

Sunday May 26th 2024 Congregational Service on 'Awe and Wonder'

All our hymns today are from 'Hymns for Living' aka 'The Green Hymn Book'

Opening music: 'In Paradism' from Faure's Requiem <https://youtu.be/6-i1ESIRKdA>

Welcome: Good morning and Welcome, whether you are here in the church, joining us online, or watching on youtube at a later date. Welcome whoever you are, and however you are feeling, whatever you carry in your heart, and bring with you: cares, concerns or celebrations, sadness or joys, you are welcome.

However we join in, each one of us is part of our community, contributing by being connected in spirit, and all are equally valued. We begin, as is our custom, by lighting our chalice as a symbol of our free religious faith. If you are at home and have a candle, you may like to light it now.

Chalice lighting: Words of Jacob Trapp (Adapted)

To Worship is to stand in awe under a heaven of stars before a flower, a leaf in sunlight, or a grain of sand.

Worship is the kindred fire in our hearts, it moves through deeds of kindness and acts of love. Worship is the mystery within us reaching out to the mystery beyond.

It is an inarticulate silence, yearning to speak;

It is the window of the moment open to the light of the Eternal.

To worship is to illumine the common path to kindle a light in the window of the Eternal"

Introduction of Service theme

Every few months, we hold a congregational service, on a particular theme, to give everyone a chance to contribute an item: a reading, prayer, poem, or a hymn or piece of music on that theme.

Today, our theme is 'Awe and Wonder'. It has been truly wonderful to receive so many contributions about what inspires awe and wonder – thank you to everyone who has offered something, it has been a privilege to arrange the wonderful variety, similar to arranging beautiful and unique flowers into a gorgeous bouquet.

As often happens, the contributions seem to fall into a few categories. Today, some are inclusive of the whole of creation, some more specifically of Nature and animals, and yet others celebrate human creativity as expressed in wondrous buildings. Each one has inspired feelings of awe and wonder at manifestations of something more than 'us – maybe a Divine presence? So each has a spiritual significance, enriching our lives, and those with whom we share them – enjoy!

Opening words: by Sophia Lyon Fahs, who lived to the wonderful age of 102!

"Fling wide the windows of, O my soul! The bright beams of morning are warm.

We pause in reverence before the wonder of life,

the wonder of this moment,

the wonder of being together, so close, yet so far apart,

each hidden in a secret chamber,

each listening, each trying to speak,

yet none fully understanding,

none fully understood.

We pause in reverence before all intangible things
that eyes see not, nor ears can detect,
that hands can never touch,
that space cannot hold,
and time cannot measure.

Fling wide the windows of, O my soul! The bright beams of morning are warm.”

1st Hymn: 247 ‘A World of Wonder’

Words: by Sydney Knight used by permission

Tune: ‘Laudate Dominum’ by Charles Hubert Hastings Parry

1.The sun at high noon,
The stars in dark space,
The light of the moon
On our upturned face,
The high clouds, the rain clouds,
The lark song on high –
We gaze up in wonder
Above to the sky.

2.The green grassy blade,
The grasshopper’s sound,
The creatures of shade
That live in the ground,
The dark soil, the mist soil,
Where plants spring to birth –
We look down at wonder
Below in the earth.

3.The glad joys that heal
The tears in our eyes,
The longings we fell,
The light of surprise,
Our night dreams, our day dreams,
Our thoughts ranging wide –
We live with a whole world
Of wonder inside.

Prayers: 1. Prayer by Rev Cliff Reed

O, Spirit of unbounded Life,

In the glory and beauty of late spring we turn to you in humble gratitude,

O Spirit of unbounded life.

Our hearts leap as the skylark sings in the heavens, and all around us is blossom and bursting,
freshest green.

We rejoice, and bow our heads in wonder.

But, for too many here and in the wider world, the wonder is dimmed by fear –
fear of unemployment, of poverty, or homelessness, fear of violence and fear of the
consequences of war and conflict - fear of a future without hope.

Spirit of unbounded hope, come to all who dwell in fear's shadow.

And come to us, that our community of faith may help to lift the gloom, reflecting in our worship
and our fellowship, in our words and our deeds, the ancient promise that ‘All shall be well’.

In love for all who despair this day, we pledge ourselves to be your messengers of better days
to come. May it be so .. *AMEN.*

2. ‘Just for this day’ by Marjorie Holmes, offered by Caroline

2nd Prayer . 'Just for this day' by Marjorie Holmes, offered by Caroline

Oh God give me grace for this day
Not for a lifetime, nor for next week
Not for tomorrow, just for this day.
Direct my thoughts and bless them
Direct my thoughts and bless them.
Direct my work and bless it.
Direct the things I say and bless them too.
Direct and bless everything that I think and speak and do
So that for this one day, just this one day
I have the gift of grace that comes from your presence.

First set of contributions

1. "Awe and Wonder' what a theme!" Written by Rachel Garnett

Awe and wonder, what a theme! I felt very inspired to share my thoughts on this topic, but the more I thought about it, the more I realised that to consolidate all of my thoughts into an appropriate length would be, in my opinion, to do them a disservice.

I could talk about how 'wow!' is one of my most used words when I am out and about, walking in nature, or spotting little pieces of foliage or animals hidden within the urban landscape I call home, or looking at what I call the 'big sky' of the coast.

I could also talk about how the beauty of humankind and animals impacts me on a deep and profound level, with their kindness, love, generosity, philosophy, wisdom, humour, and so many more varied qualities. I could talk about so many different things, in so many different ways, that I just couldn't choose one to focus on.

So I thought instead I would share a quote from a book written by one of my favourite authors, the late Sir Terry Pratchett (who was, and still is, an awe-and-wonder-inspiring person). In his book 'Hogfather', the character of Death puts it perfectly, I think: "Human beings make life so interesting. Do you know, that in a universe so full of wonders, they have managed to invent boredom."

2. 'Wonder' poem by Thomas Traherne

Chosen and read by Delphine

How like an angel came I down!
How bright are all things here!
When first among his works I did appear
O how their glory me did crown!
The world resembled his eternity,
In which my soul did walk;
And ev'ry thing that I did see
Did with me talk.

The skies in their magnificence,
The lively, lovely air;
Oh how divine, how soft, how sweet, how fair!
The stars did entertain my sense,
And all the works of God, so bright and pure,
So rich and great did seem,
As if they ever must endure
In my esteem.

A native health and innocence
Within my bones did grow,
And while my God did all his glories show,
I felt a vigour in my sense
That was all spirit. I within did flow
With seas of life, like wine;
I nothing in the world did know
But 'twas divine.

Harsh ragged objects were conceal'd,
Oppressions tears and cries,
Sins, griefs, complaints, dissensions, weeping eyes
Were hid, and only things reveal'd
Which heav'nly spirits, and the angels prize.
The state of innocence
And bliss, not trades and poverties,
Did fill my sense.

The streets were pav'd with golden stones,
The boys and girls were mine,
Oh how did all their lovely faces shine!
The sons of men were holy ones,
In joy and beauty they appear'd to me,
And every thing which here I found,
While like an angel I did see,
Adorn'd the ground.

Rich diamond and pearl and gold
In ev'ry place was seen;
Rare splendours, yellow, blue, red, white and green,
Mine eyes did everywhere behold.
Great wonders cloth'd with glory did appear,
Amazement was my bliss,
That and my wealth was ev'ry where:
No joy to this!

Curs'd and devis'd proprieties,
With envy, avarice
And fraud, those fiends that spoil even Paradise,
Flew from the splendour of mine eyes,
And so did hedges, ditches, limits, bounds,
I dream'd not aught of those,
But wander'd over all men's grounds,
And found repose.

Proprieties themselves were mine,
And hedges ornaments;
Walls, boxes, coffers, and their rich contents
Did not divide my joys, but all combine.
Clothes, ribbons, jewels, laces, I esteem'd
My joys by others worn:
For me they all to wear them seem'd
When I was born.

'In No Strange Land' By Francis Thompson (1859-1907)

Chosen and read by Kathy

O world invisible, we view thee,
O world intangible, we touch thee,
O world unknowable, we know thee,
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!

Does the fish soar to find the ocean,
The eagle plunge to find the air—
That we ask of the stars in motion
If they have rumour of thee there?

Not where the wheeling systems darken,
And our benumbed conceiving soars!—
The drift of pinions, would we hearken,
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.

The angels keep their ancient places;—
Turn but a stone and start a wing!
'Tis ye, 'tis your estrangèd faces,
That miss the many-splendoured thing.

But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry;—and upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.

Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter,
Cry,—clinging to Heaven by the hems;
And lo, Christ walking on the water,
Not of Genesareth, but Thames!

2nd Hymn: 148 'The Miracle'

Words: Malvina Reynolds © Schroeder Music Co, used by permission.
Tune: 'Nun Danket All' Proxis Pietatis Melica, 1653

O what a piece of work are we,
How marvellously wrought:
The quick contrivance of the hand,
The wonder of our thought.

Why need to look for miracles
Outside of nature's law?
Humanity we wonder at
With every breath we draw!

But give us room to move and grow,
But give our spirit play,
And we can make a world of light
Out of the common clay.

2nd set of contributions:

1. 'The Tyger' by William Blake from 'Songs of Innocence', Chosen by Nick

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies.
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat.
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp.
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

3. 'Immanence' by Evelyn Underhill

Chosen and read by Christine

I come in the little things,
Saith the Lord;
Not borne on morning wings
Of majesty; but I have set my feet
Amidst the delicate and bladed wheat
That springs triumphant in the furrowed sod—
There do I dwell, in weakness and in power;
Not broken or divided, said our God!
In your straight garden plot I come to flower;
About your porch my vine,
Meek, fruitful, doth entwine,
Waits, at the threshold, Love's appointed hour.

I come in the little things,
Saith the Lord;
Yea, on the glancing wings
Of eager birds, the soft and pattering feet
Of furred and gentle beasts, I come to meet
Your hard and wayward heart. In brown bright eyes
That peep from out the brake, I stand confest.
On every nest
Where feathery Patience is content to brood
And leaves her pleasure for the high emprise
Of motherhood—
There does my Godhead rest.

I come in the little things,
Saith the Lord;
My starry wings I do forsake,
Love's highway of humility to take;
Meekly I fit my stature to your need.
In beggar's part
About your gates I shall not cease to plead
As man, to speak with man
Till by such art
I shall achieve my immemorial plan;
Pass the low lintel of the human heart.

'Awe and Wonder'

Written and read by Linda

I've been very fortunate to have travelled to many parts of our beautiful world and have been a witness to many awe inspiring things.

- Lying on a tropical beach under a palm tree, watching the breeze moving the fronds to and fro.
- On safari in Kenya seeing a baby elephant waddle along behind its mother.
- On a hotel balcony in Malaysia looking over the tropical rainforest at dawn while the morning mist rose as the sun came up.
- A Raja Brooke butterfly spreading its wings on the shore of a tropical stream.

- Beautiful orchids growing naturally in the branches of a tree.
- On a rice boat in Kerala, lying in bed and watching; by candlelight, as geckos caught flies while miraculously walking up walls and hanging upside down from the ceiling.
- A tree full of yellow crested cockatoos in Melbourne, Australia.
- Turtles on the beach in Sri Lanka.
- A Snake farm in India.

Many more come to mind, and will stay with me until I depart this wonderful world.

Even back in England there are things that fill us with awe and wonder.

A full rainbow, an eclipse, a halo around the moon, the Northern Lights, a frostcovered tree, the night sky full of stars and a cloud of starlings dancing across the sky at dusk.

You can't pass these things on; you have to experience them for yourself to understand that feeling of awe and wonder.

We have to look after this wonderful world so that in the future others can experience all these wonderful things too.

Short time for reflection

Musical Interlude: 'The Swan' by Saint Saëns
Cello played by YoYoMah, Piano Kathrine Stott
<https://youtu.be/3qrKiywjo7Q>

Chosen by Gill

3rd set of contributions .

1.Ancient Buildings and Constructions

Written and read by Christel

Before the Pandemic I have personally visited and viewed the following:

- 1.Ancient Egyptian pyramids, sphynx and gigantic pharaonic statues and temples built with stones weighing many tons – wonders of engineering and architecture, not forgetting exquisitely painted depictions of ancient Egyptian scenes. Twice visiting the Cairo Museum with its awe inspiring artefacts from Tutankhamen's tomb, his golden mask leaving the onlooker in awe and wonder at its beauty and perfection; and not forgetting sarcophagi richly decorated, some with mummies inside, and many more glorious artefacts.
2. The Coliseum in Rome – awesome in its size and construction as is the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican, with Michelangelo's frescoes and St Peter's Basilica, all wondrous creations of awe and wonder!
- 3.Excavated Ancient Pompeii after volcanic eruption of Vesuvius in 79 AD, with well-preserved buildings, roads and even a brothel with remarkably well preserved colourful wall paintings in many of the residential buildings.
4. Salisbury Cathedral in its Gothic elaborately constructed beauty and awe inspiring Stonehenge constructed with huge Sarsen stones covered by huge lintels all weighing many tons – awesome to behold!
5. St Petersburg with its spectacularly beautiful onion-domed gilded cathedrals, unique in its colourful constructions and awe inspiringly beautifully decorated interiors, plus the famous

Hermitage and Winter palace exquisitely constructed and containing most awe-inspiringly beautiful paintings, furniture, clocks, Faberge Eggs, elaborate costumes and much more.

Moscow also offers the visitor beautiful onion-domed cathedrals, the Kremlin Palace, not forgetting the Moscow Metro decorated with chandeliers and statues wondrous to behold!

6. In summary, not forgetting many Stately Homes, castles and palaces here in Britain inspire nothing but awe and wonder at their architectural beauty and interior luxurious decorations and furnishings. Lucky and privileged was I to have visited quite a few in the past.

Some in this country include Windsor Castle, Buckingham Palace, Tower of London, Hampton Court, Osborne House, Holyrood Palace and many more. All inspiring built by human beings, in my opinion, inspired by God.

Reflections on visiting St Just in Roseland Church

Written and read by Poppy

It was the Friday before the first May bank holiday earlier this year and Charles and I were travelling around villages of the Roseland peninsula looking for answers to clues we needed to solve a mystery treasure hunt. Part of our journey took us to St. Just in Roseland church. If you are not familiar with the church, it is extraordinary.

The adopted Cornishman Sir John Betjeman described it as “to many people the most beautiful churchyard on earth”.

St Just in Roseland is a 13th century church nestled alongside a pool at the end of the river Fal on the site of a 6th century Celtic chapel.

The church gardens are tiered and sat within them is the church – as you stand at the lychgate, the church tower is level with you. The slopes of the gardens are full of terraced graves and you can spend easily an hour or more wandering amongst them in reverence for those who came before you. You can enjoy listening to the birds as you explore the steep granite paths bordered with scripture or the winding bamboo trails and discover the holy well.

The 19th century rector introduced many tropical plants alongside the more familiar flowers and shrubs. This combined with the tidal creek is what makes the church so unique - a 13th century church at the edge of water alongside a subtropical garden. Idyllic!

Earlier this month on visiting, I experienced wonder - I have tried to capture what happened but the words don't seem to do it justice. I experienced sudden unexpected feelings of peace and belonging to something bigger than myself. I felt uplifted in a way that made me stop and really take notice – it, the feeling demanded my attention. I was completely present and everything was so clear. The energy of the area – the history and the sense of everything fitting together seemed palpable. I was dazed by my feelings; it was like my spirit automatically recognised that I was in a remarkable place and my questioning or rationing mind was nowhere in sight. I so wanted to spend time just being in the space but we had other commitments so after a short walk around some of the gardens and a visit inside the church, we left. I said to Charles on leaving how I wanted to come back and spend most of a day there, sitting and reading or listening to music, to be in that space seemed important and necessary. I still hope to do this, either in the summer or autumn this year.

Charles and I went did go back this Friday though and we wandered around the gardens and sat in the church for more than an hour. I didn't have a repeat of my previous visit but I understand this is the norm for moments of wonder, they are unbidden and can't be forced. That

said, I was able to admire and appreciate the church and gardens for the remarkable historical spiritual sanctuary they are. Mostly though, I am grateful for having experienced what T. S. Eliot called “a moment in and out of time” on my previous visit.

3rd Hymn 233 ‘Others call it God’

Tune: ‘Aurelia’ Samuel Sebastian Wesley

Words: William Herbert Carruth

A fire-mist and a planet,
A crystal and a cell,
A star-fish and a saurian,
And caves where cave-folk dwell;
The sense of law and beauty,
A face turned from the clod –
Some call it evolution,
And others call it God.

Haze on the far horizon,
The infinite tender sky,
The ripe rich tints of cornfields,
And wild geese sailing high;
And over high and lowland,
The charm of golden rod –
Some people call it nature,
And others call it God.

A picket frozen on duty.
A mother starved for her brood,
And Socrates drinking hemlock,
And Jesus on the rood;
And millions, who, though nameless,
The straight, hard pathway trod –
Some call it consecration,
And others call it God.

Closing words: from Marjorie Newlin Leaming:

Remembering that the universe is so much larger than our ability to comprehend, let us go forth from this time together with the resolve to stop trying to reduce the incomprehensible to our own petty expectations, So that wonder, that sense of what is sacred, can open up our minds and light up our lives.

Extinguish the Chalice

Closing music/video:

[The Majestic Beauty of the Cosmos \(Hubble\) HD Relaxing space music NASA \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=khySM1YBQvA)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=khySM1YBQvA>