

## 18<sup>th</sup> August 2024 – PLYMOUTH

### The moods of summer, led by Rev Kate Whyman

1. **INTRO MUSIC** Here comes the sun

2. **WELCOME/CHALICE LIGHT**

Welcome to you all, whether you're here in the church or joining us online today.

The theme of our service today is Moods of Summer.

Let's begin our service, as is our custom, by lighting our chalice candle as a symbol of our free religious faith. (Do please light one with me if you are able to do so.)

*LIGHT CHALICE* Words by Ellen Hamilton

In faith, together, we light this small scrap of light,  
symbol of the Sun's enormous power,  
whose energy burns so brightly in these days of deep Summer,  
catapulting the leaves and vines,  
vegetables, flowers and fruits to astonishing size, lengths and heights,  
spilling over the tops of cages, walls and trellises,  
delighting and nourishing all beings.  
We bask in the warmth and the heat of these days,  
with lightened hearts and quickened senses,  
in gratitude and in faith.

3. **OPENING PRAYER** **Summer Prayer**, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)

To settle ourselves ...

I ask for a moment's indulgence to sit by thy side.  
The works that I have in hand  
I will finish afterwards.  
Away from the sight of thy face  
My heart knows no rest or respite,  
And my work becomes an endless toil  
In a shoreless sea of toil.....  
Today the summer has come at my window  
With its sighs and murmurs,  
And the bees are plying their minstrelsy  
At the court of the flowering grove.  
Now it is time to sit quiet  
Face-to-face with thee,  
And to sing dedication of life  
In the silent and overflowing leisure.

4. **1<sup>st</sup> HYMN 43 (P) Gather the spirit**

Gather the spirit, harvest the power.  
Our sep'rate fires will kindle one flame.  
Witness the mystery of this hour.  
Our trials in this light appear all the same.

Gather in peace, gather in thanks.  
Gather in sympathy now and then.  
Gather in hope, compassion and strength.  
Gather to celebrate once again.

Gather the spirit of heart and mind.  
Seeds for the sowing are laid in store.  
Nurtured in love and conscience refined,  
with body and spirit united once more.

Gather in peace, gather in thanks.  
Gather in sympathy now and then.  
Gather in hope, compassion and strength.  
Gather to celebrate once again.

Gather the spirit growing in all,  
drawn by the moon and fed by the sun.  
Winter to spring, and summer to fall,  
the chorus of life resounding as one.

Gather in peace, gather in thanks.  
Gather in sympathy now and then.  
Gather in hope, compassion and strength.  
Gather to celebrate once again

*Words and music © Jim Scott*

## **5. STORY Ghost in the orchard, Elizabeth Tarbox**

When I was little there was an orchard in my life. It belonged to a great-aunt of mine, Auntie Carrie. She was tiny. Even when I was ten I stood head and shoulders above her and looked down on the dainty embroidered cap she wore. She dressed in clothes that reached her ankles and wore narrow black shoes. She lived in a battered-looking cottage which leaked and sagged and smelled of decay. It was a converted summer house in a land not acclaimed for its summers. A little shack embedded in several acres of undergrowth.

Auntie Carrie was dear to me, and loved me and my sister. She understood what magic the orchard held and didn't complain that our visits to her were short in order for our playtime in the orchard to be long. There were apple trees, all higgledy-piggledy, maybe twenty of them, shooting up from the grass that grew three feet tall. I suppose the trees had been planted in straight lines, but apple trees know nothing of

geometry and by then they were gloriously disarranged, their branches going first one way and then the other, exploring, exploding out and up.

Each of us had a special tree – my sister, our friend Vonny, and me, and various other kids we used to invite over. The name of my tree was Beauty of Bath. Her apples were small, hard, and sweet and had a tough yellowish-orange skin. No one tended the apple trees or any of the fruit that grew in Auntie Carrie's garden. The trees blossomed each year, bore their fruit, and dropped them. No one except us kids harvested any of it.

I knew that my mother had lived there with Auntie Carrie before my folks married, and that was the reason why my father never came over, but in those days I knew my mother the way I knew Florence Nightingale or Queen Victoria – as someone important who had lived a long time ago. To me the apple orchard was anything and everything I wanted it to be, no memories, only adventures on long summer afternoons with my sister and our friends.

That apple orchard was there for all those everlasting years of childhood until Auntie Carrie moved to a nursing home when I was fourteen. She died two years later. She left the property in her will to me and my sister, but we were not consulted about its disposition. People more knowledgeable about such things sold it for us and put the money in a savings account.

Selling that orchard seems like a betrayal now; the apple trees meant more to us than the money ever did. But it's okay; the real value of the place cannot be sold. That's why I got such a pang this morning as I cycled passed a little bit of unkempt grass with some apple trees growing on it a mile or two from our home. I hope that apple orchard has a child in its life.

## 6. **POEM: Summer Moods, by John Clare**

I love at eventide to walk alone,  
Down narrow lanes overhung with dewy thorn

Where, from the long grass underneath, the snail  
Jet black, creeps out, and sprouts his timid horn.  
I love to muse o'er meadows newly mown,  
Where withering grass perfumes the sultry air;  
Where bees search round with sad and weary drone,  
In vain, for flowers that bloomed but newly there;  
While in the juicy corn the hidden quail  
Cries 'wet my foot' and, hid as thoughts unborn,  
The fairy-like and seldom-seen landrail  
Utters 'craik craik' like voices underground,  
Right glad to meet the evening dewy veil,  
And see the light fade into glooms around.

**7. 2<sup>nd</sup> Hymn 148 (P) Spirit of life (sung twice)**

Spirit of Life, come unto me.

Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion.

Blow in the wind, rise in the sea;

move in the hand, giving life the shape of justice.

Roots hold me close; wings set me free;

Spirit of Life, come to me, come to me.

*Words and music © Carolyn McDade, arr David Dawson*

**8. POEM The Summer Day, Mary Oliver**

Who made the world?  
Who made the swan, and the black bear?  
Who made the grasshopper?  
This grasshopper, I mean —  
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,  
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,  
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down —  
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.  
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.  
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.  
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.  
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down  
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,  
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,  
which is what I have been doing all day.  
Tell me, what else should I have done?  
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?  
Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
with your one wild and precious life?

## 9. REFLECTION

10. **INTERLUDE:** 'Summer evening', Ireland

11. **ADDRESS** 'The moods of summer'

The first mood I associate with summer is poignancy. Memories of so many summers, long gone. Our back garden where I splashed in the paddling pool and made mudpies of the flowerbeds. Put up a Wendy house on the grass and made imaginary tea in brightly coloured plastic cups with matching saucers. The bright

yellow laburnum tree before we discovered it was poisonous and had it taken down. My father's apple trees that never produced any fruit, and my mother's famously colourful herbaceous borders. The high hedge at the back that separated us from a school for children with learning difficulties. The few but memorable really hot summers. Many long and golden-lit evenings. The inevitable parade of summer music courses, holiday jobs and romances. All gone now.

The feeling of poignancy is not unpleasant, even though tinged with sadness and yearning. It brings, too, a fondness for the innocence of those days, along with the hindsight of greater understanding, and a softness in appreciating and forgiving it all.

I find I carry a mix of hopefulness and sadness into my summers still. A tender-heartedness for my own and my family's struggles and our small triumphs too. There's the temptation to wonder whether things could have been different. If I could travel back in time and change anything, would I? Maybe I'd encourage my mother to marry the man she really loved, instead of my dad, but then I wouldn't be here, or not in this form at least. Or perhaps I'd call for help the night my brother was born to so he might be delivered safely. But we must live with what actually happens, not with what might have been.

Summer also means freedom. No socks, light cotton dresses, seaside holidays. Sunglasses and ice-cream. Beaches and barbeques. Festivals and fetes. Sunsets and sunrises. Chilled white wine. A loosening of inhibition, a carefree easiness. A chance to relax, to rest.

Yet summer brings its own kinds of anxiety, too. As well as the excitement, the stressfulness of catching ferries, coaches, planes, getting stuck in traffic jams and cramming into busy trains. And all the while feeling that it's somehow slipping by. Wondering whether I'm really making the most of it. Anticipated for so long, it will be gone before we know it.

But above all this season offers opportunities for transcendence – for transformation – experiences that can change us forever. Maybe there's a road trip, or travel abroad, or a new love. Or maybe there are just small moments that shift us.

Moments of stillness in high summer in which time seems to stand still, or shimmer like a heat haze. For example, I think of watching a dragon fly, hover and dart between tall reeds in a deep pond in Hucklow, an insect so exquisite and improbable that it might be visiting from another eon, its wings rendered almost invisible by speed and light. I recall the sound of cicadas clicking unseen under endless stars in an African night. And only a few days ago listening to owls hooting across the woods to each other near Wembury. In such moments we seem to be lifted out of ourselves and out of time altogether. Moments to cherish.

Some would say the spiritual life is a long process of learning to let go, certainly it feels that way as we grow older, as each stage of life gives way to the next. And as the summer matures through August we get to experience loss once again as summer – for all its warmth and light – also carries within it the inevitability of dying.

Elizabeth Tarbox's nostalgic story from her childhood leads to the death of her Aunt Carrie, the end of the children's visits to the orchard, and the selling of the property. John Clare's poem closes with 'meeting the evening dewy veil and seeing the light fade into glooms around'. Here, today, we are already on the other side of Lammas, and know the summer is beginning to wane. Perhaps this is what Mary Oliver is realising in her 'Summer Day' poem. Wondering at creation's small and beautiful miracles, she cries out 'Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?', as though suddenly feeling the summer – and life itself – is slipping through her fingers. 'Tell me, what do you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?'

The summer may rest us, free us, loosen our inhibitions, bring us joy and lighten our mood. It may make us too hot and lethargic, or grumpy that the sun didn't shine as much as we'd hoped. It may lead us back into reveries of the past, provide a stage for important rites of passage, and reconnect us with nature. But finally it reminds us, once more, that nothing lasts for ever. Which is exactly as it should be, and must be. Our challenge is, as always, to embrace each summer – and each day – to the full, and then to let it go.



## 12. THIRD HYMN 268 (G) Moods of summer

When the summer Sun is shining  
Over golden land and sea,  
And the flowers in the hedgerow  
Welcome butterfly and bee;  
Then my open heart is glowing,  
Full of warmth for everyone,  
And I feel an inner beauty  
Which reflects the summer sun.

When the light of summer sunshine  
Streams in through the open door,  
Casting shadows of tree-branches,  
Living patterns on the floor;  
Then my heart is full of gladness,  
And my soul is light and gay,  
And my life is overflowing  
Like the happy summer day.

When the summer clouds of thunder  
Bring the long-awaited rain,  
And the thirsty soil is moistened,  
And the grass is green again;  
Then I long for summer sunshine,  
But I know that clouds and tears  
Are a part of life's refreshment,  
Like the rainbow's hopes and fears.

When beneath the trees of summer,  
Under leafy shade I lie,  
Breathing in the scent of flowers,  
Sheltered from the Sun-hot sky;  
Then my heart is all contentment,

And my soul is quiet and still,  
Soothed by whispering, lazy breezes,  
Like the grasses on the hill.

In the cool of summer evening,  
When the dancing insects play,  
And in garden, street and meadow  
Linger echoes of the day;  
Then my heart is full of yearning,  
Hopes and memories flood the whole  
Of my being, reaching inwards  
To the corners of my soul.

### **13. CLOSING WORDS**

May the road rise to meet you;  
May the wind be always at your back;  
May the sun shine warm upon your face;  
May the rain fall softly on your fields,  
Until we meet again,  
May God hold you in the hollow of her hand.

### **14. CLOSING MUSIC 'Summertime' Gershwin**