

SERVICE THEME: The Love of Angels (people will find an angel card on their seat which they can read to themselves and then can light a candle)

INTRODUCTORY MUSIC (start at 10:57): **Heaven's Window - Peter Kater**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhsKF4Yo14s>

Chalice Lighting

We light this candle as a symbol of our faith.

By its light may our vision be illumined;

By its warmth may our fellowship be encouraged;

And by its flame may our yearnings for peace, justice, love, compassion and the life of the spirit be enkindled.

We join together now...

We join together now to worship as a beloved community.

Each individual brings to our gathering faith and ideas, but each of us also yearns to share fellowship one with the other.

May we look beyond any differences to the common bonds that unite us: faith, hope, and love.

And may those divine qualities shine through our worship today.

HYMN 98 (P): Love will guide us

Love will guide us, peace has tried us,

hope inside us will lead the way

on the road from greed to giving.

Love will guide us through the hard night.

If you cannot sing like angels,

if you cannot speak before thousands,

you can give from deep within you.

You can change the world with your love .

Love will guide us, peace has tried us,

hope inside us will lead the way

on the road from greed to giving.

Love will guide us through the hard night.

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Tune: 'Olympia' traditional arranged by David Dawson. Used by permission

QUOTES: "Love is composed of a single soul inhabiting two bodies." – Aristotle. "Angels have no philosophy but love." – Terri Guillemets

STORY: The Whispering Tree

Once upon a time, in a small town nestled by the mountains, lived a little boy named Ethan. He was a curious and kind-hearted 8-year-old with a love for adventure. Every day, Ethan would explore the woods behind his house, searching for hidden treasures and secret paths.

One sunny afternoon, while he was wandering through the dense forest, Ethan stumbled upon a peculiar old tree. Its gnarled branches twisted in all directions, making it look like a mystical creature frozen in time. Intrigued, Ethan approached the tree and noticed a small, weathered sign hanging from one of its branches.

Curiosity sparked within him as he read the words written on the sign: "The Tree of Life." Ethan's eyes widened with wonder as he wondered what secrets this tree held. He decided to investigate further and gently touched its rough bark, almost as if he was communicating with it.

Suddenly, a gentle breeze rustled through the leaves, and the tree began to whisper a tale. "Long ago," it said, "this tree was known for its magical powers. It held the key to understanding the mysteries of life and death."

Ethan's heart raced with excitement. He had always wondered about life and death, and now, he had a chance to uncover some answers. With determination in his eyes, he vowed to seek the truth hidden within the Tree of Life.

Ethan embarked on a journey to unravel the secrets of the Tree of Life. He spent days researching books at the local library, seeking knowledge about life and death. With each page he turned, his curiosity grew stronger, and he longed for answers.

One day, while reading about ancient civilisations, Ethan stumbled upon a story that mentioned a wise old sage living in the mountains. Legend had it that this sage possessed ancient wisdom and had a deep understanding of life's mysteries. Determined to find answers, Ethan set off to find the sage's dwelling.

After days of hiking through rugged terrain, Ethan finally reached a humble cottage perched on the edge of a cliff. Inside, an old man with a long white beard and kind eyes welcomed him. The sage introduced himself as Master Samuel and listened attentively to Ethan's quest for knowledge.

With a gentle smile, Master Samuel said, "To understand life truly, one must embrace its cycle. Life and death are two sides of the same coin. Just as the seasons change, so does life. Cherish every moment, for it is part of a grand journey."

Ethan nodded, taking in the sage's wise words. He realised that life was a precious gift, and death was a natural part of it. Determined to live each day to the fullest, Ethan thanked Master Samuel for his guidance and headed back home, his heart brimming with newfound wisdom.

Back in his cozy room, Ethan reflected on his encounter with Master Samuel and the teachings of the Tree of Life. He decided to embrace life fully and make every day count.

Ethan started by spending more time with his family and friends. He played board games with his younger sister, Emma, and listened attentively to his grandmother's stories. He realised that these moments were precious and that building strong relationships brought immense joy and fulfillment.

He also learnt to appreciate the beauty of nature surrounding him. Ethan would often sit by the lake, watching the ripples dance under the golden sun. He marveled at the vibrant flowers in his mother's garden, each petal a symphony of colours. He understood that the world was full of wonders waiting to be discovered.

As time passed, Ethan's perspective on life and death had transformed. He no longer feared the unknown but saw it as a natural part of the cycle. He embraced the memories of loved ones who had passed and held them close to his heart.

One day, as Ethan explored the woods behind his house, he noticed a tiny sapling growing beside the Tree of Life. The sapling represented new life, a symbol of hope and growth. He realised that even in the face of death, life continued to flourish.

Ethan felt a deep sense of gratitude for the lessons he had learnt. He wanted to share his newfound wisdom with others, to show them the beauty that lay within the circle of life. He began writing stories and poems, capturing the essence of life's wonders.

With each tale he penned, Ethan spread a message of love, hope, and understanding. His words touched the hearts of many, inspiring them to see beyond the fear of death and embrace the gift of life.

As the years passed, Ethan's stories became famous, and he continued to write with passion and purpose. He understood that life was ephemeral but that the impact we leave behind could last forever.

And so, the little boy who once sought answers from an ancient tree became a beacon of light, guiding others to find their own meaning in the grand tapestry of life.

MUSIC: Merlin's Magic – Angel, Symphony of Love and Light

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zmsuUplpGQ>

READING 1: How do Unitarians understand salvation? From ‘Unitarian, what’s That?’ By Rev Cliff Reed, page19

“It must be said that many Unitarians are wary of the word “salvation”. We find some of its associations in mainstream Christianity unhelpful.

However, whether we use the word or not, Unitarians tend to see salvation in this-worldly rather than other-worldly terms. We identify it with the deliverance of the human spirit from those things that diminish it and bar the way to its fulfilment. Thus, deliverance from all that fractures our relationships with each other, with the rest of creation, and with our own true selves – and so from God – constitutes salvation. Such fracture manifests itself in hatred and resentment, arrogance and bitterness, greed and fear, guilt and self-contempt.

Unitarians identify the agent of salvation as healing, dynamic love.

This is both channelled through others and derived from some wellspring within ourselves. It is love that brings wholeness and fulfilment through the dissolution of the barriers that divide us.

These barriers exist both inwardly and in the external world. The ultimate saviour is the source of love’s power – which most call God.

However, love becomes manifest only in human beings and their relationships. So all those people who bring mercy and reconciliation, liberty and justice into the world are the embodiments of salvation. They are the “saviours” within humanity”.

READING 2: Each relationship and every single encounter can be a vehicle for meaningful spiritual connection, through the transformative magic of Bodhicitta. Buddha taught that this Bodhicitta or spiritual love has four active arms, known as the Four Boundless Heartitudes, and four expressive faces known as the Four Forms of Compassion in action. This is how we love, Buddha-style: impartial to all, free from excessive attachment or false hope and expectation; accepting, tolerant, and forgiving. Buddhist nonattachment does not imply complacency or indifference, or not having committed relationships or being passionately engaged with society, but rather has to do with our effort to defy change and resist the fact of impermanence and our mortality. By holding on to that which in any case is forever slipping through our fingers, we just get rope burn. Buddhist love is based on recognising our fundamental interconnectedness and knowing that all beings are like ourselves in wanting and needing happiness, safety, fulfillment, and not wanting suffering and misery. The Dalai Lama says, "If you want to be wisely selfish, care for others." All the happiness and virtue in this world comes from selflessness and generosity, all the sorrow from egotism, selfishness, and greed.

READING 3: A Short Message on Lent & 5 Things to do During Lent

During Lent Christians are called to use the three elements the Gospel recommends for spiritual growth: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. In spite of traumatic experiences and occurrences in today's world, we are called to dive into the sea of prayer, which is "the sea of the boundless love of God" to use the Pope's words. With more regular and intense prayer during Lent, Christians are called to think of the needs of others, including situations of famine, poverty, disease and suffering in the world.

Fasting becomes an act of compassion, loving and caring if it benefits someone else, if it helps us cultivate the style of the good Samaritan, who bent down to his brother in need and took care of him. Fasting should "exercise the heart" to recognise what is absolutely essential and to teach one how to share with others. It is a sign of becoming aware of and taking responsibility for injustice and oppression, especially of the poor, and is a sign of the trust we place in God's providence.

Almsgiving is a practice that should be common among Christians (and others) especially during Lent. Christians give concrete help and attention to those in need -- asking nothing in return -- because they recognise how much God has given them. Almsgiving also helps free people from the obsession of possession, from the fear of losing what they have and from the sadness of not sharing their well-being with others.

Some people like to devote the Lenten period to seeking out and indulging in God's presence. Lent does not always mean forbidding ourselves some pleasure. It can be an opportunity to seek the pleasure of God's presence. Here are 5 things you may wish to try out during Lent:

- 1. Get outdoors**
- 2. Spend time with others**
- 3. Pray for the little things**
- 4. See the answers, the daily miracles**
- 5. Turn worry into prayer, meditation, reflection, contemplation**

Hymn 110 'Now we sing to praise love's blessing' (Purple Book)

Now we sing to praise love's blessing
All through our lives,
Laughter, joy, surprise, confessing
All through our lives,
Love that dreamed a new creation,
Love that dares through incarnation,
Love that offers transformation
All through our lives.

How our wounds ache for love's healing
All through our days;
How our world needs love's revealing
In all its ways.
Fearful hearts suspect the stranger,
Hardened nations arm for danger,
Love live on, the powerful changer,
All through our days.

Love's the grace that makes us caring
All through our lives,
Urges us to warmth and sharing
All through our lives,
Speaks to us, oppression naming,
Lives in us, injustice shaming,
Lives in us, true peace proclaiming
All through our lives.

Love's the clown that mocks at winning
All through the world,
Midwife of each new beginning
All through the world,
In the struggles that confound us,
In the chaos all around us
Love's wide arms with hope surround us
All through the world.

In God's faithful love we flourish
All through our lives,
Known and loved, each other nourish
All through our lives;
Though the world's demands are pressing,
What life brings is left to guessing,
Still we sing to praise love's blessing All through our lives.

*Words @Anna Briggs
Music Tune 'Olicana' by David Dawson*

REFLECTIVE ADDRESS: the love of angels

Angels have long been portrayed as beings of light, guardians and messengers, appearing throughout various religious and spiritual traditions. While the understanding of angels can vary, from celestial beings in Christianity to more metaphorical representations in other spiritual practices, the Unitarian perspective offers a unique and inclusive approach to the concept of angels: angels are often seen less as literal beings and more as symbols of love, compassion, and hope — qualities that transcend any specific religious or doctrinal boundary. Let us attempt to explore the Unitarian understanding of angels, focusing on their symbolic nature and the role they play in inspiring love and kindness.

1. Unitarianism and the Role of Symbols

At its core, Unitarianism is a faith tradition rooted in the principles of individual freedom, reason, and the search for truth. Unitarianism does not adhere to a singular doctrine but instead encourages its followers to draw from a variety of religious, spiritual, and humanist sources. This inclusivity allows for a diverse range of interpretations about the nature of angels, and yet, despite this diversity, one common thread emerges: angels are seen as powerful symbols of love.

In Unitarianism, there is an emphasis on the "living tradition" which encourages people to explore wisdom from different sources, such as world religions, philosophical thought, and personal experiences. For many Unitarians, angels are not viewed as supernatural beings but as manifestations of the love and kindness that exists in the world around us. They might be seen in the form of a friend who offers support during a difficult time, or in the comforting words of a loved one who reassures us when we feel lost. In this sense, angels are not external forces but representations of the love that flows through the hearts of people.

2. Love as a Central Theme

Love is perhaps the most profound concept in Unitarian thought, transcending barriers of race, gender, and creed. The idea of universal love, or a love that encompasses all beings regardless of their differences, is foundational to the Unitarian ethos. Unitarianism emphasises the interconnectedness of all people, and this is mirrored in the way angels are viewed. Angels are often seen as agents of love — beings who act as messengers to remind us of our deep, intrinsic connection to one another.

In a world that can often feel divided by conflict, suffering, and injustice, the image of angels serves as a powerful reminder of what is possible when love transcends barriers. The love of angels, in this view, is not necessarily an abstract or distant force but is something that is real and tangible in the everyday acts of kindness, generosity, and compassion that we experience in our daily lives. Unitarianism encourages us to recognise these moments as 'angelic' as they reflect the divine spark within all of us.

3. Angels as Metaphors for Human Potential

From a Unitarian perspective, the love of angels is also a reflection of human potential. Angels are often described as embodying qualities such as purity, goodness, and guidance—traits that are also present within each individual. Unitarians might view angels not only as beings that inspire love but also as representations of the idealised version of ourselves, the part of us that is capable of acting with selflessness, compassion, and empathy.

In the Unitarian tradition, personal growth and the pursuit of justice are central goals, and angels can serve as symbols of the human capacity to transcend ego and live with purpose. The love that angels represent is not something that exists only in the divine or in a distant otherworldly realm. Instead, it is a potential that resides within each person, waiting to be realised. In this way, the love of angels is a call to live more fully in alignment with our highest values — values of love, justice, and kindness.

4. Angels as Guardians of Hope

Another significant aspect of the love of angels from a Unitarian perspective is their role as guardians of hope. Angels are often depicted in religious traditions as beings who provide protection and guidance in times of distress. From a Unitarian standpoint, the role of angels can be seen as a symbol of the hope and resilience that human beings can embody, even in the face of adversity.

Hope is a critical element of Unitarianism which teaches that no matter how dark the world may seem, there is always the potential for healing, transformation, and renewal. The love of angels is, in part, a reminder that even in the midst of suffering, there is light. Whether we interpret this light as a divine presence, the love of others, or an inner sense of peace, the image of angels encourages us to hold onto the belief that things can improve, and that love can guide us through even the most challenging circumstances.

In practical terms, this might manifest in the way that Unitarians advocate for social justice, work towards healing broken communities, and strive for personal growth. Angels, in this context, become not just ethereal figures but a symbol of the hope that drives us to continue working toward a better world, despite the obstacles we may face.

5. Angelic Love in Everyday Life

For Unitarians, the love of angels is not confined to religious rituals or special moments of transcendence. Rather, it is something that is accessible in the here and now, in the everyday interactions that shape our lives. Unitarianism encourages individuals to see the sacred in the ordinary and to recognise the presence of love in the simplest of acts — whether it is a hug from a friend, a smile from a stranger, or a kind word offered in a moment of need.

This focus on the everyday allows Unitarians to embrace a broader understanding of angels. Rather than seeing them as distant or supernatural beings, angels can be understood as everyday manifestations of love that invite us to be more compassionate and more present in the world. When we act with love, we are embodying the qualities of angels, and in doing so, we help to create a more loving and just world.

6. The Unitarian Vision of Universal Love

The Unitarian vision of angels is tied deeply to the belief in universal love — that love is a force that transcends all boundaries, all religions, and all divisions. Angels, from this perspective, are not limited to one faith tradition or another; instead, they are symbols of the divine love that is accessible to all. The love of angels invites us to see beyond differences and to recognise the shared humanity in all people.

This universal love is a central tenet of Unitarianism. It calls us to practise love not only for those we know but for all people, regardless of their background or beliefs. In this way, the love of angels is not just an individual experience but a collective one, a call to be in relationship with others in a way rooted in compassion, empathy, and understanding.

Conclusion: The love of angels, from a Unitarian perspective, is a rich and multifaceted concept that serves as a reminder of the divine potential within all of us. It is a love that transcends religious boundaries, encouraging us to recognise the sacred in the ordinary and to embrace the possibility of transformation, both within ourselves and in the world around us. By viewing angels not as separate, supernatural entities but as symbols of the love that connects us all, Unitarians are reminded of their deep responsibility to live with compassion, justice, and hope—values that are central to the human experience and the journey toward creating a better world for all. In this way, the love of angels becomes a call to action, an invitation to live out the best of what it means to be human.

MUSIC: Meditation and Celtic Music - A Short and Relaxing Meditation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uap-sgTkk1w>

POETRY: “How Do I Love Thee,” by Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861)

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of being and ideal grace.
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for right.
I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints. I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

Offertory Prayer

This church is sustained by what we are able to bring to it:

Our time and our energy,

Our love and our resources.

The morning collection will now be gratefully received immediately after the service to support the work of this congregation.

HYMN 106 (P): Nothing distress you

Nothing distress you,
nothing affright you,
everything passes,
God will abide.

Patient endeavour
accomplishes all things;
who God possesses
needs naught beside.

See the world's glory!
Fading its splendour,
everything passes,
all is denied.

Look ever homeward
to the eternal;
faithful in promise
God will abide.

Lift your mind upward,
fair are his mansions,
nothing distress you,
cast fear away.

Follow Christ freely,
His love will light you,
nothing affright you,
in the dark way.

Love in due measure,
measureless goodness,
patient endeavour,
run to love's call!

Faith burning brightly
be your soul's shelter;
who hopes, believing,
accomplishes all.

Hell may assail you,
it cannot move you;
sorrows may grieve you,
faith may be tried.

Though you have nothing,
he is your treasure:
who God possesses
needs naught beside

*Words St. Teresa of Avilam 1515 – 1582 translated Colin Peter Thompson. b 1945
Music Tune 'Many Mansions' ' by Peter Cutts b. 1937*

Closing Words

We are blessed with an abundance of good things for we which we are truly thankful, as long as we remember them.

We are privileged with great freedom and power, for which in return we act with responsibility.

We are lucky to have shared this time and space together, because we are lucky to have each other.

May the spirit of this place and these friends go with us into the busy city!

MUSIC: Om Mani Padme Hum | Meditative Sound of Buddhist | Peaceful Chanting | Buddhist Mantra | <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mvBLSJWk6HE> (audio/video – 23:58 – to play only until 04:07)