

SERVICE THEME: Disarmament Week and War MUSICAL THEME: Bittersweet Memories.

OPENING MUSIC: Samuel Barber, Adagio for Strings, Track 1, (Audio) 8 min 10 sec

<https://youtu.be/izQsgE0L450>

OPENING PRAYER:

We gather, as we always do for all the same reasons that we gather week after week:

To lift up the gift of life that is ours,

To remember that life is holy,

To pray for healing and hope in the midst of trouble,

To give thanks for the blessings that surround us.

Today especially we lift these up:

The gift of life, the holiness that surrounds us, the troubles and blessings

As we remember and honour those who have given themselves to the cause of war in its intensity and terror, including those who have lost their lives in various acts of terrorism.

We remember those who have given their lives in hope of a new day of peace.

In the quiet of our gathering, may we lift up our hearts in grateful thanksgiving for their lives, and for the promise of peace that they mean.

CHALICE LIGHTING:

I look around this chapel today and I'm glad to see you.

I can only guess how each of you is feeling today.

Some of you are happy to be here.

Some of you have had a rough week and almost didn't come.

Some of you have sorrow in your hearts.

Others are celebrating a significant event.

Whatever the reason, know that you are welcome.

May something in our worship today meet your needs and connect you with the Divine,
However you may perceive the Divine.

As I kindle this symbol of light – our Flaming Chalice – think for a moment about why you've come here today, and what it is you hope this hour of worship might bring.

PRAYER:

Lord, With your spirit, guide the efforts of humankind to bring peace and justice to the nations of the earth, and give strength to rulers and all who work to establish peace and justice in the world.

Prosper the activities of those who work to preserve human rights.

Promote the endeavours of all who work for reconciliation and justice.

Deliver us from the forces of malice, jealousy and fear.

Direct us into the ways of understanding, cooperation and mutual respect.

Bless all peacemakers.

Sustain all peacekeepers.

Break down all barriers of ignorance, suspicion and fear.

Build up those things that make for peace, justice and freedom.

Enable us to live with dignity as brothers and sisters united in our diversity and our desire for a world where war itself is but an event only dimly remembered. *Amen.*

HYMN: 43 Gather the spirit (purple book)

Gather the spirit, harvest the power.
Our sep'rate fires will kindle one flame.
Witness the mystery of this hour.
Our trials in this light appear all the same.

*Gather in peace, gather in thanks,
Gather in sympathy now and then.
Gather in hope, compassion and strength.
Gather to celebrate once again.*

Gather the spirit of heart and mind.
Seeds for the sowing are laid in store.
Nurtured in love and conscience refined,
With body and spirit united once more.

*Gather in peace, gather in thanks,
Gather in sympathy now and then.
Gather in hope, compassion and strength.
Gather to celebrate once again*

Gather the spirit growing in all,
Drawn by the moon and fed by the sun.
Winter to spring, and summer to fall,
The chorus of life resounding as one.

*Gather in peace, gather in thanks,
Gather in sympathy now and then.
Gather in hope, compassion and strength.
Gather to celebrate once again*

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MEDITATION READING:

This space is sacred because of the faith, hopes, and dreams of those who went before us...

This time is sacred because we have set it apart for worship...

And we are sacred because we all bear the imprint of the divine.

Divine Spirit, who turns the ordinary into the sacred, be with us in the daily routine and in the mundane. Remind us again that you ask nothing of us except to "do justly, love mercy and to walk humbly with you our God" – a way of living that makes our very lives holy.

In the silence now we call to mind the times that we have failed to honour ourselves and others as sacred beings; the times when we have failed to treat the world as a sacred space; the times when we have neglected to look for the spirituality that can be found in the everyday ... and we listen for the still small voice that encourages us to forgive ourselves and begin again.

Let us keep silence together...

(Silence)

Life is precious and is a gift. The world is beautiful, and we are privileged to live here.

May we know this as truth. And what we know as truth, may we exhibit in our lives.

Amen

SHORT STORY:

There was once a town where the thing everyone feared the most was getting lost at night in the "Cave of Fear". No one had ever returned from there, and whenever anyone got lost and ended up there, the last that was heard was a great cry of terror, followed by a few enormous guffaws. The townsfolk lived in terror that one day the monster would leave the cave. So, they regularly left gifts and food at the mouth of the cave, and these always soon disappeared.

One day, a young man came to town, and, as he heard about the situation with the cave, he thought that it was unfair. So, he decided to enter the cave and confront the monster. The young man asked for some help, but everyone was so afraid that not a single person approached the mouth of the cave with him. He went inside, finding his way with a torch, and calling out to the monster, wanting to talk with it and discuss the situation. At first, the monster had a good long laugh, and the young man followed the sound of the monster's voice. But then the monster went quiet, and the young man had to carry on, not knowing in which direction to go.

Finally, he arrived at a huge cavern. At the bottom of the cavern, he thought he could make out the figure of the monster, and as he approached it, he felt that something hit him hard on his back. This pushed him forward towards a hole in the rock. He couldn't avoid it and fell through. Believing that he was about to die, he let out one last cry. Then he heard the great guffaws. "Darn it, I think the monster has swallowed me," he said, whilst falling.

However, as he fell, he heard music, and voices. They got clearer, and when he made a soft landing at the bottom, he heard a group of people shout: "Surprise!!"

Hardly believing it, he found himself right in the middle of a big party. The partygoers were all those people who had never returned to the town. They explained to him that this place had been the idea of an old mayor of the town. That mayor had tried to accomplish great things but was always held back by the fears of the people around him.

So, the mayor invented the story of the monster to demonstrate to people how such an attitude was so limiting. So, the young man stayed there, enjoying the party and the company of all those who had dared to approach the cave.

And what about the town? In the town they still believe that to enter the Cave of Fear is the worst of all punishments...

FIRST READING: How do Unitarians respond to 'the problem of evil'? *from* 'Unitarian, what's that?' by Rev Cliff Reed P.13

Unitarians tend to see the world and its inhabitants in positive terms. This doesn't mean, though, that we are not conscious of "evil". The Unitarian theologian, James Martineau, described the so-called "problem of evil" as "this old and terrible perplexity" - and so it is. Unitarians are reluctant to produce glib solutions to it.

As far as "natural evil" (disease, earthquakes, hurricanes and so on) is concerned, Unitarians see it simply as part and parcel of living on this planet. We would not regard such phenomena as the result of supernatural agency or divine wrath. But we might want to ask just how "natural" some of these disasters really are. It is often the case that human action, or the neglect of it, can greatly exacerbate or even cause an apparently "natural" disaster. The destruction of

forests, for example, is implicated in such disastrous events as flooding, landslides, climate change, and desertification. Thus the boundaries between "natural evil" and "human" or "moral" evil can become blurred.

As far as moral evil is concerned, Unitarians do not see this as an inherent or inherited feature of human nature. Let us take "evil" to describe attitudes, words, and actions that originate in malice, hatred, and ruthless self-concern. Unitarians might well see its source in a fundamentally flawed world-view, one that denies the essential connectedness of all people and all creation. However, even then we would be conscious of the immense complexity of the issue, and of our limited understanding of human motivation.

Rather than get too bogged down in theorising, most Unitarians would see tackling evil and the suffering it causes as a higher priority. As adult individuals we are responsible for ourselves. Our prime task is to examine what we do and think. Then it is to direct our own lives in such a way that they will be a blessing to those whose lives we touch.

Having done this, our responsibility extends to the wider human community. There the challenge is to respond effectively, yet lovingly, to the consequences of evil, whatever its cause..

SECOND READING:

Disarmament Week (United Nations)

On the anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, i.e. the 24th of October, began Disarmament Week, first established in 1978 following a special session of the UN General Assembly focused on disarmament. The week serves as a platform for governments, civil society, and educational institutions to engage in discussions about arms control, disarmament, and international security. The observance of Disarmament Week is crucial for several reasons: Promoting Peace: it encourages dialogue and education on how disarmament contributes to a safer world, reducing the reliance on weapons for security. Addressing Global Challenges: The week highlights the risks posed by weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, and emphasises the need for international cooperation to mitigate these threats. Link to Sustainable Development: Disarmament is linked to sustainable development, as resources spent on arms could be redirected towards health, education, and infrastructure.

THIRD READING: Sila addresses the UNSC (United Nations Security Council) on 25.06.2025

My name is Sila, I'm 17 years old, from Idlib, Syria.

I am one of thousands who have lived through the war in all its details—a generation that never knew what safety meant, only smoke, shelling, displacement, and fear.

But honestly, I didn't come here today to talk about the war itself. I came to talk about its consequences— about my story with war, about the pain that remains even after the guns fall silent, about a small hope in my heart that there is a better future, God willing.

The first moment I remember, I was around 3 years old. I suddenly woke up to the sound of an explosion, shattered glass on the ground, and my parents shouting, "Hurry up!"

From that day on, our home became a travel bag, and our path became one of displacement. Every time we got used to a place, we left it under shelling. Every time we made a friend, we had to say goodbye and continue our way.

My childhood was filled with fear, anxiety, and people I was deprived of—people I shared the best days of my life with.

Imagine going to school while hearing the sound of a warplane above your head, not knowing whether you'll return home or not.

Imagine sitting in class, your body present, but your mind wondering whether the next missile will hit your school, your house... or maybe someone you love.

I heard the sound of bombing and lived through every kind of fear. I lost people I loved deeply, and from that moment on, nothing felt normal in my life. I developed a phobia of any sound that resembles a plane... of the dark... and even of silence.

My cousin went out once to get us bread. I was standing with his sister, watching him from the window. Soon, we heard the sound of fighter jets and an explosion, smoke filled the air, people running in the streets—and my cousin ... we never saw him again. It was an extremely difficult moment, and I still haven't forgotten it.

Another time, my aunt's house was bombed. We ran to her, but they wouldn't let us get close to the house ... At that very moment, our own house was also bombed.

The result was that I lost both my aunt and my home—and we continued our journey of displacement.

It felt like the bombing was chasing us from house to house. There are so many moments that are engraved in my memory—Like the time I was holding my younger brother's hand, walking down the street, when suddenly a nearby explosion threw us apart.

For a moment, I thought I had lost my brother. Those were some of the longest moments of my life. When I found him, I ran to him and hugged him. Even though I was injured, I didn't feel it—all I cared about was that he was safe, not me.

The war doesn't end just because the shelling stops. The real danger continues after the war—landmines, unexploded shells, and lives turned into death traps.

A child might see something shiny and run toward it, not knowing it's a landmine. People walking through their land, unaware that death lies beneath their feet. Many lost limbs, or even their lives, without ever being part of any battle.

Our neighbour's son, 18 years old, returned to check on their house after displacement. A mine exploded—and he lost his hand.

Today, I'm here to talk to you about this issue, and I'm not just speaking about it—I'm actively working on it. In the past period, I took training courses with a humanitarian organization, and I'm currently volunteering as part of an awareness team.

We work on awareness campaigns about the risks of war remnants—especially for children. I'm trying to be a voice in this field, and to deliver the message to as many people as possible.

Without removing these remnants of war, there will be no real hope, no real return, no future for us. Now is our time to speak up, to raise our voices, and to educate others.

I did not come today as a victim. I came as a witness. I came to deliver a message. To speak on behalf of every child who was promised a normal life but couldn't live it. On behalf of every mother who buried her son, and every home that lost its warmth. I'm standing in front of you today to deliver just one message:

The war must end—not only on maps, but in our streets, in our memories, and in our children's toys. God willing, we will be the last generation to live this pain. The last generation to fall asleep to the sound of missiles and wake up to fear.

Thankfully, today, there is a little more safety. Now we can dream, work on ourselves, I can continue my education, achieve my ambitions, and support my community and my family.

But to make those dreams possible, we need many things—and most importantly, we need opportunity... and we need decisions. We still need your support.

I am from a generation that survived physically...but our hearts still live in fear. Help us replace the word “displacement” with “return,” the word “rubble” with “home,” and the word “war” with “life.”

HYMN: 126 Open the door, step right inside (purple book)

Open the door, step right inside,
come into this place where love and hope will abide.
Reach out your hand, I'll welcome you in,
its so good to be together again.

Start out the day wearing a grin,
joyful faces make people want to come in.
Open your arms to show that you care,
and our little light will shine everywhere.

When you're in pain, trouble or doubt,
let the love come in to help the hurting get out.
Open your heart to share how you feel,
and we'll build a church of love that is real.

Open the door, step right inside,
come into this place where love and hope will abide.
Reach out your hand, I'll welcome you in,
its so good to be together again.

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REFLECTIVE ADDRESS:

As we observe **United Nations Disarmament Week** and **Global Media and Information Literacy Week**, we are called to reflect deeply on what it means to be peacemakers in an age of both immense connectivity and profound division. These two international observations, though distinct in focus, are deeply intertwined. Disarmament seeks to remove the weapons which destroy bodies and nations; media and information literacy seeks to disarm the mind — to free it from manipulation, hatred, and ignorance. Together, they remind us that peace requires both the absence of violence and the presence of understanding. As mentioned in our reading earlier on, Disarmament Week, observed annually at the end of October, echoes the urgent cry of the United Nations for a world free of nuclear weapons, chemical arms, and the tools of mass destruction. Yet disarmament is not only a political project; it is a profoundly spiritual one.

The **Christian** scriptures declare, *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God”* (Matthew 5:9). This beatitude offers more than a moral suggestion — it is a blueprint for human dignity. To disarm is to follow in the footsteps of the Prince of Peace, who taught that love of neighbour and even love of enemy are the highest forms of discipleship. True peace cannot coexist with instruments designed to annihilate life.

Similarly, in **Islam**, the Qur'an teaches, *“And if they incline to peace, then incline to it [also] and rely upon Allah”* (Surah Al-Anfal 8:61). Peace — *salaam* — is at the very heart of the faith, both as a greeting and as a divine attribute. The act of disarmament, then,

becomes an act of trust: trust that reconciliation is stronger than retaliation, and that security built on compassion is more enduring than that built on fear.

From a **Buddhist** perspective, peace begins with inner disarmament. The *Dhammapada* reminds us, *“Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world. By non-hatred alone is hatred appeased. This is an eternal law.”* The Buddha’s call to cultivate mindfulness, compassion, and non-violence speaks to the deeper roots of armament — the anger, greed, and delusion that drive nations and individuals towards conflict. Without addressing these inner causes, external disarmament remains incomplete.

Hinduism, too, envisions peace (*shanti*) as an essential cosmic principle. The Upanishads proclaim the prayer, *“Om Shanti Shanti Shanti”*—*Peace, peace, peace*. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna teaches Arjuna that the highest form of victory is mastery over oneself. Disarmament, therefore, is not weakness; it is the strength to overcome ego, desire, and fear — the very forces that make weapons seem necessary.

Additionally, in **Judaism**, prophet Isaiah’s vision of the future speaks powerfully: *“They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore”* (Isaiah 2:4). This vision continues to inspire movements for peace across centuries, calling humanity to transform the instruments of harm into tools for nourishment.

As Disarmament Week calls us to put down weapons, **Global Media and Information Literacy Week** — also held in late October — invites us to pick up wisdom. In our digital age, misinformation and manipulation have become new kinds of weaponry. Words, images, and algorithms can wound as deeply as bombs. The unfiltered spread of hatred, falsehood, and fear erodes trust between peoples and fuels the very conflicts disarmament seeks to end.

Media and information literacy, not media without information literacy, empower individuals to discern truth from falsehood, to question rather than react, and to communicate responsibly. It is, in essence, a spiritual discipline of the digital age, a form of mindfulness applied to information.

Religious wisdom traditions have long recognised the ethical power of words and knowledge. The **Book of Proverbs** teaches, *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue”* (Proverbs 18:21). In a world where one viral message can inflame or inspire millions, this ancient warning feels strikingly relevant.

In **Islam**, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, *“Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should speak what is good or remain silent.”* The moral responsibility to use words wisely aligns closely with the aims of media literacy: to speak truth, verify information, and refrain from spreading harm.

Buddhist practice emphasises *Right Speech*, one of the Noble Eightfold Path’s central components. This means speaking truthfully, kindly, and beneficially. In an online world, this teaching becomes a reminder that our digital speech — tweets, posts, and comments — should also reflect compassion and awareness.

In **Hinduism**, the concept of *satya* (truth) and *ahimsa* (non-violence) guides not only actions but also communication. To share truth without harming others is both a moral

and spiritual act. Similarly, **Jewish** teachings on *loshon hara* — the prohibition against harmful speech — call for restraint and responsibility in how we speak about others.

Thus, media literacy is not merely an academic skill; it is a continuation of ancient ethical wisdom. It helps us become better stewards of knowledge, peace, and dialogue.

Disarmament and information literacy are twin paths towards the same horizon: the creation of a just, peaceful, and informed global community. To disarm without educating is to leave hearts vulnerable to manipulation and fear. To educate without disarming is to equip minds but leave bodies at risk. Both must coexist.

In practical terms, this means advocating for peace at every level: supporting treaties that reduce arms, promoting dialogue between adversaries, and cultivating education systems that teach critical thinking, empathy, and media literacy from an early age. It means transforming not only policies but also hearts.

Each religion reminds us that peace begins within — within our choices, our words, and our perceptions. If we can disarm our anger, if we can question before we share, if we can see truth as sacred, then the hope of a disarmed world and an enlightened public becomes real.

As these two global observances converge, may we hear in them a single, unified call: to build peace not only with treaties but with truth. Let us beat our swords into ploughshares and our careless words into bridges of understanding. May we, as Unitarians and as members of one human family, embody the spirit of *shalom*, *salaam*, *shanti* — peace in all its forms. May our hearts be disarmed of hatred, our minds armed with wisdom, and our voices guided by truth. In this way, Disarmament Week and Global Media and Information Literacy Week become not mere dates on a calendar but also living reminders of our shared responsibility to heal the world — one act, one word, one truth at a time.

MUSIC: Franz Liszt, Consolation No.3 in D flat major, 4 mins 30sec.

<https://youtu.be/ufBUoUM3-TA>

WORDS BEFORE THE OFFERTORY:

The purpose of the church is to encourage all who gather there to grow more generous in spirit and in action. This is the great end of all the world's faith traditions: to bring the human being closer to the divine by acts of creation and compassion. Immediately after the end of the service, we will take an offering that allows us to exercise that all-important generosity of spirit, an offering that will support this self-supporting church. The gifts of the congregation will be received most gratefully after the end of the service.

POETRY: 'Forgiveness' by Ashley Dickerson

Adrift in a sea of sadness
lost in my thoughts
Jokes can be taken so harsh
when meant to be taken lightly
A slip of the tongue is all it takes

and suddenly you're alone
boxed in a world of fears
a world of tears

Cruelty is it's game
life it's name
ever changing, rapidly sweeping you along
like a roller coaster you can't stop
and as you spin wildly spin
out of control
scenes from earlier on this ride of life
flash through your mind

The walls are closing in
The room begins to spin
you fall to your knees and
beg for it to stop
you beg and plead for
forgiveness knowing
that you were wrong

You've been too bossy,
said too much,
you say it will never happen
again and you know
that you'll do anything
in your power to keep it
from happening again
you love these people
and can't fight
like this with them
so you plead for forgiveness.

PRAYER:

We pray for a better world - more peaceful and more caring, and we ask for the strength and the courage to do what is needed to fulfil our dreams. We confess that so often we fall short of our own ideals, and we remember Jesus' saying that the one who is without sin should cast the first stone. For all our mistakes, we pray for forgiveness, and we pray too that we may find it in our hearts to forgive the mistakes of others.

HYMN: 10 Be that guide whom love sustains (purple book)

Be that guide whom love sustains.
Rise above the daily strife:
Lift on high the good you find.
Help to heal the hurts of life.
Be that helper nothing daunts –

Do not be friend or taunt of foe.
Ever strive for liberty.
Show the path that life should go.

Be that builder trusting good,
Bitter though the test may be:
Through all the ages they are right,
Though they build in agony.

Be that teacher faith directs.
Move beyond the old frontier:
Though the frightened fear that faith,
Be tomorrow's pioneer!

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FINAL BLESSING:

Now,
Through the rain and the sun,
Go your ways with gladness:
With Love in your hearts,
Peace in your minds
And Beauty touching your soul.

EXTINGUISH THE CHALICE FLAME

CLOSING MUSIC: Henry Purcell, Dido and Aeneas, 'Dido's Lament', 3min 23sec.

Henry Purcell: Dido's Lament (Dido and Aeneas); Anna Dennis, soprano, with Voices of Music
4K UHD <https://youtu.be/JIKInTJKuZM>