

All hymns from the Green Book

**Opening Music:** 'Rhosymede' composed by R.Vaughn Williams  
<https://youtu.be/kymJPJTUfty>

**Welcome:** Good morning and Welcome everyone, whether you are a regular attender, or if this is your first visit here, and you are especially welcome if it *is* your first time here – welcome! Welcome whoever you are, however you are feeling, what ever you carry in your heart, and bring with you: cares, concerns or celebrations, sadness or joys, or curiosity! You are welcome.

Whoever you are, and however you are feeling, each one is part of our worshipping community this morning, contributing by being connected in spirit, and all equally valued. We begin, as is our custom, by lighting our chalice flame as a symbol of our free religious faith.

**Chalice Lighting:** words of *Abraham Lincoln*

'I am not bound to win, But I am bound to be true.  
I am not bound to succeed But I am bound to live up to what light I have'

**Opening Words:** My theme for today is 'Being true to oneself', something which chimes with most Unitarians, for being true to oneself includes being true to our personal beliefs, including spiritually and in our chosen religion.

Here are some words by our Chief Executive, Liz Slade, taken from an address she gave some years ago at New Unity Chapel: "Thinking about the things that I do associate with the full sort of happiness that really reaches through me, I've realized I am happier the more that I am being myself. Not the version of myself that I *think* people want to see, or expect to see, but when the outside of me truly resonates with the inside of me. Expressing that version of myself, and connecting with other people who recognize and understand it, brings an easy flowing happiness that I'd choose every time over a fancy restaurant. And I've realized that part of expressing that version of me in the world is accepting it myself – that self-acceptance feels much more than a cause of being happy, but part of being happy in itself."

**1<sup>st</sup> Hymn No. 15: 'For all that is our life'**

Words by Bruce Findlow, b 1922

Melody 'Old 120<sup>th</sup> ' from *Este's Psalter*, 1592

For all that is our life  
We sing our thanks and praise;  
For all that is a gift  
Which we are called to use  
To build the common good  
And make our own days glad.

For needs which others serve,  
For services we give,  
For work and its rewards,  
For hours of rest and love:  
We come with praise and thanks  
For all that is our life.

For sorrow we must bear.  
For failures, pain and loss,  
For each new thing we learn,  
For fearful hours that pass:  
We come with praise and thanks  
For all that is our life.

For all that is our life  
We sing our thanks and praise;  
For all that is a gift  
Which we are called to use  
To build the common good  
And make our own days glad.

### Prayers:

(i) We hold in our thoughts and prayers, all those of our church community, all those of our families and friends and our neighbours in the wider community who are in need of solace. For the sick, may there be healing and strength. For the distressed may there be peace and tranquility of spirit. For the embittered may there be reconciliation and a new beginning. For the despairing, may there be faith and rekindled joy. For the fearful, may there be courage and unquenchable hope. For the poor and oppressed, may there be better times ahead. With trembling hands we reach out to all our neighbours, those near by or afar, who are suffering in any way. May love and life flow out through us to restore, to relieve and to re-create ... AMEN

ii) 'What we are not' by Rev. Cliff Reed

We are not our hairstyles,  
We are not our clothes,  
We are not our cars.  
We are not our religious labels,  
We are not the part of town in which we live,  
We are not our nationality,  
We are not our houses,  
We are not our bank accounts,  
We are not our jobs:

We are not what is accidental and external to us.  
They may or may not say something about us,  
But they are not *us*. We wouldn't like to be prejudged because of them.

But we do the same thing to others all the time; may we be forgiven.

Remind us that our worth lies in our true selves – behind the show, behind the image, behind the pretence.

Remind us that we are not devalued by what happens to us – by violence, by unemployment, by impoverishment. We remain creators, we remain people. Only our own loveless-ness can diminish us.

We are not what others see. We are what is inside looking out – and that is special. Help us to respect ourselves and so to love others. *A M E N*

Story: this is about accepting ourselves with all our qualities, including our limitations and our strengths: Ann will read the story for us now:

### **A Story – ‘The Fish and the Monkey’ (author unknown)**

The Fish loved living in the river. It felt blissful swimming around in its clear blue waters. One day, while swimming closer to the river bank than usual, it heard a voice say, “Hey, Fish, how is the water?”

Fish raised its head above the water and saw a Monkey seated high up on the branch of a tree.

The Fish replied, “The water is nice and warm, thank you, Monkey”.

The Monkey felt jealous of the Fish, which seemed so content in its natural element, and wanted to give it a put-down. So the Monkey asked, “Why don’t you come out of the water and climb this tree. The view from here is amazing!”

The Fish, feeling a little sad, replied, “I don’t know how to climb a tree and I know I cannot survive out of the water”.

Hearing this, the Monkey made fun of the Fish saying, “You are totally worthless if you cannot climb a tree!”

The Fish started thinking about this remark day and night and became very depressed, “Yes, the Monkey is right”, it would think, “I cannot even climb a tree, I must be worthless.”

An Eel saw the Fish looking so sad and asked the reason why. When the Fish explained, the Eel laughed and said, “If the Monkey thinks you are worthless for not being able to climb the tree, then the Monkey is worthless too, because it cannot swim or live under water.”

Upon hearing this the Fish suddenly realised how gifted it was; that it had the ability to survive under water and swim freely which the Monkey never could!

The Fish felt thankful to Nature for giving it such an amazing ability.

### **Moral of the story:**

This story takes from Einstein’s quote, “Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a Fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid”.

The Fish in the story attained self- realisation. It realised what its true power was, thanks to its friend the Eel. In a similar way, the only way to realise *your* true potential is to become self- aware. The more awareness you bring into your life, the more you realise your true potential.

(ii) By Carol Rocklin, MSW

"Each of us comes into this world with a unique set of genes and neurons. Even before I learned of the neuropsychiatric findings of the last decade I became aware of this when I worked at White Plains Hospital. My job was filled with stress and many crises. When I needed a break, I would go up to the neonatal nursery and gaze at the newborns. There they were all lined up in rows in front of a picture window, swaddled up except for their faces. Those were spiritual moments for me. I would ponder the miracle of life. I would think about those lives to be lived and hope for the best possible for them.

One thing was abundantly clear. They were not all alike. Some were tranquil, some wriggled tensely, even though asleep, some cried furiously. No, they were not blank slates. They had come into this world with their own unique set of genes and neurons giving them their own individual set of characteristics with which to face the world they had just entered.

And that world, what would it be like? Hopefully with parents who were lovingly prepared to care for their newborn, to raise him or her to be a confident human being, at home in the world and with her or himself as a whole self fulfilled human being."

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Hymn No. 155 'Be True, Live Truly'**

Words after Horatius Bonar, 1808 – 89 English Traditional melody 'Heronsgate'

You must be true unto yourself  
If truth to others you would teach;  
Your soul must overflow with love  
If you another's soul would reach.

Think wisely, truly, and your thoughts  
This hungry world shall help to feed;  
Speak truly, and your every word  
Shall yet become a fruitful seed.

Let lips be full of gentle speech,  
Your heart respond to human need;  
Live truly, and your life shall be  
A glorious and a noble creed.

## **Second Readings: from the Tao te Ching**

(i) Chapter 33 \_\_\_\_\_ 'Kinds of power'

Knowing other people is intelligence;  
knowing yourself is wisdom.  
Overcoming others takes strength;  
Overcoming takes greatness.  
Contentment is wealth.

Boldly pushing forward takes resolution.  
Staying put keeps you in position.

To live till you die  
Is to live long enough.

(ii) Chapter 44 'FAME AND FORTUNE'

Which is nearer,  
name or self?  
Which is dearer,  
self or wealth?  
Which gives more pain, loss or gain?

All you grasp will be thrown away.  
All you hoard will be utterly lost.

Contentment keeps disgrace away.  
Restraint keeps you out of danger  
so you can go on for a long, long time.

Chapter 19 'RAW SILK AND UNCUT WOOD'

Stop being holy, forget being prudent,  
It'll be a hundred times better for everyone.  
Stop being altruistic, forget being righteous,  
People will remember what family feeling is.  
Stop planning, forget making a profit,  
There won't be any thieves and robbers.

But even these three rules  
Needn't be followed; what works reliably  
Is to know the raw silk,  
Hold the uncut wood.  
Need little,  
Want less.  
Forget the rules,  
Be untroubled

*'Raw silk' and 'uncut wood' are images traditionally  
associated with the characters 'su' (simple, plain) and 'p'u' (natural, honest)*

**'An alphabet of life and living'** .by our dear friend Bernice Lashbrook,, who attended various chapels in the Western Union and was its President some years ago.

A is accepting that there are other points of view to be considered.  
B is recognising what is beautiful in ourselves as well as in others.  
C is nurturing curiosity in all and everything around us,  
D is daring to be brave and speaking out against injustice, not easy to do.  
E is enjoying what we have rather than envying others.  
F is having fun at every opportunity.  
G is having the good grace to accept and admit when we're wrong.  
H is the comfort a hug will bring to someone who may need it.  
I is to be 'interested' as well as 'interesting'.  
J is just being ourselves and not adopting false affectations.  
K is kissing whether in greeting, friendship or love.  
L is trying to be a good listener.  
M is meaning what we say when we say it.  
N is never making promises we cannot or will not keep.  
O is for opening our ears and hearts when someone is troubled.  
P is making time to play as well as to work.

Q is finding quiet moments alone for our own thoughts.

R is realising that often something good comes out of bad.

S is the sharing of joys and all that is good in our lives with others.

T is remembering to say 'thank you' more than we do.

U is valuing our uniqueness.

V is recognising that victory is hollow if won cheaply or dishonestly.

W is working for what we need or want rather than waiting for or expecting it to come to us for nothing.

X is striving to rid ourselves of the xenophobia that may lie within us.

Y is learning to recognise that what we yearn for, but cannot have, consumes energy we can usefully spend on something worthwhile and achievable.

Z is sustaining our zest for life, even when life gets difficult.

Some time to reflect ...

**Reflective Music:** 'Serenitas' by Hawes

--- P A U S E ---

### ADDRESS – “BE TRUE TO YOURSELF”

A famous man, I think it was Michael Faraday, when asked to what use he could put his discoveries in electromagnetism and electricity, replied, “Madam, what use is a new born infant?” I was reminded of those words when reading that lovely piece by Carol Rocklin.

Almost nearly every new born baby has unlimited potential. Even a child with most unpromising beginnings in life may go on to make wonderful achievements. But how true to her or his true nature will that that child, or any one of us, be? Some aspects of ourselves cannot be changed, of course, in much the same way that a fish cannot live out of water or climb a tree, and we'd suffer if we tried such a change, that wouldn't be being true to ourselves.

We are none of us perfect, whatever 'perfect' means – different things to different people, certainly. As Carol Rocklin points out no two babies are exactly alike in all respects. Siblings may be *similar* – in the case of twins, especially identical twins, **very similar**, but their parents *do* find some small but significant differences, which increase as the children grow, and develop their own unique identities. Each child – each one of us, has a set of spontaneous feelings and responses to each new situation encountered. The behaviours are modified by the parents/carers and those closest, to ensure the baby is kept safe from harm. Also the behaviour has to be modified to fit in with whatever is expected by the culture into which we are born. The most obvious example is potty training, otherwise the world would be a very messy and unpleasant place!

But apart from this, there are many expectations heaped upon the growing child. Expectations have been described as the bits we hear that don't always fit who we are. We soon learn what will happen if we don't comply with them, and modify our behaviour accordingly.

Each of us accommodates our environment so as to blend in, be accepted, and be safe. We have all done this, in varying degrees. Even in the most loving home, these lessons have to be learnt, and our “real” self will inevitably get lost, to some extent. Some children grow up with such strong expectations, from family that they live lives and make careers very different from those to which they may be ideally best suited, as if the choices are pre-ordained. Others struggle mightily and never feel sure of their way or feel as if they are making the right decisions. For example, how much career choice does the child of a 4<sup>th</sup> generation Dr, or

Admiral, or farmer or undertaker or dustman really have, if the expectation is to follow into the family 'firm'?

Throughout our lives we have to make choices. How do we live in 'their' (meaning our parent's or our cultural) world, how do we relate to others, who do we fall in love with, what friends do we choose, how we spend our time? These choices are large and small, and extend to our Values and belief-systems. Are they being made by the healthy whole being in a way that is sustaining and fulfilling?

To be true to yourself means to stand up for what you believe in and to be proud of your actions. You can't do this without having people occasionally disagree with what you do, but that's not important. The most important thing is that you get to live the life that you were destined to live, without living on someone else's terms. This can take enormous courage, mentally and emotionally, and sometimes even physically too.

I'm thinking now of religious beliefs, and of those early Protestants and Unitarians (though that term wasn't used until about 250 years ago). They realized that they could no longer blindly follow the current religious doctrines of their times. As far back as the reign of Henry V, that 'golden boy' who led the English army to a great victory at Agincourt in the early 1400's, the Lollards, challenged orthodox religious views, and questioned the authority of the Pope. They felt they had to be true to themselves, and their own religious beliefs, which went against the mainstream. They were imprisoned for that, and several sadly were burnt as heretics. A terrible price to pay for being true to themselves.

We move on to Tudor times. What we now call the English Reformation involved enormous changes in the political and religious life of this country. The religious beliefs of succeeding monarchs differed widely. From the Protestant Edward 6<sup>th</sup> to his staunchly Roman Catholic half-sister, Queen Mary, and then his Protestant half-sister, Queen Elizabeth 1<sup>st</sup>, who tried to steer a more middle way.

Anyone who didn't change their own beliefs in accordance, risked being labelled a 'heretic' and cruelly persecuted. Many men and women lost their liberty, and even their lives in the most horrible way, at the stake.

The last people to die in this horrible way in England as heretics were Bartholomew Legate and Edward Wightman in March and April 1612 respectively, in the reign of James I of England. They rejected many of the accepted religious beliefs, including the concept of the Trinity of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Legate and Wightman were victims of a complex series of events, including a growing campaign against the Puritans and King James' desire to be seen as a traditional Christian. A terrible price to pay for being true to themselves.

In Scotland, as late as 1697, Thomas Aikenhead, a young Edinburgh medical student, rejected the doctrine of the Trinity for which he was hanged. All for being true to himself and his beliefs.

The Pilgrim Fathers in 1620, set sail, lastly, from this place (Plymouth) to go to America, where they could practice their religion in their own way, without fear of persecution. Being true to themselves eventually led to the formation of a whole new nation.

During the English Civil War, John Biddle, who is known as the 'father of English Unitarianism', was imprisoned for what could be described as 'Dissenting' behaviour, in his writings. His writings were burned; he was not, but he died in prison years later. A terrible price to pay for being true to himself.

When King Charles II returned from exile and restored the monarchy, everyone hoped for a new more liberal age, but within 2 years, this turned sour. The Act of Uniformity in 1662 required all ministers of religion and anyone employed by the church, to comply with the 39 Articles of Religion. This was a set of rules governing beliefs and religious practices.

Many of the Clergy felt unable to conform to all of them. As a result, nearly 2,000 clergymen, including George Hughes, the puritan vicar of St Andrews in Plymouth, were forced to leave the established church in what became known as the Great Ejection in 1662. If you ever visit our church in Cullompton, you'll see that date on the gates there. Any 'non-conforming' Minister, preferring to follow the dictates of his own conscience, was forced from office, and lost his living and income.

Time passed. Eventually attitudes softened towards several branches of Protestant Non-conformity; maybe they were no longer perceived as a threat. Unitarians began meeting for worship towards the end of the 17th Century, though often in out of the way places, to be safe. The original Bridgwater Chapel was destroyed by a mob.

In 1689, a Toleration Act was passed, amended in 1779 "for the further relief of Protestant Dissenting ministers and schoolmasters". This relief, however, was not extended to Unitarians. So, the Unitarians who met in Essex Street in London 1774 to hear Theophilus Lindsey preach, were breaking the Law. So was Joseph Priestly, the scientist and Unitarian preacher. He eventually emigrated to America in 1794 after a mob destroyed the chapel where he was Minister, and his own home and laboratory in July 1791. A heavy price to pay for being true to himself.

Closer to home, many members of the congregation at the Devonport Unitarian chapel built in 1790, worked in the naval Dockyard. Commissioner Fanshaw threatened to sack them if they continued to attend, because they were perceived as a security threat. This was too heavy a price to pay for being true to themselves – they had families to support and there were no unemployment benefits back then. As records state, 'The Congregation of the Chapel decayed in consequence'. It eventually closed as a chapel, became a pub for many years and is now a Co-operative store. The building has been well preserved and '1790' inscribed over the front entrance. It is near the Cumberland medical centre.

The persecutions continued until the Act of Toleration of 1813, brought in by MP William Smith. For 40 years, he was Chairman to the Deputies of the three Denominations (Independents, Presbyterians and Baptist); the body that represented the Dissenting interests in Parliament. He was also a grandfather of Florence Nightingale. The 1813 Act repealed parts of the earlier acts, and removed the risk of prosecution and even death, for anyone who dared to openly be a Unitarian. It was finally safe for Unitarians in this country, to follow their consciences in the matter of their beliefs – it was finally safe for them to be true to themselves.

And we enjoy that freedom today – how lucky we are. We should never take this for granted. It was won at such cost by those of previous generations. It is our privilege, our right and our duty to keep it alive for those who come after us.

Thank you, William Smith for being true to yourself, so that we can be true to ourselves today.

Before closing, lets take a moment to reflect and ask ourselves:

How many of us sitting here today, would have had his energy, commitment, perseverance and courage, to carry this out?



How many of us sitting here today, would have had the courage of those first Non-conformists in 1662, to show publicly what our beliefs are?

How many of us sitting here today, would have had the courage of those earlier men, like Edward Wightman, Bartholmew Legate, or Thomas Aikenhead, to be true to themselves at such cost? I'm not sure I would! But now we can be true to ourselves freely, and safely – no price to pay for being true to ourselves – except to work to ensure future generations enjoy the same freedom.

Your true self is the core of you –the state you were born to be. It is whole and still exists inside you. The other part was that altered and repressed needs in order to survive in the environment in which you found yourself – your parents, your family, your culture.

It is true that one must make adaptations to live with others and self, but often we make adaptations that keep us from being whole.

So, as we close, take a few moments to reflect on how true to yourself, you have been able to become? And to celebrate being you!

### **Final Hymn: No. 290 'Unfolding Life'**

Words by Marion Sheahan Whitcomb, b 1924 Tune 'Sarie Marais' traditional South African

When I was a child I spoke as a child,  
I sang my childhood themes;  
I understood as children do  
And dreamed my children's dreams.  
But when in all good time I grew  
And called myself mature,  
I put away my childish ways,  
For they could not endure.

As life unfolds from stage to stage,  
I play in many roles.  
The object is to find myself  
Amid these tight controls.  
O, have you ever been a son,  
A parent, daughter, wife?  
O, have you ever wondered when  
You might live your own life?

I'll try to make some time each day  
For liberating me.  
I'll build a bridge or write a song,  
And that will set me free.  
For when I've made some goal my own,  
I'll take the rest in stride,  
Adjusting and adapting to  
The changes that abide.

### **Closing Words:**

"Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life.  
Don't be trapped by dogma - which is living with the results of other people's thinking.

Don't let the noise of others' opinion drown out your own inner voice.  
And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition.  
They somehow already know what you truly want to become.  
Everything else is secondary."  
-- Steve Jobs, co-founder of 'Apple'

**Closing Music:** 'Allegro risoluto' from Tartini's Concerto with Clarinet  
<https://youtu.be/OAPPHvq1ZqA>

**Extinguish Chalice**