

(1 “From a Distance” played on Piano by Richard Clayderman Video 3:46 mins)**(2 The Welcome)**

Welcome to you all, those of you here in the church and all of you zoomers joining us online; also those who might later be watching the recording via You Tube.

You are welcome here just as you are, whatever your religion or even if you have none. You are a member of our human family and; as we all are, a leaf on the tree of life. All are welcome here.

Today is “All Soul's Day” and yesterday was “All Saint's Day”. This is when the Christian church remembers the lives of the Saints and prays for the souls of the departed. The last day of October is Samhain (Sow-in) better known as Halloween, or All Hallow's Eve when the Celtic wheel of the year turns, and the veil between life and death thins. This is a time for understanding that life and death are part of a sacred whole. All of our families are made up of the living and the dead and I have therefore named my service “Our Human Family”.

(3 Chalice Lighting & Opening Prayers)

And now, as is our custom, let us begin this time of words, music and contemplation by lighting our chalice candle as a symbol of our free religious faith.

(Light Candle)**(“This Miracle Planet” - Cliff Reed)**

From creation's light we kindle our own light giving thanks for all the life of this miracle planet the life we are privileged to share.

(“From The Stars” – Cliff Reed)

From the stars we have come; of stardust we are made and to stardust we will return, but for now we will walk by the light of the sun and worship by the light of our holy flame.

(4 Opening Address)

The chalice prayers were the words of the retired Unitarian Minister Cliff Reed.

I shall be using many of his prayers and poems throughout this service as I feel he is someone who believes in God very much in the same way that I do.

I do a lot of quoting others. “I quote others the better to express myself” which is a quote in itself. Though I don't know where I got it from, or who wrote it.

Con't:

Some years ago now, I started researching my Family Tree.

It soon became clear to me that to some degree we must all be related to one another, even though at a very remote distance. If you believe in the book of Genesis we could all trace our lineage back to Adam and Eve!

Even if you are more inclined, as I am, to Darwin's theory of evolution, we all evolved from the same species.

Charles Darwin was born on the 12th February 1809 and died aged 73 on the 19th April 1882.

He was an English naturalist, geologist, and biologist, widely known for his contributions to evolutionary biology.

His proposition that all species of life have descended from a common ancestor is now generally accepted and considered a fundamental scientific concept.

In a joint presentation with Alfred Russel Wallace, he introduced his scientific theory that this branching pattern of evolution resulted from a process he called natural selection, in which the struggle for existence has a similar effect to the artificial selection involved in selective breeding.

Darwin has been described as one of the most influential figures in human history and was honoured by being buried in Westminster Abbey.

Darwin published his theory of evolution in his 1859 book 'On the Origin of Species'. By the 1870s, the scientific community and a majority of the educated public had accepted evolution as a fact. However, many initially favoured competing explanations that gave only a minor role to natural selection, and it was not until the emergence of the modern evolutionary synthesis from the 1930s to the 1950s that a broad consensus developed in which natural selection was the basic mechanism of evolution. His scientific discovery is the unifying theory of the life sciences, explaining the diversity of life.

Darwin is known for several insightful and impactful quotes related to evolution, natural selection and human nature. One of his most famous quotes is: "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change," another "The love for all living creatures is the most noble attribute of man" and one of my favourites, "A man who dares to waste one hour of time has not discovered the value of life".

Since Darwin published his book 'On the Origin of Species' a great deal of research has been done in the field of genetics.

Our DNA; the blueprint code for all forms of life on our planet has, in that research, revealed that all modern humans come from the continent of Africa – this is a scientifically confirmed fact. Our shared history begins around two hundred thousand (200,000) years ago, when the first Homo Sapiens emerged on the African continent. The most recent research has taken the DNA back to Mitochondrial Eve ~ she is defined as the most recent woman from whom all living humans descend in an unbroken line purely through their mothers and through the mothers of those mothers, back until all lines converge on one woman.

Con't:

Around sixty thousand (60,000) to seventy thousand (70,000) years ago our ancestors embarked on a great journey, leaving Africa and settling in other parts of the world. This migration was a pivotal moment in human history. Genetic research clearly shows that all modern humans, regardless of skin colour, language or culture, share the same common ancestry.

Fossils and archaeological finds further support this fascinating story of our origins. What makes us special is not only our diversity, but also the fact that we all share the same story of survival, adaptation and migration. Whether in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Americas or Australasia – we all carry a part of this history in our genetic code. This realization reminds us that the boundaries we often draw between ourselves are artificial, because deep within us we all share the same roots. It is a lesson about connection and community that reminds us of our true oneness.

(5 Hymn Number 147 “Spirit of Earth, Root, Stone and Tree”)

And now for our first hymn.

*Hymn number 147 in the purple hymn book, “Spirit of Earth, Root, Stone and Tree”
Stand if you're able*

(6 Evolution)

Two readings both written by Cliff Reed

The “Big Bang”

If there was a 'big bang' -
and most scientists seem to think there was -
an infinitesimal moment in less than nothingness
when, suddenly, the show was on the road,
creation *ex nihilo*, (*ex knee heal oh*)
then in that exploding point
between non-time and time
all the potential for what happened later was there -
galaxies, neutrons, and dung-beetles;
solar winds, War and Peace, fish 'n' chips;
love, Jesus, you and me;
goodness, badness, and everything else
that was, and is, and is to come.
There is not a God,
in whom to believe or disbelieve,
there is just God;
whatever it is that spans
all this space, all this time,
and laughs in a child.

Con't:

“Community In Infinity”

If there is an infinity of galaxies in the universe;
and if there is an infinity of stars in each galaxy,
and if only an infinitesimal percentage of those stars
have planets orbiting around them;
and if only an infinitesimal percentage of those living planets
have evolved intelligent life;
and if only an infinitesimal percentage of that intelligent life
has developed advanced civilisations -
then there are countless millions of planets in the universe
that sustain advanced civilisations.
But since these advanced civilisations are
impossibly remote from each other,
it is unlikely that any of us will ever meet
and yet we are all out there
And we are one, as all we, who live on Earth are one.

(7 A Story “The Shepherd's Crown” by the author Terry Pratchett)

I'm now going to read a story from “The Shepherd's Crown” by the author Terry Pratchett

*But before I do :~ This is a Shepherd's Crown
(Holding and showing my Shepherd's Crown)*

The ‘shepherd’ part comes from the fact that such objects are often found in farmers’ fields. The ‘crown’ part is based on its shape and the five pairs of dotted lines running up the side like the arches of a crown. In reality, it is a fossil sea urchin dating back from 93 to 66 million years ago. This was a time when most of Britain was covered by an expansive sea in which thick layers of chalk were being laid down. Many different types of sea urchin lived and died on the prehistoric seafloor before becoming buried and fossilised. Millions of years later, sea levels fell and the land rose up to form the chalky hills and fields we see today in the Chilterns.

Quote :

It was born in the darkness of the circle sea: at first just a soft floating thing, washed back and forth by tide after tide. It grew a shell, but in it's rolling, tumbling world there were huge creatures which could have cracked it open in an instant. Nevertheless, it survived.

It's little life might have gone on like this for ever until the dangers of the surf and other floating things brought an end, were it not for the pool.

It was a warm pool, high on a beach, replenished by occasional storms blown in from the Hub, and there the creature lived on things even smaller than itself and grew until it became king.

Con't:

It would have got even bigger if it were not for the hot summer when the water evaporated under the glare of the sun.

And so the little creature died, but its carapace remained, carrying within itself the seed of something sharp. On the next stormy tide it was washed away onto the littoral, where it lodged, rolling back and forth with the pebbles and other detritus of the storms. The sea rolled down the ages until it dried and withdrew from the land, and the spiky shell of the long-dead creature sank beneath layers of the shells of other small creatures which had not survived. And there it lay, with the sharp core growing slowly inside, until the day when it was found by a shepherd minding his flock on the hills that had become known as The Chalk. He picked up the strange object which had caught his eye, held it in his hand and turned it over and over. Lumpy, but not lumpy, and it fitted in the palm of his hand. Too regular a shape to be a flint, and yet it had flint in its heart. The surface was grey, like stone, but with a hint of gold beneath the grey. There were five distinct ridges spaced evenly, almost like stripes, rising from a flattish base to its top. He had seen things like this before. But this one seemed different – it had almost jumped into his hand. The little piece tumbled as he turned it around and about, and he had a feeling that it was trying to tell him something. It was silly, he knew, and he hadn't had a beer yet, but the strange object seemed to fill his world. Then he cursed himself as an idiot but nevertheless kept it and took it to show his mates in the pub. Look, 'he said, 'it looks like a crown.' Of course, one of his mates laughed and said, 'A crown? What would you want with one of them? You're no king, Daniel Achings.' But the shepherd took his find home and placed it carefully on the shelf in his kitchen where he kept the things he liked. And there, eventually, it was forgotten and was lost to history.

But not to the Achings, who handed it down, generation to generation.....

(8 Reflective Video 5:54 mins followed by Silence)

During our Reflective video let us remember both family and friends who have past away this year. Gone but never forgotten, remembering how their lives have influenced our own. Joan Frost "The Model" who was a member of our congregation for many years. Eleanor Dixon who was not only a member of the Western Union but served on the Committee of the General Assembly.

The video is "A Hundred Thousand Angels" sung by Lucinda Drayton

(9 Three Readings)

And now three readings. The first selected from "A Hat Full of Sky" by Terry Pratchett and (Ann) is going to read it for us.

From "A Hat Full of Sky" by Terry Pratchett

part 1) Once we were blobs in the sea, and then fishes, and then lizards and rats and then monkeys, and hundreds of things in between. This hand was once a fin, this hand once had claws! In my human mouth I have the pointy teeth of a wolf and the chisel teeth of a rabbit and the grinding teeth of a cow! Our blood is as salty as the sea we used to live in! When we're frightened the hair on our skins stand up, just like it did when we had fur. We are history! Everything we've been on the way to becoming us, we still are.

Con't:

part 2) I'm made up of the memories of my parents and grandparents, all my ancestors. They're in the way I look, in the colour of my hair. And I'm made up of everyone I've ever met who's changed the way I think. So who is "me" ?

Part 3)The teacher had been a little bit crazy, even for a teacher but what he'd said had seemed to make absolute sense. One of the most amazing things about the universe, he had said, was that, sooner or later, everything is made of everything else, although it'll probably take millions and millions of years for this to happen. The other children had giggled and argued, but Tiffany knew that what had once been tiny living creatures was now the chalk of the hills. Everything went round, even stars.

Thank you Ann , now I'll ask Viv to read a quote from "Unruly" by David Mitchell.

David Mitchell wrote in his book "Unruly"

A few years ago in an episode of QI that I appeared in, Stephen Fry explained that almost everyone in Western Europe is a direct descendant of Charlemagne and almost everyone in the UK a direct descendant of William the Conqueror, these were facts based on overwhelming statistical likelihood someone of English ancestry living today will have two parents, four grandparents, eight great-grandparents, etc. Spin this back ten centuries and their number of ancestors hits about eight billion, many times the total number of humans alive on earth at that time, let alone in England and Normandy. So a person living now must be descended from a person living then by many, many different routes, not just one. That makes the chances of any given person with any English ancestry at all, not descended from William the Conqueror by at least one of those routes so vanishingly small as to be, in practical terms, impossible.....

Thank you Viv

And now before our next hymn a Poem written by an American poet William Butler Palmer that he wrote in 1906 after visiting his Great-grandfather's grave.

Which Margaret is going to read for us.

Dear Ancestor

Your tombstone stands among the rest;
Neglected and alone,
The name and date are chiselled out
On polished, marbled stone.

It reaches out to all who care
It is too late to mourn.
You did not know that I exist
You died and I was born.

Con't

Yet each of us are cells of you
In flesh, in blood, in bone.
Our blood contracts and beats a pulse
Entirely not our own.

Dear Ancestor, the place you filled
One hundred years ago
Spreads out among the ones you left
Who would have loved you so.

I wonder if you lived and loved,
I wonder if you knew
That someday I would find this spot,
And come to visit you.

Thank you Margaret

(10 Hymn 128 "Our World is one World")

We will now sing our second hymn

*Hymn number 128 in the purple hymn book, "Our World is one World"
stand if you're able.*

(11 Census & Lineage)

When researching my family history a major resource was the National Census which takes place every ten years. The first one that named the occupants of the houses was the one taken in 1841.

Then came more information in the later ones. The information in the Census is closed for viewing for 100 years so the latest one we can access is the one taken in 1921. There wasn't one in 1941 because of the war, but one was taken in 1939 in order for the government to see who had any skills that might be useful during the war. A great deal of the information in this one however is still closed for viewing.

My father was born in 1922. so doesn't appear in the 1921 Census. His father, my grandfather, whom I do remember, was born in 1896 and died in 1957 when I was just 9 years old; his father, my great grandfather was born in 1866 and died in 1909; which was 61 years before I was even born. His father was born in 1842; and five generations back my three times great grandfather was born in 1817.

I have traced my father's family tree back to 1762.

Of course my family, and yours go back further to the ancestors who first left Africa ! Maybe one day it will be possible to trace our ancestry through DNA, back to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden!

Although our great-grand parents may have been alive when we were born we cannot say that we remember them, but stories of our family members are passed down from one generation to the next. So their lives live on through their descendants in the same way that their DNA does. Passed on from one generation to the next.

Con't

On these people; most of whom we never met, or ever got to know, our life, our very existence depends.

Without their love and devotion to each other we would not be here, we would not have been born!

In the 2001 Census more questions were added about people's ethnicity and religion. Those who appear on it will never be able to view it; unless they were born in 2000 and are lucky enough to live to be 100 years old!

This reflection by Cliff Reed is based on the questions that were asked in the 2001 Census and is called "Meditation for Census Day 2001".

(12) Meditation for Census Day 2001 - Cliff Reed

What is your name?

My name is what I have left when
every other possession is stripped away.

What is your country of birth?

The world is my country.

What is your ethnic group?

All ethnicities are mine, for I am human, and humanity is one.

What is your religion?

I am Christian, because I try to follow God's rule of love, as Jesus did.

I am Buddhist, because I reverence the Buddha's way of compassion for all beings

I am Hindu, because I see the divine Unity in a myriad avatars.

I am Jewish, because the Law still guides me and the Prophets still challenge me.

I am Muslim, because I bow before the One God, the beneficent, the merciful.

I am Sikh, because I heed the Gurus' witness to the worth and oneness of us all.

I am of other religions too, for the truth has many channels, the divine so many messengers.

I am Unitarian, because I embrace the unity that I see in all.

Count me as a child of your universe, O God. So be it.

(13 Readings from the New International Version of the Holy Bible)

First a reading from the Old Testament

Psalm 133 Just verse 1

How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!

Con't

And this from the New Testament

Romans Chapter 12 verses 9 to 18

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practise hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

Rejoice with those who rejoice.; mourn with those who mourn, live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

We will now have our last hymn

(14 Hymn 125 “One More Step”)

Hymn number 125 in the purple hymn book, “One More Step”, stand if you're able.

(15 “Getting Along” by Cliff Reed)

Now one last prayer by Cliff Reed called “Getting Along”

Why can't we all just get along God?

You don't care a hoot about our conflicting creeds, dogmas, and theologies, so why do we argue and fight about them?

Why can't we just be a bit more loving to each other?

Is it really so hard?

Why can't we give each other a bit more respect?

Why can't we be kinder and more forgiving?

Why can't we all live by a few simple rules about honesty, consideration for others, and treating them as we'd like to be treated ourselves?

Why can't we accept that it's enough to be part of the one human family regardless of the labels we stick on ourselves?

Why can't we live together peacefully on this beautiful earth without wrecking it?

Why can't we be content to have enough, and only be discontent when other people don't?

Why do we persist in judging other people instead of paying attention to our own mistakes?

Why do we have to be rude, nasty, and violent to each other when it's so much better - and easier – to be nice?

God, why can't we all just get along?

Show us the right path! Amen

(16 Closing Words & Prayers)

Now some closing words and prayers before we extinguish our chalice flame and have our Notices.

A Sanskrit poem

Look to this day for it is life, the very life of life.
In its brief course lie all the realities and truths of existence.
The joy of growth, the splendour of action, the glory of power.
For yesterday is but a memory and tomorrow is only a vision.
But today well lived makes every yesterday a memory of happiness
and every tomorrow a vision of hope.
Look well, therefore, to this day!

A Prayer by Stephen Grellet

Dear Lord,
I expect to pass through this world but once;
and any good thing, therefore, that I can do
or any kindness that I can show to any fellow creature,
let me do it now;
let me not defer or neglect it,
for I shall not pass this way again.
Let us go in peace
to live together in harmony,
to see beauty in everything,
to know wonder in each passing moment,
and to walk gently with our God.
Amen

(17 Extinguishing of the Chalice candle followed by the closing video and our notices)

(Extinguish Candle)

The closing video which precedes our Notices is “Humble and Kind” sung by Tim McGraw

*After which you're welcome to join us for tea and coffee in the hall.
Please also try to donate any small amount you can to our offertory.*

(18 Closing Video “Humble and Kind” Tim McGraw 4:29 mins)

