

Plymouth Unitarian Church - 'A Cup of Tea and Happiness' Sunday February 23rd 2025

Service by Ann Kader

Opening music: Hauser 'May it be'

[https://youtu.be/ ZW5B6nZ8Xw](https://youtu.be/ZW5B6nZ8Xw)

Welcome

Chalice lighting and words by Sarah Ruth Wekoye Davis

We light this chalice with all our soul's longing

To be who we are

To be who we will become

To be ourselves

Today's service, I hope, is an enjoyable one. It suddenly occurred to me that before lockdown, I used to do a yearly 'Cup of Tea' Service . So I thought this might be the right time to reinstate this especially with all that's going on with changes in our church, our lives and the state of the world.

So this service is about taking time out, being happy for a while, connecting with each other, connecting with ourselves and connecting with the Divine.

Happiness ebbs and flows throughout our time, but we can't value happiness until we've gone through sadness or disappointments.

But let's start with our cup of tea, or even coffee.

As I said earlier, I started to do my cup of tea services many years back after visiting Truro Cathedral, and always a sucker for a book and a cathedral shop, I bought 'The Tea Lover's Devotional' little book.

Our story today will come from that book.

1st hymn purple book no 147 – 'Spirit of Earth, Root, Stone and Tree'

Spirit of earth, root, stone and tree,

water of life, flowing in me,

keeping me syable, nourishing me,

O fill me with living energy!

Spirit of nature, healing and free,

Spirit of love, expanding in me,

Spirit of life, breathe deeply in me,

Inspire me with living energy!

Spirit of love, softly draw near,
open my heart, lessen my fear,
sing of compassion, help me to hear,
O fill me with loving energy!
 Spirit of nature, healing and free,
 Spirit of love, expanding in me,
 Spirit of life, breathe deeply in me,
 Inspire me with living energy!

Spirit of life, you are my song,
sing in my soul, all my life long,
gladden and guide me, keep me from wrong,
O fill me with sacred energy!
 Spirit of nature, healing and free,
 Spirit of love, expanding in me,
 Spirit of life, breathe deeply in me,
 Inspire me with living energy!

Music: 'Leaving of Lismore' Traditional Scottish melody Arr by David Dawson
Words: © Lyanne Mitchell used by permission

Story- 'The Comfort of Tea' from 'The Tea Lover's Devotional' By Emilie Barnes

Collecting teacups in Southern California is really an act of faith. I recall the time we had a major earthquake not far from where I live. Our home was safely south of the epicentre, and my tea things were safe, but friends showed me photos of knee deep rubble. Days of shaking and aftershocks left all their breakable treasures in shards and shatters.

It wouldn't take much of an earthquake to send all my teacups to the floor.

Actually, it wouldn't take an earthquake at all, for my fragile teacups are also vulnerable to more mundane dangers - the cat, the feather duster, my grandchildren, my own carelessness.

I always have to confess that once I broke 14 of my own prized teacups! A glass shelf was balanced precariously after cleaning, and it collapsed at my accidental nudge. More than a dozen of my favourite cups fell and broke to smithereens.

I was so devastated I couldn't face what had happened. I simply swept the China shards into a box and put it on the shelf - and six years passed before I could muster the courage to look inside the box. Only one cup was in large enough pieces even to be salvaged with glue, and it will never be the same.

All this is to say that I take a significant risk in keeping my teacups out. I take a risk in using them, in letting others use them. But it's a risk I choose to take. I choose it with my eyes open, and I choose it with gladness.

After all, life is fragile too.

But if we let that risk stop us from living, we've already lost!

While protecting us from injury and loss, we're also cutting ourselves off from joy and growth. But life in all its vulnerable beauty is incomparably worth it.

It is this realisation that has taught me to take risks with my teacups, to fall back on safe mugs or paper cups. I've even learned to take those teacups travelling - outdoors on a picnic or in a basket to visit a friend. Once I move the "safety" mentality,

I can use my beautiful tea things as they were intended - to share joy, happiness, friendship and caring, truly a cup of kindness.

I can be thankful that something meaningful to me can give comfort to another.

So what will I do when another earthquake comes?

I guess I'll do what anyone must do. I'll pick up the pieces.

And then, somehow, have another cup of tea.

2nd Hymn: Purple Book no 193, 'We laugh, we cry'

We laugh, we cry, we live, we die – we dance, we sing our song,
We need to feel there's something here to which we can belong.
We need to feel the freedom just to have some time alone,
But most of all we need close friends we can call our very own.
And we believe in life, and in the strength of love,
And we have found a need to be together
We have our hearts to give, we have our thoughts to receive,
and we believe that sharing is an answer.

A child is born amongst us and we feel a special glow.
We see time's endless journey as we watch the baby grow.
We thrill to hear imagination freely running wild
We dedicate our minds and hearts to the spirit of the child
And we believe in life, and in the strength of love,
And we have found a time to be together
And with the grace of age, we share the wonder of youth,
and we believe that growing is an answer.

Our lives are full of wonder and our time is very brief.
The death of one amongst us fills us all with pain and grief,
But as we live, so shall we die, and when our lives are done
The memories we shared with friends, they will linger on and on.
And we believe in life, and in the strength of love;
And we have found a place to be together.

We have the right to grow, we have the gift to believe that
Peace within our living is an answer.

We seek elusive answers to the questions of this life.
We seek to put an end to all the waste of human life.
We search for truth, equality, and blessed peace of mind
And then we come together here, to make sense of what we find.
And we believe in life, and in the strength of love;
And we have found a joy to be together
And in our search for peace, maybe we'll finally see:
Even to question truly is an answer.

Words and Music (Tune 'Credo') ©Shelley Jackson Denham, b 1950. Used by permission.

Prayers

At the end of each devotional there is a short prayer and a heart action:

The prayer after the story is:

'God, help me be a compassionate , giving person who is quick to offer up comfort and beauty.
Let's not focus on " things" so that I can focus on hearts.'

And a prayer for happiness:

Divine Spirit,
Please help me to rest in your happiness,
To allow a smile to linger on my lips,
To dwell within a wonderful memory,
To walk back through sunlit places.

Please help me to awake with hope,
To engage with life in all its variety,
To take in the beauty of others joy,
To touch the souls of those I meet with thankfulness.

Please help me to sing with faith,
To carry the truth close in my heart always,
To rejoice at new life and
To have peace as I age.

Please help me to indulge in love
To breathe in the sweetness of intimacy
To taste the kindness of friendship,
To feel the warmth of embrace

Please help me not to miss,
A single drop of heaven
To catch each moment
And drink in the great joy of life
May it be so.

On your chair are the words of the Buddhist Metta Loving Kindness prayer. The prayer is slightly shortened. Please join in saying them if you wish or just read or listen to them. We will go straight into a short silence after this followed by Celtic harp reflective music which will be played twice as it's a short piece.

My heart fills with loving kindness. I love myself. May I be well. May I be peaceful. May I be free.

May all beings in my vicinity be happy. May they be well. May they be peaceful. May they be free.

May all beings in my city be happy. May they be well. May they be peaceful. May they be free.

May all beings in my country be happy. May they be well. May they be peaceful. May they be free.

May all beings on every continent be happy. May they be well. May they be peaceful. May they be free.

May all beings on planet earth be happy. May they be well. May they be peaceful. May they be free.

May all beings in the universe be happy. May they be well. May they be peaceful. May they be free.

May all beings everywhere, whether near or far, whether known to me or unknown, be happy. May they be well. May they be peaceful. May they be free.

Silent time / reflective music: 'Dream Weaver' playing Celtic harp.

<https://youtu.be/DE31QENx64c>

3rd hymn purple book no 24 – 'Come sing a song with me'

Come, sing a song with me,
come, sing a song with me,
come, sing a song with me,
that I might know your mind.
And I'll bring you hope when hope is hard to find,
and I'll bring a song of love and a rose in the winter time.

Come dream a dream with me,
come dream a dream with me,
come dream a dream with me,
that I might know your mind.
And I'll bring you hope when hope is hard to find,
and I'll bring a song of love and a rose in the winter time.

Come, walk in rain with me,
come, walk in rain with me,
come, walk in rain with me,
that I might know your mind.
And I'll bring you hope when hope is hard to find,
and I'll bring a song of love and a rose in the winter time.

Come, share a rose with me,
come, share a rose with me,
come, share a rose with me,
that I might know your mind.
And I'll bring you hope when hope is hard to find,
and I'll bring a song of love and a rose in the winter time.

Words and Music by Carolyn McDade b.1935 © Surtsey Publishing Company used with permission.

Address

A reverend from York Minster saw on a cafe wall

“Where there is tea, there is hope” I really like that. We definitely all need to hang on to hope.

Offering tea we used to think of as uniquely British but it really isn't, all over the world people are welcomed with tea or coffee, usually with sweet things to accompany it. It is a way of making people feel at ease, or a comfort when we don't know what else to do to help. Conversation flows from a cuppa, people relax.

I am so grateful for the growers and pickers, who work so hard in order for me to have the ritual of a cup of tea. Making a cup of tea slows us down, we need this as we are forever busy.

Thich Nhat Hahn says:

‘Drink your tea slowly and reverently,
As if it is the axis on which the whole earth revolves-
Slowly, evenly, without rushing
Toward the future’

And T.S.Eliot writes:

‘I smile, of course
And go on drinking tea
Yet with these April sunsets, that somehow recall
My buried life, and Paris in the Spring,
I feel immeasurably at peace, and find the world
To be wonderful, after all’.

Both are telling us to take time and in T.S Eliots poem, he is recalling memories while just sitting taking tea.

What memories may you recall while drinking tea, who have we laughed and cried with over a cup of tea.

Perhaps we may connect with the Divine while drinking tea , and say a little prayer of thanks that we can enjoy this ritual.

Lots of people are unable to even do this.

The ritual of tea enables us to give and to receive, so becomes a blessing. If we are mindful about what we are doing, seeing, drinking, smelling and tasting tea or coffee can be quite beautiful , it can connect us to the past, perhaps by using a teapot that was grandma's or a cup or mug that a dear friend bought you. There is something special about this ritual, it can make us happy , if we are outside drinking tea , it can make us notice what is around us. There must be a reason why for special occasions, we may treat someone to an afternoon tea.

A cup of tea can definitely contribute to happiness , as I said before through memories or actions. I have a beautiful memory of my school . One of the celebrations of Eid, the festival at the end of Ramadan. One of my parents, in order to thank all the staff would come in to the staff room at lunch time with her beautiful Moroccan silver teapot and silver cups and other beautiful cups . We would then join in the ritual of her making her special mint tea, then pouring it and giving each of us a cup along with a special pastry she had made for each of us. A spiritual time of sharing and connection and a memory I won't forget.

As to happiness, do we sometimes think we don't deserve happiness, can we justify being happy when there is so much suffering in the world. Being miserable won't help , being happy or content will make you want to actively do things to help in small ways you are able to. I believe prayer and sending healing thoughts will help. I don't know how but I truly believe this. Also being kind to others boosts the chemicals that make us happy, so perhaps find ways to be kind, that also means being kind to yourself. Maybe start a conversation with someone or even just smile. Two things that made me happy a week or so ago, and here again I realise I have told any of my bus stop stories for a while. Anyway one was at the bus stop and one was on the bus.

A middle aged man was sitting at the bus stop. He had a prosthetic leg, he started telling me he lost his leg through sepsis and he had started volunteering at the prosthetic rehab centre, just helping by listening and helping through his own story and the things he can do. He told me some very sad things but some uplifting things. I was very humbled and happy that I had listened and he was happy as he had been given a purpose.

The other time , I was on a bus and a beautiful big brown poodle, I think it was, got on with it's owners. I asked if I could stroke the dog and the man said yes of course, but put your hand on his head first and look at him. He then went on to tell me the dog was deaf and that they communicated to the dog with special signs , they told me how much they loved the dog and how happy the dog made them. I think them talking about their special dog made them happy and I was very happy stroking the dog as it reduced the stress I had been feeling.

On writing this , once again I realise happiness comes and goes , so maybe contentment is the answer.

I'd like to finish with another story if I may: It's called " True Happiness lies in contentment "

I don't know who wrote it

'Once there lived a happy cobbler who passed his days in working and singing, from morning to night. A rich neighbour of his was a banker who one day said to him

" How much a year do you earn?"

The cobbler laughed and said, " how much a year sir, I never reckoned in that way, living as I do from hand to mouth, each day brings its meal and I am happy."

The banker said, " I have resolved to place you above the fear of want. Take these thousand pounds, preserve them carefully and use them in time of need."

The cobbler, who had never seen so much money , hurried home and buried his treasure in the earth. But alas! He buried his happiness too. Because, at night he could not enjoy a sound sleep. He would remain alert all night, thinking of the money.

Thus he lost his sleep and his happiness. One day he went to the banker and told him that his money snatched away his sleep. He told the banker to take his money back and he finally returned the money to the banker. Again he was able to enjoy sound sleep and mental peace and happiness.

The moral of this story is money can't buy happiness but try to be content with what you have.

Perhaps happiness and contentment lie within yourself as a spiritual being and we find these traits elusive as human beings. Let's take time to be kind and compassionate to ourselves and to others.

Final hymn purple book no 125 – 'One more step'

One more step along the world I go,
one more step along the world I go,
from the old things to the new,
keep me travelling along with you.

*and its from the old I travel to the new,
keep me travelling along with you.*

Round the corners of the world I turn,
More and more about the world I learn;
All the new things that I see
You'll be looking at along with me;

*and its from the old I travel to the new,
keep me travelling along with you.*

As I travel through the bad and good,
Keep me travelling the way I should;
where I see no way to go
You'll be telling me the way, I know;

*and its from the old I travel to the new,
keep me travelling along with you.*

Give me courage when the world is rough,
Keep me loving though the world is tough;
leap and sing in all I do,
keep me travelling along with you;
*and its from the old I travel to the new,
keep me travelling along with you.*

You are older than the world can be,
You are younger than the life in me;
ever old and ever new,
keep me travelling along with you;
*and its from the old I travel to the new,
keep me travelling along with you.*

Words and Music (Tune 'Southcote') By Sydney Carter 1915 – 2002 ©1971 Stainer & Bell Ltd. Used by permission

Final Reading: 'Smile' by Spike Milligan

Smiling is infectious,
You catch it like the flu,
When someone smiled at me today,
I started smiling too.

I passed around the corner,
And someone saw me grin,
When he smiled I realised,
I'd passed it on to him.

I thought about that smile,
Then realised it's worth,
A single smile just like mine,
Could travel round the earth.

So if you feel a smile begin,
Don't leave it undetected,
Let's start an epidemic quick,
And get the world infected.

Closing words by Chris Rothbauer

May our lives be reflections of the beauty, peace and joy that is possible in this world, and may the love we find in our church sustain us as we go our separate ways.

Closing music and video - Morecambe and Wise 'Bring me sunshine'

<https://youtu.be/ZedhoqYdfTM?si=9MDkf7I-64xQP4zi>