

Opening Music: Vivaldi ‘Spring III’ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zAGR_fKm2Ko

Welcome: to each and every one of you, whoever you are and however you are feeling, and whatever you bring in your heart – joy, sadness, uncertainty or curiosity! .

You are especially welcome if you are joining us for the first time. Welcome whether you are in church, or joining us via the wonders of technology on Zoom, or watching the recording online later.

Today, we celebrate the start of Spring, for the spring Equinox was only a few days ago, last Thursday. More of this later in the Service. Firstly, as is our custom, we light our chalice as a symbol of our free religious faith.

Chalice Lighting: based on words by David J Miller , an American Unitarian Universalist

We Light this chalice as a symbol of our thankfulness .

The chalice reminds us of the sun, the giver of life.

The flame rises up like the power of growth and renewal in the springtime’

We give thanks: for the sun, which lights and warms the earth,

For the growth and renewal of nature, arising from the earth, and for the earth itself.

Opening words: Two short readings, the first written over 3,000 years ago, the second less than 30.

From the Song of Solomon chapter 2 verses 10-13 King James Version (KJV)

“My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone;

The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land;

The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell.”

Words by Rev Cliff Reed, Slightly adapted

“Let us give thanks for Spring! here again with its promise ever-new, with its many-yellowed flowers, its bright song-birds proclaiming their presence to the world – a world darkened, as ever, by human folly; by war and suffering undeserved, and by human disregard for its natural systems and wondrous life forms; but still, let us give thanks for Spring, this season of hope renewed! “

1st Hymn: Green Book 280. ‘Morning has broken’

Morning has broken	Sweet the rain’s new fall	Mine is the sunlight!
Like the first morning,	Sunlit from heaven,	Mine is the morning
Blackbird has spoken	Like the first dewfall	Born of the one light
Like the first bird,	On the first grass.	Eden saw play!
Praise for the singing!	Praise for the sweetness	Praise with elation,
Praise for the morning!	Of the wet garden,	Praise every morning,
Praise for them, springing	Sprung in completeness	God’s re-creation
Fresh from the Word!	Where his feet pass	Of the new day!

Music: Tune, ‘Bunessan’ Old Gaelic melody Arr & Har. Martin Fallas Shaw 1875 – 1958

Words: Eleanor Farjean, 1881 – 1965, from ‘The Children’s Bells’, published by Oxford University Press by permission of David Higham Associates, Ltd.

Prayers:

Let us pause and hold in our thoughts & prayers those of our church community and in the wider world, who are experiencing difficult, sad or worrying times, whatever the cause.

We hold in our thoughts & prayers all whose lives have been lost or changed forever in terror attacks, violence, by accident or plain misfortune, around the world. May those who claim to be their leaders be blessed with compassion and the wisdom to prevent further destruction. May those rushing to hide or escape in warring nations, many vulnerable young families and the elderly, find sanctuary and peace, and the places to which they flee, somehow find the strength and resources to provide what is needed.

Let us pray that politicians and leaders in our own country and around the world have the wisdom to resolve their differences, to act for the common good, and prevent further bitter division and unrest amongst the general public. Let us remember that we are all part of one world, and be mindful that local actions can potentially affect those far away. Each one of us will be touched by sad and joyful events in our own lives, so let us be moved to offer comfort and solace to one another. We contribute to and benefit from the resources of love and strength which our church community offers, to us and to the wider community outside our doors. ...AMEN

From the Native American tradition 'To the Great Spirit'

Give us hearts to understand; never to take from Creation's beauty more than we give;
Never to destroy wantonly for the furtherance of greed;
Never to deny to give our hands for the building of earth's beauty;
Never to take from her what we cannot use.

Give us hearts to understand:

That to destroy earth's music is to create confusion;
That to wreck her appearance is to blind us to beauty;
That to callously pollute her fragrance is to make a house of stench;
That as we care for her, she will care for us.

We have forgotten who we are.

We have sought only our own security. We have exploited only for our own ends.

We have distorted our knowledge; abused our power.

Great Spirit, whose dry lands thirst, help us to find the way to refresh your lands,
Great Spirit, whose waters are choked with debris and pollution, help us to find the way to cleanse your waters.

Great Spirit, whose beautiful earth grows ugly with misuse, help us to restore beauty to your handiwork.

Great Spirit, whose creatures are being destroyed, help us to find a way to replenish them.

Great Spirit, whose gifts to us are being lost in selfishness and corruption,
Help us to find the way to restore our humanity.

Oh, Great Spirit, whose voice I hear in the wind, whose breath gives life to the world, hear me: I need your strength and wisdom. May I walk in beauty. So be it, *AMEN*

Story: 'The Spring Beauty', an Ojibbeway (Native American) Legend, adapted by Henry R. Schoolcraft

An old man was sitting in his lodge, by the side of a frozen stream. It was the end of winter, the air was not so cold, and his fire was nearly out. He was old and alone. His locks were white with

age, and he trembled in every joint. Day after day passed, and he heard nothing but the sound of the storm sweeping before it the new fallen snow.

One day while his fire was dying, a handsome young man approached and entered the lodge. His cheeks were red, his eyes sparkled. He walked with a quick, light step. His forehead was bound with a wreath of sweet grass, and he carried a bunch of fragrant flowers in his hand.

"Ah, my son," said the old man, "I am happy to see you. Come in! Tell me your adventures, and what strange lands you have seen. I will tell you of my wonderful deeds, and what I can perform. You shall do the same, and we will amuse each other."

The old man then drew from a bag a curiously wrought pipe. He filled it with mild tobacco, and handed it to his guest. They each smoked from the pipe and then began their stories.

"I am Peboan, the Spirit of Winter," said the old man. "I blow my breath, and the streams stand still. The water becomes stiff and hard as clear stone."

"I am Seegwun, the Spirit of Spring," answered the youth. "I breathe, and flowers spring up in the meadows and woods."

"I shake my locks," said the old man, "and snow covers the land. The leaves fall from the trees, and my breath blows them away. The birds fly to a distant land, and the animals hide themselves from the cold."

"I shake my ringlets," said the young man, "and warm showers of soft rain fall upon the earth. The flowers lift their heads from the ground, the grass grows thick and green. My voice recalls the birds which fly joyfully from the Southland. The warmth of my breath unbinds the streams, and they sing the songs of summer. Music fills the groves wherever I walk, and all nature rejoices."

And while they were talking thus a wonderful change took place. The sun began to rise. A gentle warmth stole over the place. Peboan, the Spirit of Winter, became silent. His head drooped, and the snow outside the lodge melted away. Seegwun, the Spirit of Spring, grew more radiant, and rose joyfully to his feet. A robin began to sing on the top of the lodge. The stream began to murmur at the door, and the fragrance of opening flowers came softly on the breeze.

The lodge faded away, and Peboan sank down and dissolved into tiny streams of water, that vanished under the brown leaves of the forest. Thus the Spirit of Winter departed, and where he had melted away, there the Indian children gathered the first blossoms, fragrant and delicately pink - the modest Spring Beauty.

2nd Hymn: Green Book 264 "Spring buds of Hope"

Tune: Lucerna David Evans, 1874 – 1948 Words: William Wolff

Used by permission of Janet Wolff and the Hodgin Press, Los Angeles

In the spring time of our year
Silver buds of hope appear.
Will they blossom? Will they grow?
We who plant the seed must know.
Will they blossom? Will they grow?
We who plant the seed must know.

Tender shoots thirst for the sun,
Surging with each day begun.
Banish darkness, hate and fear:
Golden fruit will soon appear.
Banish darkness, hate and fear:
Golden fruit will soon appear.

Welcome, children, welcome here,
Silver buds of our late year.
May our harvest still increase
Joys of fellowship and peace.
May our harvest still increase
Joys of fellowship and peace.

Readings: Two poems about Spring;

'The Enkindled Spring' By D.H. Lawrence

This spring as it comes bursts up in bonfires green,
Wild puffing of emerald trees, and flame-filled bushes,
Thorn-blossom lifting in wreaths of smoke between
Where the wood fumes up and the watery, flickering rushes.

I am amazed at this spring, this conflagration
Of green fires lit on the soil of the earth, this blaze
Of growing, and sparks that puff in wild gyration,
Faces of people streaming across my gaze.
And I, what fountain of fire am I among
This leaping combustion of spring? My spirit is tossed
About like a shadow buffeted in the throng
Of flames, a shadow that's gone astray, and is lost.

'Lines Written in Early Spring' William Wordsworth

I heard a thousand blended notes,
While in a grove I sate reclined,
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to the mind.

To her fair works did Nature link
The human soul that through me ran;
And much it grieved my heart to think
What man has made of man.

Through primrose tufts, in that green bower,
The periwinkle trailed its wreaths;
And 'tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes.

The birds around me hopped and played,
Their thoughts I cannot measure:—
But the least motion which they made
It seemed a thrill of pleasure.

The budding twigs spread out their fan,
To catch the breezy air;
And I must think, do all I can,
That there was pleasure there.

If this belief from heaven be sent,
If such be Nature's holy plan,
Have I not reason to lament
What man has made of man?

Candles of Joy and Concern particularly for green issues

Now is a chance for anyone with a special concern, or a joy who might wish, to come to the front, and light a candle – either in silence, or to speak briefly about it. Especially welcome are any green issues, dear to the hearts of several people here, particularly appropriate and welcome, at this season of new growth.

Silent Reflection

Music: Grieg 'To Spring' Piano <https://youtu.be/SFhy0yCaTIA>

ADDRESS: Springtime Reflections

I'd like to start with another poem: '*The Spring Equinox*' –by Anne Barbara Ridler, 1912 - 2001

'Now is the pause between asleep and awake:
Two seasons take
A colour and quality each from each as yet
The new stage-set
Spandril, column and fan of spring is raised against the
winter backdrop
Murrey and soft;

Now aloft
The sun swings on the equinoctial line.

Few flowers yet shine:
The hellebore hangs a clear green bell and opulent leaves
above dark mould;
The light is cold in arum leaves, and a primrose flickers
Here and there; the first cool bird-song flickers in the thicket.
Clouds arc pale as the pollen from sallows;
March fallows are white with lime like frost.

This is the pause between asleep and awake:
The pause of contemplation and of peace,
Before the earth must teem and the heart ache.

This is the child's pause, before it sees
That the choice of one way has denied the other;

Must choose the either, or both, of to care and not to care;
Before the light or darkness shall discover
Irreparable loss; before it must take
Blame for the creature caught in the necessary snare:
Receiving a profit, before it holds a snare.'

In the words of this lovely poem, Anne Barbara Ridler, whose long life stretched from before the 1st World War into the 21 century, captures so beautifully, the sense of pause, of balance, we experience at the Spring Equinox. Between the cold of winter, so reluctant to depart that even the light in the arum lily seems chilled, is this pause, like that between sleeping and waking, eventually giving way to the season of light and teeming life.

What causes this ever changing kaleidoscope of the turning seasons? Its all because of the relative movements of planet earth and the sun. Last Thursday, March 20th, at one minute past 9 in the morning. the centre of the sun crossed directly over the earth's equator, appearing to head north as part of an annual cycle.

On that day, the sun rose exactly due east, and set exactly due west. For a few days either side of 20th, the length of darkness and light, of day and night, are *almost* the same around the world. Hence the name given to this phenomenon Equi-nox 'Equal night (and day) This has fascinated me ever since I first heard about it as a child. It is amazing to think that someone like Rosine, a Fair Trade cocoa farmer, living in Cote d'Ivoire, near the Equator, will enjoy a similar amount of daylight as someone living in Norway, or my step family in Australia, or as us in Plymouth, and the scientists living at the research bases in Antarctica. Truly, this is a special event, uniting the whole human race, and it happens only once every 6 months at the March and September Equinoxes!

After Thursday's Equinox, the sun's apparent path over the earth will continue to move northwards, until in 3 months time, in late June, the Sun will shine directly over the tropic of Cancer. It will be our northern Summer, and for weeks, unbroken daylight will embrace the North Pole and all lands and waters north of the Arctic Circle. Meanwhile, the South Pole is immersed in weeks of constant darkness. Then, gradually, as the northern hemisphere tilts away from the sun, the process is reversed, until at the September Equinox, the whole world has equal shares of light and dark again, before the tilt of the earth gives the South the greater light. And so it goes on, and has done, over the centuries and the millennia.

With the changing of the seasons, we recognise the flux of life – nature's profound teaching, that everything is constantly changing – all in a state of balance. Cold winter months in the temperate and polar latitudes used to be the norm. Humans and animals prepared for the season of no growth, storing food, laying down extra fat on their bodies, and seeking shelter from the cold and darkness. People burned wood or peat to warm their dwellings. I think how worried they must have been in the coldest darkest months, noticing how many animals and birds seemed to vanish for months as they hibernated, or flew away. People must have wondered when they would return, and whether their supplies would last, until the cold and darkness eased

No wonder that people around the world and down the ages, celebrated the arrival of Spring, with special rituals and explained it in origin myths, like Ojibbway tribe in North America with their story of how old man Winter fades away in the warmth of Spring sunshine. 3,000 years ago, the writer of the Song of Solomon rejoiced at Spring's arrival; 'For lo, the winter is past,' the writer exclaims. 3 millennia later, D.H. Lawrence is "amazed at the spring conflagration of green fires", the "blaze of growing" Wordsworth. There is constant change, but we become more aware of it at this time of change of season.

All seemed nicely balanced, like the old fashioned Scales of Justice depicted on the Old Bailey.

Then a few hundred years ago, a mere blink of an eye in the long history of human existence and the unimaginably greater existence of the life of our planet, people discovered huge buried deposits of coal and later oil and gas, and burnt them to warm their houses. Winter, so dreaded for centuries, lost a lot of its terrors. Towns grew into large cities, with factories powered by these fuels. and modern forms of transport enabled people to travel much further & more quickly than in the wildest dreams of even powerful kings of antiquity. Solomon would have been amazed! But now, it seems, we are paying the price for this convenience. For several decades, the balance has become noticeably tipped. The average world temperature is increasing year on year. Climate scientists tell us that the warmest 20 years since records began in 1850's, have happened in the most recent 22 years.

Think back a month, when we had mid February temperatures of nearly 20°C! This is linked to the amounts of gases released into the atmosphere from the burning of the coal, gas & Oil. Allowing this to increase much more, puts in jeopardy not only human beings, but all living things. Unless humans address the upsetting of the balance – and quickly. It is still in our power - just! - to prevent the worst of the damage, but will take a big change in all our lives. We must turn our ingenuity to solving the problem – well, we already have the knowledge of what to do, we need the will and determination to persuade those with the power to make it happen – the politicians and businesses, to stop the use of harmful fossil fuels and other actions which harm our planet and us all. To stop what Wordsworth lamented as “What man has made of man” We have to keep the Balance as even as possible, to give a chance of a reasonable life to our grandchildren and their grandchildren, and the other species with which we share this good Earth. We humans can do it, we already have much of the technology, we just need the collective will of everyone, to do their bit. Like the child in Anne Barbara Ridler's poem, the time to pause is over, the choice must be made - let us pray it be the choice to care.

You know me by now - ever the optimist, albeit a more cautious one these days! I like to think that in 50 year's time, people, will continue to meet in this church, to enjoy the approach of Spring Equinox 2075, and to contemplate on the remarkable Balance of the Season. *A M E N*

3rd Hymn Green Book 267 “We sing the roses waiting”

We sing of golden mornings,
We sing of sparkling seas,
Of fenlands, valleys, mountains,
And stately forest trees.
We sing of flashing sunshine
And life bestowing rain,
Of birds among the branches,
And springtime come again.

We sing the heart courageous,
The youthful, eager mind;
We sing of hopes undaunted,
Of friendly ways and kind.
We sing the roses waiting
Beneath the deep-piled snow;
We sing, when night is darkest,
The day's returning glow.

Tune: 'Ewing' Alexander Ewing , 1830 – 95 wrotas: Kaipti waido EMERSON 1803 - 82

Closing words: by *Jeff Bowes*

As our world turns toward the sun, as the days lengthen and fresh, green, growth begins, so we can see that even through tears and sorrows we can turn, in our hearts and minds, toward that which is light and life in all we have. We too can turn, and be warmed.

Closing video: English Folk Song – the Springtime of the year

<https://youtu.be/E4u3TcN-Oxo?si=u8QJaxT-0EAmVUkr>