires and decorating all around with evergreen to sustain them at this challenging time of the year.

May our acts of celebration at this season inspire us to work for brighter and more enlivening times in the coming year when the world we live in may often appear to be slipping into chaos and negativity.

Let us celebrate the cycle of the year by these December activities, as symbols of renewal. The evergreen branches even now in this seemingly dead season are living and will renew. The seeds of growth and hope are ever present within and around us in the coming new year as they have always done in the past.

Now is a time to celebrate possibilities.

May it be so

I'd like to tell you a story about mistletoe. Some of us were at the interfaith afternoon and a Druid woman told us many stories about mistletoe but the one that resonated with me was the one I'd like to share with you.

Tenbury in Worcestershire has an annual mistletoe festival with the mistletoe queen, musical performances and story telling sessions, also energetic dancing - but at 3 pm drummers and druids assemble and lead people along a footpath beside the river to the Burgage, a grassy open space, for a Druid ceremony, during which the mistletoe was blessed. A good number of the public attend. After this everyone walks back to where three druids descend to the River Teme into which a bunch of mistletoe was thrown, the idea being that it would wash downstream, into the sea, and thus spread its blessings around the world.

And doesn't the world need these blessings.

A short meditation called The Gifts all Around , I'm not sure who wrote it. It's a meditation for children but I think appropriate for us too.

This will be followed by a short silence then some music.

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- When you take a drink of clear water, that's a gift.
- When you take a deep breath and fill your lungs with fresh air for your body, that's a gift.
- When you put on clean socks or comfortable shoes, that's a gift.
- When you give or receive a hug from someone you love, that's a gift.
- There are gifts all around us, every day. At Christmastime, there is a lot of talk about gifts, but the important thing to know is that gifts don't need to be bought in a store and wrapped in a bow.
- When you are thankful for the things you have, you have all the gifts you could ever want or need.

### **Reflective music - 4 mins – 'Butterflies' - Tony Anderson**

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=3Tb0NWTvtqE&si=EbRaaJecYEtyWOyg>

### **3rd hymn green book no. 82 – 'People look East'**

People look east! The time is near

Of the crowning of the year.

Make your house fair as you are able,

Trim the hearth, and set the table.

People, look east, and sing today:

Love, the guest, is on the way.

Furrows, be glad! Though earth is bare,

One more seed is planted there:

Give up your strength the seed to nourish,

That in course, the flower may flourish.

People, look east, and sing today:

Love, the rose, is on the way.

Stars, keep the watch! When night is dim,

One more light the bowl shall brim,

Shining beyond the frosty weather,

Bright as sun and moon together.

People, look east, and sing today:

Love, the star, is on the way.

### **Address on Advent**

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During this time of advent, the shops are busy, it's dark from late afternoon, people are rushing around buying gifts, looking at the lights. Let's face it , we all need light and they do cheer us up especially if like me , you are prone to seasonal affective disorder or sad as it's commonly known.

But there is the other side of Advent, the spiritual, faith side.

Advent in the Christian tradition is a time of waiting for Jesus to be born. During that waiting time, a time of reflection and hopefulness, we may want to think about faith and our life by reading from different spiritual writers, taking time out to do this. Some people see this as a time of fasting until Xmas.

Hanukkah also is around this time. This year it starts at nightfall on December 7th and ends with nightfall on Dec 15th. The word means dedication and commemorates the re-dedication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. A candle is lit each evening on the menorah, religious rituals may be reading of Scripture, almsgiving and singing a special hymn.

Judith from the synagogue had knitted a lovely jumper with a menorah on the front and Hanukkah in Hebrew down one arm. Very clever. She wore it hot off the press to the interfaith afternoon.

Christel always brings a wreath with four candles at the beginning of advent, she lit one candle earlier and will do so each Sunday until all four are lit. I suppose I just accept this as a tradition but haven't thought much about the meaning for a long time and maybe you haven't also.

So let's just remember what they stand for - they stand for hope, peace, joy and love. Love is the last as Christians believe that God's greatest gift of love was Jesus.

Whether you believe in the story of Jesus or not, I think we all hope for peace, joy and love.

Today's candle signifies hope. We have all been through sad times as in the story earlier but hope for better times often got us through. We don't forget them but we learn to live with them as well as our happy times.

Hope is believing things will get better and they usually do. The dark nights get lighter, seeds start sprouting, animals come out of hibernation. Edgar will talk more about hope in his service in two weeks time.

The wreath symbolises the eternity of God and the never-ending cycle of life.

So thank you Christel for bringing this in each year and reminding us of these virtues that Jesus gave, in order for us to share them in whatever way we are able to.

#### **Final hymn purple book no.44 – 'Give thanks for life'**

Give thanks for life, the measure of our day,  
mortal, we pass through beauty that decays,  
yet sing to God our hope, our love, our praise:

*Alleluia, Alleluia!*

Give thanks for those whose lives shone with a light  
caught from the Christ flame, gleaming through the night,  
who touched the truth, who burned for what is right:

*Alleluia, Alleluia!*

Give thanks for all, our living and our dead,  
thanks for the love by which our life is fed,  
a love not changed by time or death or dread:

*Alleluia, Alleluia!*

Give thanks for hope that like a seed of grain  
Lying in darkness, does its life retain  
to rise in glory, growing green again:

*Alleluia, Alleluia!*

## **Benediction by Cricket Hall**

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In this time of waiting, may we hold the world in our hearts.

In this time of waiting, May we hold each other's hands.

In this time of waiting, May we be thoughtful and introspective.

In this time of waiting, May we delight in the darkness and all it teaches us.

In this time of waiting, May we rekindle the fires of hope, love, joy and peace within ourselves and our communities.

In this time of waiting, May we become ready for the coming day.

### **Closing music - Signed version of 'Count on us'**

3.24 mins

o:revkatewhyman@gmail.com,sheila church

Tue, 28 Nov at 19:12

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=uF9mvzhg0-c&si=i4izHhY2eiVNNaQM>

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