

Poetry Group: 'Unitarian poets and the light of Unitarianism'

**Opening Music:** 'Morning' from Peer Gynt Suite by Greig

<https://youtu.be/J-1Bob1dU18>

**Welcome and introduction**

Good morning & welcome, whether you are here in person, joining us on Zoom or watching the recording online at a later date. You are welcome, whether a regular attender, have been here a few times and especially so if you are a newcomer. Whatever you bring in your heart: whether you come in sadness, joy or out of curiosity, whatever your faith or none, you are welcome! Our service today is offered by the Poetry Group, and our theme is 'Unitarian Poets and the light of Unitarianism'.

**Chalice lighting:**

We begin by lighting our Chalice flame as a symbol of our free religious faith:  
Words by John Andrew Storey, a former Minister of this church.

"Remember, O seeker,  
The truth divine,  
The light is within thee,  
Let the light shine."

**Introduction of Service theme and opening words**

Today's Service is offered by our Poetry Group: church members and friends, who have met most months for well over 20 years, to share our enjoyment of an enormous variety of poetry. Our service today celebrates just a few of the poets from the last 200 years, who were or are Unitarians, or with strong Unitarian connections. Some were and are known personally to many of us here today: Richard Lovis, Erna Colebrook and Caroline Earl.

This thread of Unitarian influence runs through our hymns and music. Our opening and reflective music was composed by Edvard Greig, a Norwegian Unitarian, and our closing video is of words by ee cummings, set to music. Unitarians wrote the hymn words and the tunes were composed or arranged by Unitarians. And the singing on the recordings is by members of the Unitarian Music Society. Our poems are grouped into 4 sections, and range from a work by WG Tarrant, 19<sup>th</sup> Century Unitarian Minister, celebrating the chapel which once stood on the site of the present day Essex Hall, UK Unitarian HQ, to a young Unitarian Oliver Lomax, who ran online poetry sessions during lockdown. The light of Unitarian influence illumines all, and we offer them to you with love and hope you each find something which lights and brightens your day.

Lets begin by singing our first hymn, words by Rev Cliff Reed, retired Unitarian Minister.

**1<sup>st</sup> Hymn:** Sing your Faith' (aka 'Purple Book') 158 'The flame of truth is kindled'

The flame of truth is kindled,  
our chalice burning bright;  
amongst us moves the Spirit  
in whom we take delight.  
We worship here in freedom  
With conscience unconstrained,  
A pilgrim people thankful  
Of what great souls have gained.

The flame of thought is kindled.  
we celebrate the mind,  
its search for dee[est meaning  
that time bound creeds can't bind.  
We celebrate its oneness  
with body and with soul,  
with universal process,  
with God who makes us whole.

The flame of love is kindled,  
we open wide our hearts,  
that it may burn within us,  
fuel us to do our parts.  
Community needs building,  
A Commonwealth of Earth,  
we ask for strength to build it –  
a new world come to birth.

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Music: 'Morning Light' George James Webb, 1803 - 1887

### **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

### **1<sup>st</sup> set of poems: Early Unitarianism**

'Chapel of the Holy Spirit' about Essex Hall      Chosen and read by Delphine

Delphine explained the history behind this. The current GA Headquarters at Essex Hall in London was built on the exact site of this early chapel. The poem celebrating it was written by W.G. Tarrant, a mid 19<sup>th</sup> century Unitarian Minister, and author of several hymns.

Church of the Spirit, long ago  
The fathers to thy shelter came,  
And all their purest joys below  
Were clustered round thy sacred name.

Days come and go – the walls decay  
That love doth rear so white and fair;  
Where art thou now, and where are they  
That sang the hymn and said the prayer?

The shrine is gone, and they are dumb;  
Howe'er we listen, nevermore  
Shall echo of their music come  
Through pillared aisle and open door.

And yet across the waste of years,  
The changing world, the deeps of death,  
The spirit born within us hears  
The word the Holy Spirit saith.

**2<sup>nd</sup> 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

## **2<sup>nd</sup> set of poems:- Poems about Nature**

'The Summer Day' by Mary Oliver

Read by Caroline

Although not a Unitarian herself, Mary Oliver has won the hearts of many Unitarians and Unitarian Universalists (UU). This gained her the esteemed and prestigious place of being a Ware Lecturer in 2006 at the American UU General Assembly.

Who made the world?  
Who made this swan, and the black bear?  
Who made this grasshopper?  
This grasshopper, I mean –  
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,  
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?

'Moorland Matins' by Richard Lovis

Read by Kathy

Richard Lovis was our Lay Pastor for over 8 years, and a member of our poetry group. He penned many fine poems including this one. It reminds us of the moorland walks we enjoyed as a congregation some years ago.

Such a day it was as – looking back –  
Imbues a whole Summer's memories with warmth  
And places a gold overlay on all grey.  
Larks lifted at my feet  
And climbed, cascading sound, to vanishing point  
in faded denim skies.  
Foals like gloss chestnuts newly split  
Lay fallen in their mothers' shadows  
And lizards flickered the furze through.

At length the river valley wound below  
For respite,  
Where moorland cattle, unkempt in dark brown habits  
Bowed their heads around a granite cross  
And grazed by beneficent waters.  
Nor moved when I approached, but by their gaze  
Defied me not to join their worship there.

From 'Walden' by Thoreau David Thoreau

Read by Viv

"We need the tonic of wildness, to wade sometimes in marshes where the bittern and the meadow-hen lurk, and hear the booming of the snipe; to smell the whispering sedge where only some wilder and more solitary fowl builds her nest, and the mink crawls with its belly close to the ground.

At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be infinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable.

We can never have enough of nature.

We must be refreshed by the sight of inexhaustible vigor, vast and titanic features, the sea-coast with its wrecks, the wilderness with its living and its decaying trees, the thunder cloud, and the rain which lasts three weeks and produces freshets.

We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander". –

'Hymn of the Earth' by William Ellery Channing

Read by Delphine

My highway is unfeatured air,  
My consorts are the sleepless stars,  
And men my giant arms upbear,  
My arms unstained and free from scars.

I rest forever on my way,  
Rolling around the happy Sun;  
My children love the sunny day,  
But noon and night to me are one.

My heart has pulses like their own,  
I am their mother, and my veins,  
Though built of the enduring stone,  
Thrill as do theirs with godlike pains.

The forests and the mountains high,  
The foaming ocean and the springs,  
The plains O pleasant Company,  
My voice through all your anthem rings.

Ye are so cheerful in your minds,  
Content to smile, content to share:  
My being in your chorus finds  
The echo of the spheral air.

No leaf may fall, no pebble roll,  
No drop of water lose the road;  
The issues of the general Soul  
Are mirrored in its round abode.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Hymn:** P 35 'Find a stillness'

Find a stillness, hold a stillness,  
let the stillness carry me.  
Find the silence, hold the silence,  
let the silence carry me.  
In the spirit, by the spirit,  
with the spirit giving power,  
I will find true harmony.

Seek the essence, hold the essence,  
let the essence carry me.  
Let me flower, help me flower,  
watch me flower, carry me.  
In the spirit, by the spirit,  
with the spirit giving power,  
I will find true harmony.

Words © Carl G. Seaburg 1922 – 1998 based on a Transylvanian Unitarian text.

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Music Transylvanian Hymn Melody, Harmony by Larry Phillips, b. 1948

'Affirmations' by Frank Clabburn, a former minister to Bristol Unitarians      Read by Kathy

We would make this place a temple of the heart's desire;  
built from the hewn rocks of our individuality  
and from the sure mortar of our shared understandings,  
an unwall'd, unbounded temple  
wherein all people may praise, in tones of joy,  
the Highest Things that give life meaning and worth,  
and draw us ever onward beyond our known selves.

We would make of this place a centre of meeting for the lost and uncertain, that we may  
gain renewed hope to face life's  
joys and sorrows with enterprise and forbearance,  
that we may know also a deep gratitude for all the  
opportunities of growing.  
We would make of this place a home in which dwell  
Love, Peace and Honour:  
In this deep covenant let us join, now, and for evermore.

**Time for silent reflection: followed by**

**Music/video:** 'Viren' (Last Spring) by Greig (Sung Version)

<https://youtu.be/GfPah7AkTAq>

### **3<sup>rd</sup> set of poems - Spiritual aspects**

'The Weaver Woman, She' by Erna Colebrook, a member of this congregation, now living with her family in the north

Read by Christine

I am she who sits and weaves the cloth.  
Bring me stripes of fine zebra  
and green of young shoots  
circles of bluebells  
and dreamy white shells  
grey squares of concrete  
and strong, steely, strands.  
Yes I need purple, and peacocks,  
and patches of blood....

Bring me slim silver fishes  
and myriads of stars  
and plenty of yellow  
with thistle-down laughter  
and warm brown bread.

I need all of the earth and all of the sky,  
and all of you and all of me.

So bring me your smile for it is my smile  
and your pain to make it my pain,  
tell me your story to add to my song.  
For I am she who sits and weaves the cloth,  
with warp and weft I weave it well.

Stand up weaver-woman,  
for you alone are you.  
You weave the web of all becoming.  
Through you goes all that is and was and is to be.  
You are a woman. You are man.  
Earthlings all  
and All to share.

'Thoreau's Flute' by Louisa May Alcott

Chosen and read by Viv

As a young person, Louisa May Alcott, well now American writer, was a pupil of Thoreau's and they remained friends. She wrote this after his death.

We sighing said, "Our Pan is dead;  
His pipe hangs mute beside the river  
Around it wistful sunbeams quiver,  
But Music's airy voice is fled.

Spring mourns as for untimely frost;  
The bluebird chants a requiem;  
The willow-blossom waits for him;  
The Genius of the wood is lost."

Then from the flute, untouched by hands,  
There came a low, harmonious breath:  
"For such as he there is no death;  
His life the eternal life commands;

Above man's aims his nature rose.  
The wisdom of a just content  
Made one small spot a continent  
And turned to poetry life's prose.

"Haunting the hills, the stream, the wild,  
Swallow and aster, lake and pine,  
To him grew human or divine,  
Fit mates for this large-hearted child.

Such homage Nature ne'er forgets,  
And yearly on the coverlid  
'Neath which her darling lieth hid  
Will write his name in violets.  
"To him no vain regrets belong  
Whose soul, that finer instrument,  
Gave to the world no poor lament,  
But wood-notes ever sweet and strong.

O lonely friend! he still will be  
A potent presence, though unseen,  
Steadfast, sagacious, and serene;  
Seek not for him — he is with thee."

~ A few moments to reflect ~

#### **4<sup>th</sup> set of poems – Human beings and feelings**

'Morning Song' by Sylvia Plath

Chosen and Read by Janice

In this poem, Sylvia Plath is getting to know her new born baby

Love set you going like a fat gold watch.  
The midwife slapped your footsoles, and your bald cry  
Took its place among the elements.

Our voices echo, magnifying your arrival. New statue.  
In a drafty museum, your nakedness  
Shadows our safety. We stand round blankly as walls.

I'm no more your mother  
Than the cloud that distills a mirror to reflect its own slow  
Effacement at the wind's hand.

All night your moth-breath  
Flickers among the flat pink roses. I wake to listen:  
A far sea moves in my ear.

One cry, and I stumble from bed, cow-heavy and floral  
In my Victorian nightgown.  
Your mouth opens clean as a cat's. The window square

Whitens and swallows its dull stars. And now you try  
Your handful of notes;  
The clear vowels rise like balloons.

'Incoming'

Written and read by Caroline, a member of this congregation

Caroline wrote this over 20 years ago, during the conflict in Afghanistan, when the news brought daily, sad news about British soldiers.

The wet road ahead  
Becomes a river of silver  
In a burst of low incoming winter sun  
Exploding the day's dot to dot  
In a shower of stars  
A roadside bomb of peace.  
"What's cooking" you ask  
"Deceiving Grace" I reply.  
My appointment with sadness postponed  
For another day.

'Chaucer' a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Read by Christine

An old man in a lodge within a park;  
The chamber walls depicted all around  
With portraiture of huntsman, hawk, and hound,  
And the hurt deer. He listeneth to the lark,  
Whose song comes with the sunshine through the dark  
Of painted glass in leaden lattice bound;  
He listeneth and he laugheth at the sound,  
Then writeth in a book like any clerk.  
He is the poet of the dawn, who wrote  
The Canterbury Tales, and his old age  
Made beautiful with song; and as I read

I hear the crowing cock, I hear the note  
Of lark and linnet, and from every page  
Rise odors of ploughed field or flowery mead.

'The Library, where else?' by Oliver Lomax

Chosen and read by Delphine

Oliver Lomax contributed to an online poetry group during the Covid lockdown. Several books of his poems have been published.

In The Library, where else'  
Could we shelter from the rain  
Or actively seek work, in vain  
Where will the lowly come?  
In wild abandon, to email no-one

Or Google things to do tonight  
Or suicide, or ask a stranger  
For the umpteenth time, the time  
Or seek legal advice, on the behalf

of an imaginary friend, where will the lost  
come to pretend? Or play solitaire  
and share another man's air  
if only for an hour a day, where else?

Will I while the hours away, pretending  
to be at work all day, or slowly disintegrate  
and on amnesty day, I can return  
Lord Byron and the Scottish play

and watch my debts spiral out of control  
and still take out a final loan, treat all  
the Philip Larkin as though it's my own  
and download The Deer Hunter on my phone

and sleep for two hours in the afternoon, listening to  
The Beach Boys whilst reading Camus, undercover  
or search for an ex-lover, anonymously online  
sipping from the bottle of fortified wine

concealed inside my overcoat, teary  
with a lump in my throat  
and where I exercised my right to vote  
but it didn't count and that's twice on the bounce.

I wanted us to remain and the Tories out  
but our minds slammed shut behind us

we are buried in silence, like the books  
waiting for human gods

And now the DWP has moved inside us  
overflowing with human kindness  
but shush, shush, shush  
there's people trying to work in here

in our libraries full of tears, 10,000  
have gone in less than ten years  
oh come all ye consolers of the lonely  
the Gideons Bibles are all reference only

and we have a duty of care  
I'd chain myself to the complete works  
of Pam Ayres, in a final act of defiance  
well, here in Bolton not the John Rylands

Where else could I be poet in residence?  
Where else could I imagine permanence?  
Where else, do they stack love so freely on the  
The Library, The Library, Where else?

**4<sup>th</sup> Hymn:** Purple Book 167 'There is a place I call my own'

There is a place I call my own,  
where I can stand by the sea,  
and look beyond the things I've known  
and dream that I might be free.  
Like the bird above the trees,  
gliding gently on the breeze,  
I wish that all my life I'd be  
without a care and flying free.

But life is not a distant sky  
without a cloud, without rain,  
and I can never hope that I can travel on without pain.  
Time goes swiftly on its way;  
All too soon we've lost today,  
I cannot wait for skies of blue  
Or dream so long  
That life is through.

So life's a song that I must sing,  
a gift of love I must share;  
and when I see the joy it brings  
my spirits soar through the air.  
Like the bird up in the sky,  
life has taught me how to fly..

For now I know what I can be  
and now my heart is flying free.

Words and Music by Don Besig ©1979 Shawscape Press, Inc (ASCAP)

Tune: 'Flying Free'

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### **Closing words** by Dawn Buckle, an English Unitarian

As we leave this sanctuary

May the holy music linger in our ears.

May the poetry of the spoken words stay in our minds.

May our spirits remain uplifted.

May our lives be blessed, *AMEN*

### **Extinguish Chalice**

**Closing music/video:** 'I thank you God for this most amazing day'

Words by ee cummings Music by Eric Whitacre