

21st July 2024 – ‘Rhythm’

Led by Rev Kate Whyman

1. GATHERING MUSIC ‘I’ve got rhythm’, Gershwin

https://youtu.be/eHo_oGujVBw?feature=shared

2. WELCOME and CHALICE

Welcome everyone to our service this morning however and wherever you are joining us today. Welcome.

I begin with some words by Gary Kowalski

We gather here to worship:

to seek the truth, to grow in love, to join in service;

to celebrate life's beauty and find healing for its pain;

to honour our kinship with each other and with the earth;

to create a more compassionate world,

beginning with ourselves;

to wonder at the mystery that gave us birth;

to find courage for the journey's end;

and to listen for the wisdom that guides us

in the quietness of this moment.

3. CHALICE LIGHTING

Let’s begin by lighting our chalice candle, as is our custom, as a symbol of our free religious faith. And if you’re joining at home you might like to light your own candle.

We light this flame as a symbol of the golden thread that connects us, that shines through us, and joins us to the eternal now, the sacred mystery, the all that is.

4. **1st HYMN 62 (P)** Here we have gathered

Here we have gathered, gathered side by side;
circle of kinship, come and step inside!
May all you seek here find a kindly word;
may all who speak here feel they have been heard.
Sing now together this, our hearts' own song.

Here we have gathered, called to celebrate
days of our lifetime, matters small and great;
we of all ages, women, children, men
infants and sages, sharing what we can.
Sing now together this, our hearts' own song.

Life has its battles, sorrows, and regret:
but in the shadows, let us not forget:
we who now gather know each other's pain;
kindness can heal us: as we give, we gain.
Sing now in friendship this, our hearts' own song.

Words © 1979 Alicia S. Carpenter

5. **PRAYER** some words from Teilhard de Chardin

Above all, trust in the slow work of God. We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We should like to skip the intermediate stages. We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new. And yet it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability — and that it may take a very long time. And so I think it is with you; your ideas mature gradually - let them grow, let them shape themselves, without undue haste. Don't try to force them on, as though you could be today what time (that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own

good will) will make of you tomorrow. Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be. Give Our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.

6. STORY 'The Beach', by Anne Morrow Lindberg from "Gift from the Sea", first published in 1955

The beach is not the place to work; to read, write, or think. I should have remembered that from other years. Too warm, too damp, too soft for any real mental discipline or sharp flights of spirit. One never learns. Hopefully, one carries down that faded straw bag, lumpy with books, clean paper, long over-due unanswered letters, freshly sharpened pencils, lists, and good intentions. The books remain unread, the pencils break their points, and the pads rest smooth and unblemished as the cloudless sky. No reading, no writing, no thoughts even – at least, not at first.

At first, the tired body takes over completely. As on shipboard, one descends into a deck-chair apathy. One is forced against one's mind, against all tidy resolutions, back into the primeval rhythms of the sea-shore. Rollers on the beach, wind in the pines, the slow flapping of herons across sand dunes, drown out the hectic rhythms of city and suburb, time tables and schedules. One falls under their spell, relaxes, stretches out prone. One becomes, in fact, like the element on which one lies, flattened by the sea; bare, open, empty as the beach, erased by today's tides of all yesterday's scribblings.

And then, some morning in the second week, the mind wakes, comes to life again. Not in a city sense – no—but beach-wise. It begins to drift, to play, to turn over in gentle careless rolls like those lazy waves on the beach. One never knows what chance treasures these easy unconscious rollers may toss up, on the smooth white sand of the conscious mind; what perfectly rounded stone, what rare shell from the ocean floor. Perhaps a channelled whelk, a moon shell, or even an argonaut.

But it must not be sought for or – heaven forbid! – dug for. No, no dredging of the sea-bottom here. That would defeat one's purpose. The sea does not reward those who are too anxious, too greedy, or too impatient. To dig for treasures shows not only impatience and greed, but lack of faith. Patience, patience, patience, is what the sea teaches. Patience and faith. One should lie empty, open, choiceless as a beach – waiting for a gift from the sea.

7. POEM 'Rhythm of life', from *Michael Rosen's Big Book of Bad Things*.

First, he explains how he wrote it...

'I was out with some boys and girls by the side of the river Thames and over the river Thames is a railway bridge called Hungerford Bridge, and if you stand underneath it you hear the trains going over, and we were standing under there and a train came over and it made an enormous noise – dlndelrrrr – in fact it made so much noise we were all shaking and then I went over and I put my hands on the bridge. And you could feel the train. And I thought 'Hand on the bridge feel the rhythm of the train'. And then I thought 'that would make a good first line of a poem'. I was once talking to Benjamin Zephaniah, and I said to him 'Where do you write your poems, Benjamin?' And he said 'I don't write them, I make them up when I go jogging, and that way I can remember them, and when I perform them other people will get them because it's that kind of a poem.' So I thought about that. Can I make up a poem that begins 'Hand on the bridge feel the rhythm of the train' between the time I leave the river Thames and get to my house in Hackney?' And so that's what I did. I sat on the tube and I made up a poem and it went like this...

Hand on the bridge
feel the rhythm of the train.
Hand on the window
feel the rhythm of the rain.
Hand on your throat
feel the rhythm of your talk.

Hand on your leg
feel the rhythm of your walk.

Hand in the sea
feel the rhythm of the tide.

Hand on your heart
feel the rhythm inside.

Hand on the rhythm
feel the rhythm of the rhyme.

Hand on your life
feel the rhythm of time.

hand on your life
feel the rhythm of time

hand on your life
feel the rhythm of time.

There is rhythm in all aspects of life and there is also, I like to think, an essence,
a golden thread that links everything together.

8. 2nd HYMN 142 (P) Shining through the universe

Shining through the universe
runs the golden thread;
woven in along with white,
black, yellow, green and red.

Cooling water burning fire,
metal, wood and clay,
in the earth's five elements
the gold thread marks the Way.

If we try to pick it out
from the fabric fair;
when the threads are pulled apart
the gold's no longer there.

Under heaven, over earth,
north to southern pole,
if you trace the golden thread
the Way will calm your soul.

“Turn your feet along the Way”,
sages taught of old;
live life well and tread the path
marked by the thread of gold.

Music © David Dawson, words © Roger Mason, based on the Tao Te Ching

9. REFLECTION Sam Trubore

Let us turn inward now
Feel the rhythm of the breath.
In and out, In and out,
Find the peace of just being with the flow of the breath.
Letting go of yesterday and tomorrow.
Feel the restorative power of the peace of this moment.
A peace, large enough to open
to the concerns and sorrows that trouble us.
A stillness, quiet enough to respond
to the joys and celebrations that enliven us.
There is safety here in the rhythm of the breath.
The ebb and flow of life is enacted with each one.
Taking in oxygen sustenance,
Letting go of carbon dioxide waste.
Taking in the fullness of experience
Letting go of the residue that wants to cling to us.
Let us be silent.

10. SILENCE

11. INTERLUDE Evening ocean waves

<https://youtu.be/czry9aZBvQY?feature=shared>

12. ADDRESS

Last time I was here, a fortnight ago, I spoke about Pilgrimage, and of loving the rhythm that it imposes on the day – the simplicity of following a path and repeating and becoming immersed in a particular way of being which, though it is a ‘routine’, is anything but ‘routine’. By which I mean, it is freeing rather than constraining. Inspiring rather than ordinary.

The other day I took part in a Zoom session led by Oliver Smith. He was talking about his new book entitled ‘On this Holy Island: A modern pilgrimage across Britain’. And I was interested to hear him say that we not only encounter ‘thin places’ during pilgrimage, that is places where we feel closer to the divine, or maybe to our ancestors, but we also meet ‘thin people’. By which he meant not that the people on the journey were physically thin, but that they shared their stories more easily, they gave of themselves more readily. Their souls were closer to the surface, might be one way of putting it.

I – and I’m sure you also – have experienced this feeling of ‘thinness’. Perhaps when we’re fully immersed in what we’re doing, whether that be painting or playing an instrument, or staring out to sea. And I think being attuned to the rhythms of life helps with that.

For example, I found myself thinking of the rhythm of a monastery, or a friary. At Hilfield Friary in Dorset, which I have visited many times now. I would say it is a thin place, and the people who choose to go there are ‘thin’ people, at least while they’re there. The brothers have a set rhythm to their day marked by several

periods of prayer and worship, beginning early in the morning and finishing at night, and this rhythm is held to, no matter what else is going on.

Why is it helpful to live a rhythmic life? I think it's because it puts us in touch with our bodies, our planet, with the universe, and so with God. After all, rhythm is integral to our lives, to our very existences. From our breathing and our heartbeat – those most intimate, life-giving and life-sustaining rhythms shared by us all – to the days, seasons, the tides, the moon, the sun and stars – everything in us and around us moves in rhythm. Circadian rhythms, menstrual cycles, migration and hibernation patterns, even the metres of speech and poetry, the timings of music, everything seems to have its rhythm. And when we live in rhythm ourselves, and accept the ebbs and flows of life, then we may derive more of a feeling of being at home with it all.

It's no accident that religious life is full of rhythms, rituals, practices and disciplines. I admit that I have often railed against them – too much seemingly repeated by rote or apparently without question or understanding. But of course that's an oversimplification.

Ian Adams, writing in the Church Times, says

'The monastic rhythm of life cultivates a different approach to time. It redefines a task as not just a means to an end, but as something to do because it is in itself both necessary and good. Its particular and brilliant gift is to carve out space for what is truly important.'

The monastic day does not, for example, allow the flexibility to stay on at work because of a deadline. The things we are most likely to drop — prayer, silence, and stillness — are given particular attention and pride of place in the monastic diary.

On hearing the signal for an hour of the divine Office, the monk will immediately set aside what he has in hand, and go with utmost speed, yet with gravity and

without giving occasion to frivolity. Indeed, nothing is to be preferred to the Work of God.'

We are not monks, or friars, and our daily rhythms are very different of course, and need to be more fluid and adaptable to our circumstances. But there is still something beautiful at the heart of the practice – and the paradox – of committing to a rhythm that manages to hold us and yet also free us at the same time. In a similar way that clear boundaries can make relationships easier to navigate, or the given format of a poem – such as a sonnet or a haiku – can free the imagination.

I'm fascinated by the rhythm – or structure – of people's days partly because they are quite diverse, aren't they? There are the early risers and the night owls for a start. There are those who can't do anything until they've had a strong coffee, or in my case a cup of tea. There are folk who don't eat breakfast, others for whom breakfast is the most important meal of the day. A walk is an integral part of every day for some, and a prayer ritual or meditation practice feels beneficial or even essential for many of us. Perhaps you know you do your best work in the morning but need a nap in the afternoon. Maybe you read before you go to sleep at night, or listen to some calming music to unwind. What is the rhythm of your day? Or your week? And when, within that basic shape of your life, do you feel most at home in the world, most at one with yourself and the universe? When do you feel closest to God? When do you become a 'thin' person?

Pause for 5 minutes to consider and share

During the pandemic I was quite good at establishing my rhythm. It felt necessary in order to navigate the otherwise relatively empty days. Like many people, I needed to put in place structures and waymarkers to divide the sometimes uncomfortably long stretches of time alone, and to prevent myself drifting aimlessly and losing purpose. But recently I've found it more difficult to stick to my own chosen patterns, and have felt more easily blown off course. I know I'll need to get better at this when I retire. Those of you who have already had more practice may be able to advise me on that!

Anne Morrow Lindberg carved out time at the beach, taking her inspiration from the shells she found there and allowing them to offer up insights and reflections. This was a practice of spending time by sea in a state of openness, ready to receive its gifts. At these times I would say she became a 'thin' person. And above all a patient person, willing to wait, and to embrace the times when there seemed to be no inspiration as well as the times when her thoughts flowed freely. The rhythm of the sea became her rhythm too.

It can sound counterintuitive to find freedom in discipline, but finding our rhythm and living in to it may just be the most free we can be. Similarly it may seem challenging to value the ebbs in our lives as much as the flows. Who doesn't enjoy the high days and holiday of our lives, and don't we all experience the dips and the low days? But this too, is a necessary and an integral part of life. After all, we are by nature rhythmic beings immersed in a rhythmic universe.

May it be so.

13. 3rd Hymn 26 (P) Dancing Sweetheart

Dancing sweet heart, may your kindness
be to one another shown;
and when human hearts are aching
may true human love be known.
Sweet heart calm us. Sweet heart heal us.
Sweet heart let your love be grown.

Beating small heart in the bodies
of all living things on earth,
pumping life blood through their systems
until death from day of birth.
Small heart cleanse us. Small heart feed us.
Small heart give us joy and mirth.

Pulsing great heart of the cosmos
beating in the depths of space,
keeping suns and planets turning
placing earth in rightful place.
Great heart warm us. Great heart keep us.
Great heart hold us in your grace.

Music by J. Neander, words by Andrew McKean Hill

14. CLOSING WORDS Elaine Gerhmann

Walk softly.
Speak truthfully.
Love gently.
Breathe deeply.
Live wisely.
Go in peace.

Extinguish chalice

15. CLOSING MUSIC 'The Rhythm of Life', The King's Singers

<https://youtu.be/Sbiwz-q5b7I?feature=shared>