

OPENING MUSIC: Vivaldi - In furore iustissimae irae – Piau 4min :38s

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U73a3kNbZEU&list=RDU73a3kNbZEU&start_radio=1

OPENING PRAYER:

As we gather here in this harbour of safety
We thank the spirit for fellowship and family.
We ask that we be strengthened, restored and inspired with love.
We ask that we may be filled with peace
So that as we journey onwards
We would pour out love and grace to others.
We ask that our souls would catch the wind of the spirit
so that we would take a message of hope and unity to all the earth.
So be it.

CHALICE LIGHTING PRAYER:

For the gift of this day and for our community of spiritual nurture and compassion, we give thanks. We light this chalice as a symbol of our free Unitarian faith. May our many sparks meet and merge in communion of heart and soul.

1st HYMN: purple book 178 – ‘Together Now We Join As One’

Together now we join as one
our common faith to sing;
to render to this pilgrim world
our heart felt offering.

We strive to be a fellowship
with mind and conscience free,
to search for truth and saving light
in cosmic mystery.

We worship God – love’s source and power;
we celebrate the life
that all earth’s children freely share
beyond their sinful strife.

We would in love, serve humankind
with caring, justice, peace;
and with the earth seek harmony
that pride and pillage cease

We hold in reverence the man
who walked in Galilee,
who healed the sick and loved the poor –
revealed divinity.

We welcome truth, we welcome light,
all prophecy and song,
whoever they be channelled through
to all they shall belong.

Music 'St. Fulbert' Henry John Gauntlett, 1805 1878
Words © Clifford Martin Reed b 1947 Used by permission.

PRAYER: "May We Become"

May we become at all times, both now and forever,
A protector for those without protection
A guide for those who have lost their way
A ship for those with oceans to cross
A bridge for those with rivers to cross
A sanctuary for those in danger
A lamp for those without light
A place of refuge for those who lack shelter
And a servant to all in need.
So be it.

MEDITATION:

At this quiet time and in this place of worship we would seek to know more deeply what it means to love one another.

We know so well our own needs. We know that we, ourselves need understanding, affection and recognition. Why is it then that so often we hesitate to extend these precious gifts to others? The cost of a kind word is small. The moment that it takes to listen could hardly be better used. A gesture of forgiveness can mark a new beginning. An embrace or a note of appreciation can convey crucial encouragement and comfort. And yet, so often we fail even within our own families to live by the sacred command that we should love one another.

O Spirit of life and of love, strengthen our faith, increase our resolve to give more generously of ourselves. We pray for the courage to take the risks of love. We pray for the insight to see ourselves and others in perspective. We pray for humility and understanding that we may always stand ready to forgive and begin anew. Amen.

SHORT STORY: a Mischievous Boy (vaguely from the Hindu tradition) –

Once upon a time, in a small village, there lived a boy named Ravi. Ravi was known for his mischievous behaviour and was always up to something. One day, while playing with his friends in the woods, Ravi stumbled upon a small, helpless bird that had fallen from its nest. Feeling sorry for the little creature, Ravi took it home and decided to take care of it. Ravi was now responsible for the bird's wellbeing, and he took his duty very seriously. He fed the bird, kept it warm, and played with it every day. Over time, the bird grew stronger and began to fly around Ravi's home. Ravi was thrilled to see the bird's progress and felt proud of himself for taking care of it.

One day, Ravi's friends came over to play, and they noticed the bird flying around. They were amazed at how well Ravi had taken care of it and asked him how he had managed to do it. Ravi proudly explained how he had found the bird and how he had taken care of it. His friends were impressed and congratulated him for his good work. However, one of Ravi's friends, Ajay, was not impressed at all. He thought that taking care of a bird was a

waste of time and that Ravi was foolish for doing so. Ajay believed that taking care of oneself was more important than taking care of others.

Ravi was hurt by Ajay's comments and began to doubt himself. He wondered if he had wasted his time taking care of the bird instead of doing something more important. Ravi was confused and didn't know what to do. One day, while Ravi was playing with the bird, it suddenly flew away. Ravi was heartbroken and didn't know what to do. He had lost his little friend, and he didn't know how to get it back.

As Ravi was searching for the bird, he came across a group of villagers who were struggling to put out a fire that had broken out in one of the houses. Ravi immediately rushed to help, and with the help of his friends, they managed to put out the fire. The villagers were grateful to Ravi and his friends for their help, and they praised them for their bravery. Ravi suddenly realized that taking care of others was just as important as taking care of oneself. He understood that he had helped the villagers because he had learnt to be kind and compassionate towards others from taking care of the bird.

Ravi had learnt an important lesson, and he promised himself that he would always be kind and compassionate towards others. He knew that by doing so, he would not only help others but would also bring happiness to his own life. From that day on, Ravi became known for his kindness and compassion towards others. He had learnt that helping others was the best way to help oneself, and he lived by that principle every day.

FIRST READING: The theme of World Humanitarian Day 2026 focuses on “Families of Fallen Humanitarians” and emphasizes global solidarity in supporting humanitarian workers and communities affected by crises.

World Humanitarian Day, observed annually on 19 August, honours humanitarian workers who risk their lives to aid people affected by conflict, disasters, and emergencies, while also commemorating those who have lost their lives in the line of duty. The 2026 campaign highlights the personal stories of aid workers through the voices of their families, loved ones, and the communities they served, drawing attention to the human cost of humanitarian work and the importance of protecting those who provide life-saving assistance.

The theme also metaphorically frames the world as a “Global Village”, emphasising that the service of humanity requires collective effort. Just as raising a child involves the care of an entire community, supporting humanitarian workers and vulnerable populations demands global cooperation and shared responsibility. This approach encourages people worldwide to recognise the dedication of humanitarian workers, advocate for their safety, and contribute to building resilient, compassionate communities. Activities associated with the 2026 observance include commemorative events, storytelling initiatives, social media campaigns, educational programs, and volunteer opportunities. These efforts aim to raise awareness about humanitarian challenges, honour the sacrifices of aid workers, and inspire collective action to support vulnerable populations. By focusing on families and communities, the 2026 theme underscores that humanitarian work is not only about immediate aid but also about sustaining hope, dignity, and resilience for those affected by crises, while ensuring that the contributions of humanitarian workers are recognized and protected.

SECOND READING: A House of Prayer for All Peoples, pp.454-455, from A Golden Treasury of the Bible, Lindsey Press publication (**to be read by Ann Kader?** – paper copy only)

THIRD READING: Five years of Taliban rule: Afghan women face deepening repression

• FRANCE 24 English (video-clip – 02:02)

<https://www.bing.com/videos/riverview/relatedvideo?q=timeline+of+restrictions+on+women+by+the+talibam+government+in+afghanistan&mid=64CF4ED37E5E42BB7C0264CF4ED37E5E42BB7C02&churl=&FORM=VIRE>

2nd HYMN: 84 – Justice For Persons (purple book)

Justice for person and for different nations,
respect the diverse species in our care,
community of life in earth sustaining,
love for this planet which we all must share.

Compassion is the strength of love and sympathy
letting us share another being's pain;
creature or human, loving friend or stranger,
love for each other is the whole world's gain.

Wisdom is insight clear, precise and thoughtful,
searching for truth and human love refined;
guidance from past, made ready for the future
by the best reasoning of the human mind.

Integrity, with honour and uprightness:
these are the qualities which form and make
women and men, the people for tomorrow,
those who serve others for another's sake.

Justice, compassion, wisdom and integrity,
these are the virtues which our poor world needs.
They'll flower tomorrow, fruit in glorious splendour,
If we today go out and plant the seeds.

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Music: 'Georgina' © David Dawson 2009. Used by permission.

REFLECTIVE ADDRESS: 'Humanity Beyond Violence: A Unitarian Reflection on World Humanitarian Day and Acts of Violence Based on Religion'

Earlier this week, as we marked World Humanitarian Day, we were invited to remember something both simple and profound: that every human life possesses dignity and that

our responsibility to one another does not stop at the boundaries of nation-states, religions, genders or cultures. World Humanitarian Day, observed annually on 19 August, commemorates the humanitarian workers killed in the bombing of the United Nations Canal Hotel in Baghdad in 2003. It has become a day to honour those who serve people caught in war, persecution, poverty and disaster, and to affirm the dignity and wellbeing of those whom humanitarian workers seek to protect.

From a Unitarian perspective, this universal concern for human dignity is deeply familiar. We do not possess a single creed that everyone must accept. Instead, we affirm the worth and dignity of every person, the importance of conscience, the search for truth, and the need to build a community in which justice and compassion can flourish. That perspective challenges us to confront a painful reality: religion can be used either to deepen our humanity or to deny it.

We should be careful here. Violence committed by people who claim a religious justification must not automatically be blamed upon an entire faith. Christianity is not the same thing as the actions of Christians; Islam is not the same thing as the actions of Muslims; Sikhism is not the same thing as the actions of Sikhs. Every major religious tradition contains resources for compassion, justice and human dignity, even though religious communities, like all human institutions, have sometimes failed to live up to their highest ideals.

The experience of women and girls in Afghanistan during the past five years gives us an especially painful example. Since the Taliban returned to power in August 2021, Afghan women and girls have faced an expanding system of restrictions. Girls have been denied secondary and higher education; women have been excluded from many forms of employment; restrictions have been placed upon movement, expression and participation in public life. In 2024, a morality law further entrenched restrictions affecting women and girls.

The consequences are not merely political. They are human. Imagine being a young woman who has spent years learning, dreaming and preparing for a profession, only to be told that your education must end. Imagine being a mother unable to work, or a doctor prevented from practising her profession. Imagine possessing a voice, intelligence, creativity and conscience, yet being progressively excluded from the public world in which those gifts might be used.

UN Women has described Afghanistan as the world's most severe women's rights crisis. Its recent evidence shows that exclusion has become so extensive that many women now rarely leave their homes. For us, the moral question is not simply, "What religion is responsible?" The deeper question is: What happens when religious interpretation becomes a justification for denying another person's humanity? This question must be asked honestly of every religious tradition, including our own.

Christianity contains a powerful challenge to the domination and humiliation of women. Jesus repeatedly treated women with dignity in a social environment in which they were frequently marginalised. The Gospel accounts portray him speaking with women, listening to them and recognising their spiritual and moral agency. The Catholic Church itself has acknowledged that Jesus' treatment of women challenged discriminatory traditions and affirmed their dignity. Christianity, nevertheless, has its own history of failing women. Churches have sometimes defended unequal structures, tolerated domestic abuse, excluded women from leadership and used religious language to justify subordination. A faith must therefore be judged not only by its finest teachings, but also by the courage with which its followers confront their own failures.

Islam, too, must not be reduced to the actions of the Taliban. Islam is a diverse global faith with many schools of thought, cultures and interpretations. The Qur'an contains an uncompromising call to justice: believers are instructed to stand firmly for justice even when doing so challenges themselves, their families or their interests. That principle gives Muslims — and indeed all of us — a profound ethical resource. If a religious interpretation produces systematic injustice, exclusion and suffering, believers have a responsibility to ask whether that interpretation truly reflects the moral heart of their tradition.

We can say the same of Sikhism. Sikh teaching has a particularly strong tradition of affirming the equality of women and men. The Sikh Coalition notes that Sikh Gurus taught equality between men and women and rejected restrictions that denied women religious participation. Women may undertake religious duties and leadership on the same basis as men. These traditions therefore offer us a common language: human dignity, justice, compassion and responsibility.

And that is where Unitarianism can make a distinctive contribution. We do not need to pretend that religions are identical. They are not. Their beliefs about God, revelation, scripture and salvation differ profoundly, but we can refuse the temptation to make difference itself a reason for hostility. A Unitarian approach asks us to hold two truths together. First, we must respect religious people and their right to practise their faith. Second, we must never allow respect for religion to become an excuse for ignoring cruelty.

Human rights are not suspended because an act is described as religious. A woman does not become less deserving of freedom because somebody claims that God requires her obedience. A girl does not become less worthy of education because somebody invokes tradition. A humanitarian worker does not become a legitimate target because somebody believes that the cause they serve is religiously or politically opposed to their own.

World Humanitarian Day reminds us that humanitarianism begins with a simple conviction: the suffering of another person matters to me even when I do not know them.

That is a radical spiritual principle.

It asks us to cross borders, to cross religious boundaries, to cross the boundaries of gender and nationality. It asks us to see the stranger not as an abstraction but as a human being. And so, when we think of Afghanistan, let us not think only of "Afghan women." Let us think of individual women: teachers, doctors, students, mothers, daughters, journalists, artists, humanitarians and community leaders. Let us hear their courage. Let us recognise their agency. And let us remember that humanitarian action is not simply about providing food, medicine and shelter — important though those things are. Humanitarianism is also about protecting the conditions in which human beings can live with dignity.

The exclusion of half a population is therefore not simply a matter of cultural difference. It is a profound humanitarian and moral crisis. Our response should not be hatred. Hatred merely reproduces the very violence we seek to overcome. Our response should be solidarity.

Solidarity means listening to women whose voices have been suppressed. It means supporting humanitarian organisations working under extraordinarily difficult

circumstances. It means defending education, freedom of conscience and equality. It means challenging governments and religious authorities when they violate fundamental human dignity. And it means having the humility to examine the failures within our own communities.

The United Nations reminds us that humanitarian workers themselves are increasingly becoming targets of violence. In 2024, at least 390 humanitarian workers were killed worldwide, a record number

So today we honour them. But perhaps we should do more than honour them. We should ask ourselves: what kind of humanity are we building? A humanity in which difference becomes a reason for violence or a humanity in which difference becomes an invitation to understanding? The Unitarian answer is clear.

We may come from different faiths. We may interpret scripture differently. Some of us may believe in God; others may understand the sacred through conscience, nature, reason, relationship or the mystery of existence. Yet none of these differences requires us to abandon compassion. The sacred, however we may understand it, cannot be served by cruelty. Religion cannot be used as a shield for oppression. Faith should enlarge the human heart, not shrink the circle of those whom we consider worthy of dignity.

Therefore, on this World Humanitarian Day, let us remember Afghanistan's women and girls. Let us remember humanitarian workers who place themselves in danger to serve others. Let us remember the victims of violence committed in the name of religion, ideology, nationalism or power. And let us make a quiet commitment:

To resist hatred without becoming hateful.

To challenge oppression without dehumanising the oppressor.

To defend religious freedom while rejecting religiously justified violence.

To listen before judging.

To stand with those whose voices have been silenced.

And, above all, to recognise in every human being a life of unique and immeasurable worth.

May our faith be measured not by the strength of our arguments, but by the depth of our compassion.

May our communities become places where no woman is diminished, no child is denied a future, no stranger is treated as an enemy, and no act of violence can claim the authority of the sacred.

And may we have the courage to build, together, a world in which humanity is greater than division, compassion stronger than fear, and justice stronger than violence.

Amen. So be it.

MUSIC FOR REFLECTION: Meditation from Thaïs by Jules Massenet. Orlando Pimentel, clarinet and Elena Abend, piano. 5min :27sec Video
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dm03Zx47O_s&list=RDdm03Zx47O_s&start_radio=1

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. We now 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 immediately after the end of this service.

POETRY: Paths to the Divine (anonymous)

In a world of colors,
where faith dances lightly,
voices rise, a symphony of belief.
From the quiet hum of prayer beads,
to the vibrant melody of chanting,
we find our spirits entwined,
each step a testament,
each heart a sanctuary.

Mountains bow to diversity,
and rivers embrace the wanderers,
who seek not a singular truth,
but a mosaic of sacred whispers.
Here, under one vast sky,
we gather under differing stars,
dreams woven into the same tapestry,
threads of compassion, linking our journeys.
Let us walk together,
treading lightly on sacred ground,
eschewing walls for bridges,
as peace flows like incense,
arising from the altar of understanding.
For in our differences,
we discover unity,
in our quest for meaning,
we find the divine,
a world united in the embrace of faith.

PRAYER FOR UNITY:

In times of challenge, change and growth we seek to renew ourselves. Help us to explore how to renew our faith and spiritual nature through practice and how it is embodied in our daily lives. For many people this comes through the practice or connection with prayer, mantras, meditation, kriyas, asanas, singing and various expressions. The process of cleansing and renewing our spirit is an integral part of our co-creative relationship with life. It aids us to continue our path toward peace, love and understanding with greater courage and purpose. Help us to learn to share how to restore balance and harmony into the geometry of our being in light of our spiritual path. So be it.

3rd HYMN: 128 – Our World Is One World (purple book)

Our world is one world:
what touches one affects us all –

the seas that wash us round about,
the clouds that cover us,
the rains that fall.

Our world is one world:
the thoughts we think affect us all –
the way we build our attitudes,
with love or hate, we make
a bridge or wall.

Our world is one world:
Its ways of wealth affect us all –
The way we spend, the way we share,
Who are the rich or poor,
Who stand or fall?

Our world is one world:
just like a ship that bears us all –
where fear and greed make many holes,
but where our hearts can hear
a different call.

Tune: 'Chernobyl' Cecily Taylor b.1930 Arr. Richard Graves, 1926 – 2002
Words Cecily Taylor b. 1930
Words & music © 1988 Stainer & Bell Ltd, 23 Gruneison Road, London N3 1DZ
www.stainer.co.uk

FINAL BLESSING (adapted from the Hindu tradition):

May the lord of all beings protect thee,
May the one who creates, preserves and dissolves life protect thee,
May Govinda guard thy head; Kesava, thy neck; Vishnu, thy belly;
The eternal Narayana, thy face, thine arms, thy mind, and faculties of sense;
May all negativity and fears, spirits malignant and unfriendly, flee thee;
May Rishikesa keep you safe in the sky; and Mahidhara, upon earth.

EXTINGUISH CHALICE FLAME

CLOSING MUSIC:

Bulla Ki Jaana Main Kaun – Rabbi Shergill Lyrics [PUNJABI | ROM | ENG (05:13) Video
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gbpdE8n_QWo&list=RDgbpdE8n_QWo&start_radio=1