

All hymns from Purple book

Opening Music: 'Tree Song' by 'Evie Karlsson'

Usual Opening music and video

Welcome: Good morning, and welcome, everyone. All are welcome here, whether you are a regular attender, or a new-comer, 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! Today's service is a celebration of Trees. Last Thursday was the Jewish festival of Tu B'Shevat, the 'New Year of the Trees' and as some of the trees in our own garden are showing the first signs of re-awakening, what better time than to celebrate these wonderful life forms. We light our chalice as a symbol of our free religious faith. For those at home, you may like to light a candle now

Chalice Lighting: Within the deep shadows and cold of winter, let us remember how we walked in the leafy green shade of the trees in summer, and the golden glow of the fallen autumn leaves. The pale winter light shines now through bare branches stark against a chilly sky. So we gather in this indoor warmth and light, to we kindle our chalice flame and await the opening of the buds in Spring.

Opening Words: Our opening words today are part of a longer passage, translated from a prayer recited on Tu B'Shevat, the Jewish New Year of the Trees... The prayer is recited upon seeing a fruit tree bloom in the springtime, and thanks God for creating trees and other good things in the world for people to enjoy.

"The Divine One created good trees so the children of earth might benefit from them. At this moment, for the sake of the Divine Tree of Life, may the sap awaken in the branch. Awake! thornbush and myrtle[awake etrog and reed; awake willow and palm; awake fig and cedar; awake vine and oak; awake almond and terebinth; awake pomegranate and olive and apple. Awake, all trees in all the corners of the earth. Awaken the trees in the name of the Tree of Life, for She is a tree of life to all who hold her fast."

1st 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!*

Prayers:

Yesterday was Holocaust Memorial Day, the international day on 27th January each year to commemorate all, including the 6 million Jews and many people from other groups murdered under Nazi persecution during the Holocaust, as well as those killed during more recent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur and sadly, in other conflicts still on going. We observe this day in the hope that one day there will be no more genocide.

So let us pause for a moment in shared silence

Prayer for others and ourselves:

Let us pause and hold in our thoughts & prayers those of our own church community and their loved ones, and all in our city, and throughout the wider world, who are experiencing illness, and difficult, sad or worrying 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 continuing conflicts in Ukraine and in Gaza, involving dangerous tensions between the so called super powers. May those fleeing conflict, mostly the 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 good sense and a desire for peace, prevail.

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

Lets pause just for a few moments in the quietness of our own thoughts, to 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*AMEN*

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Time for our story, which Gav will read for us now;

Story: 'The giving tree' by Shel Silverstein

read by Gav Howell

Once there was a tree....and she loved a little boy. Every day the boy would come and gather her leaves and make them into crowns and play king of the forest. He climbed up her trunk and swung from her branches and ate apples. And they would play hide-and-seek. When he was tired, he slept in her shade. The boy loved the tree very much. And the tree was happy.

But time went by. The boy grew older. And the tree was often alone.

Then one day the boy came to the tree and the tree said, 'Come, Boy, climb up my trunk and swing from my branches and eat my apples and play in my shade and be happy.

'I am too big to climb and play' said the boy. 'I want to buy things and have fun. I want some money?' 'I'm sorry,' said the tree, 'but I have no money. I have only leaves and apples. Take my apples, Boy, and sell them in the city. Then you will have money and you will be happy.'

So the boy climbed up the tree, gathered her apples and carried them away. And the tree was happy.

The boy stayed away for a long time.... and the tree was sad. One day the boy came back and the tree shook with joy and said, 'Come, Boy, climb my trunk, swing from my branches and be happy.'

'I am too busy to climb trees,' said the boy. 'I want a house to keep me warm. I want a wife and children, and so I need a house. Can you give me a house ?'

'I have no house,' said the tree. 'The forest is my house, but you may cut off my branches and build a house. Then you will be happy.'

So the boy cut off her branches and carried them away to build his house. And the tree was happy. But the boy stayed away for a long time. And when he came back, the tree was so happy she could hardly speak.

'Come, Boy,' she whispered, 'come and play.'

'I am too old and sad to play,' said the boy. 'I want a boat that will take me far away from here. Can you give me a boat?'

'Cut down my trunk and make a boat,' said the tree. 'Then you can sail away, and be happy.'

So the boy cut down her trunk and made a boat and sailed away. And the tree was happy but not really.

After a long time the boy came back again.

'I am sorry, Boy,' said the tree, 'but I have nothing left to give you - My apples are gone'

'My teeth are too weak for apples,' said the boy.

'My branches are gone,' said the tree. 'You cannot swing on them - '

'I am too old to swing on branches,' said the boy.

'My trunk is gone,' said the tree, 'You cannot climb - "I am too tired to climb' said the boy.

'I am sorry,' sighed the tree. 'I wish that I could give you something.... but I have nothing left.

I am just an old stump. I am sorry....'

'I don't need very much now,' said the boy. 'just a quiet place to sit and rest. I am very tired.'

'Well,' said the tree, straightening herself up as much as she could, 'well, an old stump is good for sitting and resting Come, Boy, sit down. Sit down and rest.'

And the boy did. And the tree was happy.

The Prayer of the Tree By Richard St Barbe Baker (1889 – 1982) He was one of the world's earliest environmental campaigners and a founder of *International Tree Foundation (formerly known as 'The Men of the Trees') The UK branch (!) was set up in 1924, a hundred years ago. ITF funds and enables tree planting around the globe. Since ITF was founded, millions of trees have been saved and reserves established in the UK, US, Kenya and India. One good example of their work is a project to help stem the spread of the Sahara desert by planting trees.

The Prayer of the Tree

"You will pass me by and raise your hand against me: Harken ere you harm me:

I am the heart of your hearth on the cold winter night,
The friendly shade screening you from the summer sun,
And my fruits are refreshing draughts,
Quenching your thirst as you journey on.

I am the beam that holds your house,
The board of your table, the bed on which you lie,
The timber that builds your boat.

I am the handle of your hoe, and the door of your homestead,
The wood of your cradle and the shell of your coffin,
I am the gift of God and the friend of Man,

You who pass by listen to my prayer – harm me not."

A poem: 'First Sight of Spring' By John Clare, (1793-1864).

The hazel-blooms, in threads of crimson hue,
Peep through the swelling buds, foretelling Spring,
Ere yet a white-thorn leaf appears in view,
Or March finds throstles pleased enough to sing.

To the old touchwood tree woodpeckers cling
A moment, and their harsh-toned notes renew ;
In happier mood, the stockdove claps his wing;
The squirrel sputters up the powdered oak,
With tail cocked o'er his head, and ears erect,
Startled to hear the woodman's understroke;
And with the courage which his fears collect,
He hisses fierce half malice, and half glee,
Leaping from branch to branch about the tree,
In winter's foliage, moss and lichens, deckt.

2nd Hymn: Purple no 199 ' Weaver God, creator'

Weaver God, Creator, sets life on the loom,
draws out threads of colour from primordial gloom.
Wise in the designing, in the weaving deft;
love and justice joined – the fabric's warp and weft.

Called to be co-weavers, yet we break the thread
and may smash the shuttle and the loom, instead.
Careless and greedy, we deny by theft,
love and justice joined – the fabric's warp and weft.

Weaver God, great Spirit, may we see your face
tapestried in trees, in waves and winds of space;
tenderness teach us, lest we be bereft
of love and justice joined – the fabric's warp and weft.

Weavers we are called, yet woven too we're born,
for the web is seamless, if we tear, we're torn.
Gently may we live – that fragile earth be left;
love and justice joined – the fabric's warp and weft.

A meditation by retired Unitarian minister, Rev. Bill Darllison *from the book, 'Fragments of Holiness'* (slightly adapted)

Sit quietly..... For a minute or so, concentrate on your breathing

Imagine you are looking at a tree

Greet it as you would a stranger, or, if you know it well, as an old friend

Observe its physical structure, its size and shape.... its various colours, the texture of its bark, and the shapes and hues of its leaves and branches

Now consider the silent interior, the unseen energies and processes which prompted it to grow from a tiny seed, and which enable it to convert water and mineral salts into such living beauty.....

And say to yourself, quietly: "Don't nobody know why?"

followed by a short silence a 5 minute Reflective video of woodland, water and bird song
https://youtu.be/z9-X8bmlH6yY?.si=ABUALGECowVJu_g

ADDRESS - 'The Tree of Life – a celebration of Trees'

Life is full of surprises, some pleasant, some otherwise. Recently I experienced both sorts within minutes. Alongside the footpath to the bus stop recently, a sad sight met my eyes. Several large trees marking the boundary of the pathfields, a public open space, lying below Egguckland church, had been cut down, leaving only large stumps and piles of sawdust. These trees were there before the houses, including mine, were built 50 years ago. It was a shock, as you may imagine. It was with a sense of irony, that I noticed at least a dozen young saplings had been planted along the footpath crossing the field. Why? What was the fate of those good old trees? Perhaps the council will shred them into chippings and sell them to pay for the saplings! I do hope they won't go into the incinerator, releasing carbon dioxide, a green house gas. What a waste, and a sad end! The local Councillors will be receiving another of my emails soon. I find it ironic that these once beautiful living trees met their fates round about the time of Tu B' Shevat, the Jewish New Year celebration for Trees.

Tu B'Shevat, is the 15th day of the month of Shevat, and the midpoint between autumn and spring, regarded as the birthday for all trees for tithing purposes: like the beginning of a fiscal year. For the first few years of a trees' fruiting, none were allowed to be eaten, the 4th year crop was given to the Temple and only after 5 years was it allowed to be eaten, according to ancient laws in Leviticus.

We might consider it strange, in the middle of our chilly northern winter, to celebrate the start of the trees' year. In Israel, however, when Tu B'Shevat is celebrated, it is usually warmer than in UK or northern Europe and N America. Daytime temperatures can reach 13 – 15° C and nights are often frost free. Sometimes, because their religious calendar is based on the phases of the moon, the festival occurs in early February, and coincides with Imbolc, the old Celtic holy day.

This is at the end of this week, and celebrates the first awakening of the earth before spring. Buds begin to swell, even in UK, as John Clare observed in the poem read earlier,

"The hazel-blooms, in threads of crimson hue,
Peep through the swelling buds, foretelling Spring"

And the female flowers on the hazel, are the small round buds, with the crimson threads. The more familiar are the male catkins, which hang down and have the pollen.

The celebrations of the Trees include eating plenty of fruit, especially grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, dates, and strangely, grains as well as *etrog*, a special type of citrus fruit resembling an elongated lemon. As they watch the trees awaken, Jews remember their old mystical name for God: Etz Chayyim, Tree of Life. "She is a tree of life," the Book of Proverbs tells.

The Psalms praise different trees for their various characteristics and uses including the strong and sturdy cedar, whose fragrant wood was used for building Solomon's temple & Palaces; trees like the olive and the early flowering almond, bearing fruit which can be eaten or crushed for its oil and the vine, whose grapes can be eaten or used for wine making, and the fig tree along with the almond, whose fragrant blossoms herald spring. This is a mere handful of examples from the Bible.

In Christianity, many people refer to the Cross upon which Jesus died as 'the Tree' According to the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the Cross is said to have been made of three types of wood, mainly cedar, pine and cypress, although no-one can be sure.

Many other traditions regard trees with respect even regarding some as Sacred. According to the tenets of Buddhism, the Buddha achieved supreme enlightenment or Bodhi beneath a spreading fig tree. A living tree in India, is called the Bodhi tree because it is believed to have been propagated from the Buddha's original fig tree. The Bodhi tree and the nearby Temple are now important Buddhist pilgrimage sites.

Several trees were important to the Celts and Druids, including oak, apple, birch, and ash. The ash tree is mainly associated with healing and enchantment, and in particular with the Welsh magician Gwyddion, who had an ash wand. Ash also features in Norse mythology.

An iconic yellow oak tree located in Oley, USA, dates back several hundred years. It is regarded as "sacred" due to a native Indian (Delaware) legend claiming the tree possesses healing powers. They prayed for it whenever they needed help.

Native to the African Savannas, the baobab with its massive size, fascinating shape, and long life (around 3,000 years) is believed to hold the spirits of the dead, which is why it's sacred in African culture. Throughout history, kings have organized their meetings under this tree, believing that it holds magical properties that could aid them in making wise decisions. Maybe we should plant some in this country....

If we widen our view of trees to include the whole world, extending far back in time, we can see how important trees have been and continue to be in shaping the entire ecosystem.

Trees are vital to life. As the biggest plants on the planet, they give us oxygen, store carbon, stabilise the soil and give life to the world's wildlife. They also provide us with the materials for tools and shelter, as mentioned in the prayer of the tree. I'd like to read an extract from a book, "Why Willows Weep" which our dear friend Ann Kader kindly lent me when she heard what the topic of today's Service, before she left for her holiday in New Zealand. It's a wonderful book of 19 short stories, each featuring a different species of tree. This is an extract from 'Why the Ash has black buds' by William Fiennes

“The trees have always had some idea of what happens to them when they die. In forests they saw their neighbours toppled by wind or age and rot into earth, and their roots sent up descriptions of peat and coal in vast beds and seams. Later, when humans came along ...Trees often wondered what their particular fate might be. Would they subside into the long sleep of coal, or blaze for an hour in a cottage grate, or find themselves reconfigured as handle, hurdle, post, shaft, stake, joist, beam – or something more elaborate and rare: an abacus, a chess piece, a harpsichord? And out of these dreams a rumour moved among the trees of the world like a wind, not quite understood at first, it was so strange – a rumour that when they died, instead of being burned, planed, planked, shimmed, sharpened, many trees would be pulped. This was an entirely new idea to trees, whose self-image was all to do with trunk, sturdiness, backbone, form. But trees are good at getting the hang of things, and soon they understood that from pulp would come the white leaves humans called *paper*, and that these leaves would be bound into books, and after a short season of anxiety in which conifers shed uncharacteristic quantities of needles, the trees came to terms with this new possibility in the range of their afterlives.

Yes, the trees recognised themselves in paper, in books, just as they recognised themselves in all the other things that hadn't been thought of quite yet, like nestbeds and bagpipes and bonfires, not to mention violins, cricket bats, toothpicks, clothes pegs, chopsticks and misericords. Men and women would sit in the shade of trees, reading books, and the trees, dreaming of all that was to come, saw that they were the books as well the chairs the men and women sat in, and the combs in the women's hair...and the hops the children chased across the lawns. The trees took pride in the idea of being a book: they thought a book was a noble thing to become, if you had to become anything”

Not only are trees essential for life, but as the longest living species on earth, they give us a link between the past, present and future.

Fossil records, tell us that first 'true' woody tree, named by scientists as *Archaeopteris*, lived around 370 million years ago, having taken over a hundred million years to evolve. It had all the structures and features of modern trees, but produced spores instead of flowers and seeds. It grew to 60 feet tall and made up 90 percent of the forests for millions of years. These early trees played a very important role in development of the world as we know it today. They stretched out branches and canopy of leaves to nourish life in the streams. The decaying trunks and leaves fed the streams enabling the evolution of many freshwater and marine species. These first trees had extensive root systems, which had a profound impact on soil chemistry, and the evolution of other ecosystems. They altered the carbon dioxide/oxygen balance of the atmosphere forever. These changes, over millions of years, paved the way for many other species, including the first dinosaurs, and many millions of years later, the first mammals.

The trees in today's forests cover a third of the land surface. They help to stabilize climate, the circulation of water, and are home to millions of life forms. About 90% of all earth's species live in forests; from insects, like beetles & butterflies, to reptiles like snakes,

turtles, and crocodiles, to birds, and many mammals. Millions of indigenous people still live in the forests and depend on them for survival. All are part of the interdependent web of life, which couldn't exist without trees. Trees as part of the forests, protect streams and rivers from sun's radiation and prevent them drying up and helping to keep the water moving from land to sea and from land to air, so promoting rainfall.

Trees play an important part in purifying the atmosphere, help to alleviate climate change, by absorbing carbon dioxide and locking it away in their tissues, during photosynthesis while also emitting life giving oxygen.

Plants and trees enrich the Soil. As shed leaves and small branches decompose, the chemicals within return to the soil. The roots absorb water from the surface and slow the flow, reducing soil erosion and preventing flooding, and they also break the soil into finer particles so it can absorb water more easily.

Trees benefit our health; their canopies trap dust and absorb pollutants from the air. Each individual tree removes up to 1.7 kilos every year. They provide shade from solar radiation and reduce noise. Humans along with many other species benefit from all this. Trees provide us with delicious food: fruits, seeds and berries and many people's livelihoods depend on growing and processing these.

And let us not forget PAPER! How many millions of trees have been sacrificed in the cause of human happiness and comfort and communication. In its many varieties and uses, from books to newspapers to tissues, to wrappings. The widespread production of Printed Books was a major revolution in communication, education and entertainment. Most people still use paper for communicating, in written and printed word, despite talk of a 'paperless society'.

Trees are good for human health and well being. Over 20 species of British trees and shrubs are known to have medicinal properties. Birch bark oil has antiseptic properties. Aspirin was first isolated from Salix (willow).

They are good company too! They are beautiful to look at and be amongst. I've never been a fan of Djokovic the tennis player, but I read that whenever he is in Melbourne, he goes to the park and sits by one of the trees. He says it a friend and he feels better after being there, and my heart warmed to him! Within minutes of being surrounded by trees and green space, your blood pressure drops, your heart rate slows and your stress levels come down. This all sounds wonderful, seen from human perspective, but what about that of the trees? This piece was written by *Cedric Wright, an American violinist, nature photographer and writer, who lived about 100 years ago:*

Consider the life of trees.

Aside from the axe, what trees acquire from people is inconsiderable.

What people may acquire from trees is immeasurable.

From their mute forms there flows a poise, in silence,
a lovely sound and motion in response to wind.

What peace comes to those aware of the voice and bearing of trees!

Trees do not scream for attention.

A tree, a rock, has no pretence, only a real growth out of itself,
in close communion with the universal spirit.

A tree retains a deep serenity.

It establishes in the earth not only its root system but also
those roots of its beauty and its unknown consciousness.

Sometimes one may sense a glimmer of that consciousness, and with
such perspective, feel that humans are not necessarily the highest form of life.

We must heed this! And also heed the lesson from our story about the 'Giving Tree', to
not overuse the resources offered by the tree, or any part of our environment. Treat them
with respect, give them space and time to rebuild after we have taken what we need. To
use the old saying, to each take according to our need, and not our greed.

In the words of *Ian Somerhalder, American film actor and environmentalist*

"The environment is in us, not outside of us. The trees are our lungs, the rivers our
bloodstream. We are interconnected, and what you do to the environment, ultimately,
you do to yourself."

Soon, for the first time in our history, the number of people living in cities will outstrip those
living in the countryside. It will more important than ever to protect open spaces and trees
which live there. We must respect them and keep them in good heart, if we want them to
keep us in good heart – literally!

Trees are one of our most potent reminders of nature's power and beauty. For thousands
of years, trees have inspired poets, scientists, warriors, and priests, and they are a living
symbol of the glory of the natural world and its importance in our lives. In their roots,
seeds, branches, leaves and flowers, we see an echo of the larger web of life we revere -
trees are beings who still teach us reverence, joy, and zest for being alive. Each and
every one is, literally 'a Tree of Life' and deserves to be valued, cared for and praised! .

Final Hymn Purple no 66 'How wonderful this world of thine'

2 min 32 sec

How wonderful this world of thine,
a fragment of a fiery sun,
how lovely and how small,
where all things serve thy great design,
where life's adventure is begun in God, the life of all.

The smallest seed in secret grows,
and thrusting upward answers soon
the bidding of the light;
the bud unfurls into a rose;
the wings within the whole cocoon
are perfected for flight.

The migrant bird in winter fled,
shall come again with spring and build in this same shady tree;
by secret wisdom surely led,
homeward across the clover field
hurries the honey bee.

O thou, whose greater gifts are ours –
a conscious will, a thinking mind,
a heart to worship thee –
O take these strange unfolding powers,
and teach us through thy Word to find
the life more full and free.

Closing words “Children of the earth and sky, we are nurtured, sustained, given warmth and light from above and below. Supported by earth’s strong, firm crust, we build our homes, till the fields, plant our gardens and orchards.

When we turn from self and seek to be aware, we will find holy light in human faces, in blossom, birdsong, and sky and trees. Then earth is truly our home, and we are one with all earth’s creatures; Parents of earth’s children yet to be. ” *Alice Berry*

Extinguish Chalice

Closing Video: ‘Trees’ by Joyce Kilmer, sung by Paul Robeson

[Trees by Paul Robeson - YouTube](#)

<https://youtu.be/vOHekLZD5i4?si=2dE1DmcYQIzWAS8L>