

## **'Give to Gain: A Service for International Women's Day' by Lisa Anthony**

**Opening music:** Natalie Merchant feat Abena Koomson-Davis. Big Girls 4 min 59 sec  
Find it here <https://youtu.be/O4VJHzYEG3w>

### **Opening words and lighting of chalice**

Welcome to you all, whether you are here in person, joining us on zoom or perhaps watching the recording at a later time. I wish you all a Happy International Women's Day.

Our opening music today was Big Girl by Natalie Merchant, featuring Abena Koomson-Davis. It's about the ways women and girls develop shields and defences to protect them from sexism and misogyny. I chose this because Natalie Merchant's music has been significant to me for many years and this song calls for women and girls to be able to be fully themselves. We will hear more from her later.

And now, as is our custom, I will light our chalice, as a symbol of our free religious faith. For those on zoom, *if you have a candle you might like to light yours with me now.*

May this flame be a symbol of the warmth and beauty of the feminine that resides in each one of us, whatever our gender.

May we be strong and resilient in our capacity to be loving and caring.

This is the first service I've written so it may feel clumsy or clunky in places. I hope you will find something of meaning and value.

### **Opening prayer**

We will begin with a prayer written by the contemporary Unitarian Universalist writer and theologian Rebecca Parker. This prayer was included in a service for International Women's Day led by our lovely Reverend Kate several years ago so I decided to include it again today.

Dear God,  
Dear Earth and Sky,  
Dear Mystery,  
Dear Love,  
I pray today for this congregation,  
This vibrant gathering of tender hearts  
And hopeful spirits,  
Of willing activists  
And deep contemplatives  
Faithful fools and genius misfits,  
Prophets and artists and devoted workers,  
Sleepy little ones and sturdy old ones  
And weary middle-agers,  
The lost, the searchers, and the anchors.  
May the people of this congregation  
See in one another the face of a holiness  
That calls us to abide in solidarity; May we be bathed in beauty  
That moves us to resist all that disparages human dignity  
and to delight in that which is good;  
In times of brokenness, may the poetry of unexpected grace  
Open us to humility and transformation;

And, in the face of the world's needs,  
May this church be a channel of our peace.  
May this church be a place of refuge from sorrow and distress  
But not from the struggle to realize justice for all.

May it be for all  
A balm for the cure of weary souls,  
A place the Spirit of Life can call home  
And be gathered into the hearts,  
Of a people who love what is sacred and will defend it  
With all their hearts, minds, souls and strength.  
Dear God,  
Dear Earth and Sky,  
Dear Mystery,  
Dear Love,      Amen

We will now sing our first hymn, it's number 146 in the green book, True Simplicity. If you don't know the words yet, you'll probably know the tune. The words will be on the screen.

### **Hymn 1: Green Book 146 'True Simplicity'**

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free;  
'Tis the gift to know where just where we want to be;  
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,  
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.

When true simplicity is gained,  
To greet all as friend we shan't be ashamed:  
To turn, turn, will be our delight,  
Till be turning, turning, we come round right.

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free;  
'Tis the gift to our common destiny;  
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,  
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.

When true simplicity is gained,  
To greet all as friend we shan't be ashamed:  
To turn, turn, will be our delight,  
Till be turning, turning, we come round right.

*Music: Traditional Shaker Song arr. By David Dawson*  
*Words: Traditional Shaker Song*

Thank you. Now I want to read you something about the Swa people of the Amazon. This account comes from a book of essays called "We are the ones we have been waiting for" by the author Alice Walker. Her novels, poetry and essays focus on the oppression of women and girls, particularly women of colour and I've chosen this piece because it speaks about those qualities traditionally seen as feminine and their importance in our world today.

I have also chosen it because it's message seems vital today, with news of the latest casualties of wars and conflicts around the world. I know I can find myself feeling helpless

against the dominance of powerful men and powerful nations and the conflict that arise between them.

Alice Walker writes....

'The Swa are indigenous people who've lived in the Amazon rainforest for thousands of years. They tell us that in their society men and women are equal but very different. Man, they say, has a destructive nature: it is his job therefore to cut down trees when firewood or canoes are needed. His job also to hunt down and kill animals when there is a need for more protein. His job to make war, when that becomes a necessity. The woman's nature is thought to be nurturing and conserving. Therefore, her role is to care for the home and garden, the domesticated animals and the children. She inspires the men. But perhaps, her most important duty is to tell the men when to stop.

It is the woman who says 'Stop, we have enough firewood and canoes, don't cut down any more trees. Stop, we have enough meat, don't kill any more animals. Stop. This war is stupid and using up too many of our resources. Stop.

When the Swa people are brought to this culture, they observe that it is almost completely masculine. That the men have cut down so many trees and built so many tall buildings that the forest itself is dying; they have built roads without end and killed animals without number. When, ask the Swa, are the women going to say STOP?'

I don't see or live in the world in the same way as the Swa people, and I don't make the same distinctions between men and women's roles. I do think that that the more feminine qualities of empathy, care and nurturing are less heard and given less value in our western society though and that perhaps we the Swa people remind us all of the importance of balance and the value of love.

We will now sing our second hymn. This one is Boldly Live My Daughter. It's number 217 in the green book and the words will appear on the screen.

## **Hymn 2: Green Book no 217 'Boldly Live, my Daughter'**

Come my daughter, come with me  
To where rushing waters flow to the sea;  
We'll share what has been and what's still to be –  
For now's the time for living.

Tell your story, sing your song,  
Seek for gentleness and learn to be strong:  
For living it takes now the whole of life long –  
Your life is yours for living.

Learn to give and learn to love,  
Nurture all life under heaven above,  
And learn of the eagle and learn of the dove:  
For love is yours for giving.

Taste the grapes on distant vine,  
Fill your cup with fine and different wine,  
And sit at the table with strangers and dine –  
For you must learn of living.

Dance with milkweed, dance with rose,  
Let the sun burn sand that drifts through your toes,  
The sweat of your body let drench all your clothes –  
For you must do your living.

Daughter dear, you leave today:  
Take my love as you go on your way,  
And pass it to those whom you meet on your way –  
And boldly do your living.

*Music: 'Greenside' by David Dawson, Used by permission.  
Words from Carolyn McDade. Used by permission.*

Thank you.

Sheila is now going to come and read a poem, written specially for International Women's Day this year.

### **Sheila:**

'Give To Gain': A poem by Maria Gulczynska-Baci

*Give to gain!  
Do not restrain  
your thoughts  
but share.  
It's only those who dare  
that change the way  
others think,  
so go out there and wink!  
Kindness given  
is kindness gained.  
Be strong and remember,  
she who shares and dares  
wins because she cares!*

*Thank you Sheila, I'm now going to read verse 28 from the Taoist wisdom book the Tao Te Ching. This is from a translation by Stephen Mitchell. After I've read it we will have a short silence to reflect on what we've heard so far and then some music.*

### **Tao Te Ching – Verse 28**

Know the male,  
yet keep to the female:  
receive the world in your arms.  
If you receive the world,  
the Tao will never leave you  
and you will be like a little child.

Know the white,  
yet keep to the black:  
be a pattern for the world.

If you are a pattern for the world,  
the Tao will be strong inside you  
and there will be nothing you can't do.

Know the personal,  
yet keep to the impersonal:  
accept the world as it is.  
If you accept the world,  
the Tao will be luminous inside you  
and you will return to your primal self.

The world is formed from the void,  
like utensils from a block of wood.  
The Master knows the utensils,  
yet keeps to the block:  
thus she can use all things.

**Interlude Music:** Mozart. Lacrimosa (cover Vivienne) 2minutes 52 seconds

Find it here: <https://youtu.be/eMy0N9njb8M>

## Reflections

The theme for International Women's Day this year is 'Give to Gain'. It asks us to think about what we each can Give to support Gender Equality.

As I was reading more about the theme, everything I came across seemed to focus on the qualities of care and compassion traditionally associated with the feminine.

As the poem Sheila read to us ended: '*she who shares and dares, wins because she cares!*'

This got me thinking more about caring. As a feminist, I don't believe that caring is by nature 'women's work' but even with all the advances in gender equality over the past decades the statistics speak for themselves:

**Unpaid Care:** Women perform over **76%** of total global unpaid care work. In the UK, 59% of unpaid carers are women.

**Paid Care Workforce:** Women hold **81%** of social care jobs in the UK. Globally, they constitute 82% of nursing/midwifery roles and 75% of domestic/cleaning roles.

**Workforce Participation:** Across the world, 42% of women cannot take paid jobs due to caregiving responsibilities, compared to only 6% of men.

**Time Poverty:** Women spend an average of 4 hours and 25 minutes daily on unpaid care, compared to 1 hour and 23 minutes for men.

**Gender Pay Gap:** In the UK, 77% of health and social work jobs are held by women, yet they face a significant gender pay gap in these sectors.

It's clear then that there is still a huge amount of work to do to enable women to access the same opportunities as men, for training, work, promotion and equal pay. For those in positions of power there is work to do to promote equality in all forms.

But what struck me about the 'Give to Gain' theme and the poem Sheila read was that alongside increasing all kinds of opportunities for women, we also need to GIVE greater

value to the work, paid and unpaid of carers and to value those traditionally feminine qualities of empathy, care, nurture.

As the story about the Swa people suggests, perhaps a significant part of the problems we have in the world today are because, in the Western world, more value is given to those attributes traditionally seen as masculine. We are encouraged to be 'successful' and success is measured through our status, roles and salaries. We are encouraged to be consumers, to want more, want the latest model, the best holiday, the most beautiful home. We are conditioned to want to 'have things' and keep our resources for ourselves and our loved ones. The Swa teaching and the Tao Te Ching reading both refer to the importance of the feminine qualities of caring and nurturing to bring balance in the world. They remind us that success is best measured through what we contribute rather than through what we have. The more we give, the more we gain, collectively.

Some of the indigenous native American tribal groups have a ceremony called the 'Give Away'. Individuals often give away many or all of their possessions and are celebrated in their community for what they give away and let go of rather than what they own or have for themselves.

Watching the news this week it did not take very long to become overwhelmed, angry and saddened about all the current tensions, conflict and wars across the world. It can be hard to listen, and I have been left at times feeling angry, sad and helpless.

But maybe another way we can 'Give to Gain' is to give our attention to the acts of care, kindness and beauty that are also happening every day. People, mostly women, continue to care, for people they love as well as for patients, clients and strangers. We might also be providing care to others. Perhaps, we can balance our helplessness with more attention and focus on the love, care, empathy and generosity happening all around us. Maybe we can also give by taking a moment to appreciate all forms of caring more deeply. We can think about how we can prioritise kindness, compassion and nurturing in our lives today and everyday.

We can also listen, deeply and sincerely, to the voices, of all genders, that say STOP in response to violence, war, destruction and excessive consumption of the Earth's precious resources. We can speak up for justice and challenge oppression, we can join in the fight to end inequality by saying STOP and by caring for others beyond our immediate family.

So while we fight for women to have equality of opportunity in education, work, health and across their whole lives, we also need to fight for caring, kindness and compassion to be valued as highly as other measures of success.

I think that all of us who come to church value kindness and appreciate our connection with each other and with every part of the natural world. It is for each of us to reflect on what we might be able to Give or indeed to Give up for the Gain and benefit of us all.

What I have gained this International Women's Day is more clarity about how I want to challenge inequality and contribute towards a fairer world for everyone. I want to be able to stay rooted in care, compassion, kindness and understanding. I want to be a loving and benevolent presence in the world and for me that includes learning to be less timid. I want to learn from the Swa to say a loud and clear STOP to the violence and suffering that happens every day and I am making sure to acknowledge and celebrate every act of beauty and kindness I come across.

We will now sing our final hymn, again from the green book, number 226. It is called Song of Peace and has a much needed message for us all.

### **Hymn 3: Song of Peace. Green book No.226**

This is my song, O God of all the nations,  
A song of peace for lands afar and mine;  
This is my home, the country where my heart is,  
here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine;  
But other hearts in other lands are beating  
With hopes and dreams and true and high as mine.

My country's skies are bluer than the ocean,  
And sunlight beams on clover leaf and pine;  
but other lands have sunlight, too, and clover,  
and skies are everywhere as blue as mine.  
O hear my song, O God of all the nations,  
a song of peace for their land and for mine.

*Music by Jean Sibelius, words by Lloyd Stone. Used by permission of The Lorenz Corporation, Dayton, Ohio*

### **Prayer**

**I have adapted our final prayer from a prayer written for International Women's Day by Rev Rosie Frew of the Church of Scotland.**

On this International Women's Day,  
as we celebrate and give thanks for the achievements of women,  
we remember the women who have played a part in our lives.  
Those who have  
nurtured us,  
taught us,  
inspired us,  
loved us.

Forgive us when we have limited women  
through inequality,  
by stereotype,  
by exclusion,  
through lack of opportunity.

On this International Women's Day,  
as we acknowledge the challenges women still face,  
we pray that all women may know equality  
of healthcare,  
of education,  
of wealth,  
of prospects.

On this International Women's Day  
We celebrate and honour those who provide care,  
In any form, for those who need it.  
May we see and feel the ever present love, compassion and care that surrounds us every  
day.

We pray that all women, and all peoples may know themselves to be respected,  
safe,  
included,  
empowered. Amen.

### **Closing words**

Thank you for sharing this time with me and each other today. I hope that you have found something of interest in this service.

I want to share a final poem, another piece of writing by Alice walker. This poem reminds us that we can, each of us, make a difference to the world and in the world, creating a more loving and inclusive future for us all:

#### We Alone

We alone can devalue gold  
By not caring  
If it falls or rises  
In the market place.  
Wherever there is gold  
There is a chain, you know,  
And if your chain  
is gold  
so much the worse  
for you.

Feathers, Shells  
And sea-shaped stones  
Are all as rare

This could be our revolution  
To love what is plentiful  
As much as  
What's scarce

In a moment I will blow out our chalice candle and we will close with a final piece of music. This is another song by Natalie Merchant, performed by her and the Perkins School for the Blind Choir after a workshop she led for them. I have chosen it for the beautiful sentiment and words, but also for the joy that I see shining through these young people as they sing together with her.

**Closing music:** Natalie Merchant and the Perkins School for the Blind Choir: Kind and Generous 4 minutes 15 seconds

Find it here: <https://youtu.be/EbdZTcBASKs?si=njpZOOw3DIbVEKkj>