

Service for members of Fulwood and Underbank Chapels

to use at home on Sunday 22nd March 2020

I suggest that you might like to put your phone(s) in silent mode and turn of any electronic devices which are likely to 'ping', looking for your attention.

You might wish play a piece of reflective or uplifting music from a CD or other device.

Each in our own separate places, we can still come together in spirit,
and welcome each other to our time of celebration, reflection and community.
Let us take a few moments to invite the Spirit of Life and of Love
to be present among us – joined together in spirit; and to awaken within us.

This morning's service is a weaving together of prayers, blessings and readings
from John O' Donohue's book, *To Bless the Space Between Us*.

Opening Words **Pandemic** ~ Lynn Ungar (UU minister)

What if you thought of it
as the Jews consider the Sabbath -
the most sacred of times?
Cease from travel.
Cease from buying and selling.
Give up, just for now,
on trying to make the world
different than it is.
Sing. Pray. Touch only those
to whom you commit your life.
Center down.
And when your body has become still,
reach out with your heart.
Know that we are connected
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.
(You could hardly deny it now.)
Know that our lives
are in one another's hands.
(Surely, that has come clear.)
Do not reach out your hands.
Reach out your heart.
Reach out your words.

Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.
Promise this world your love--
for better or for worse,
in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live.

Chalice Lighting

To face the world's darkness -- a chalice of light.
To face the world's coldness -- a chalice of warmth.
To face the world's terrors -- a chalice of courage.
To face the world's turmoil -- a chalice of peace.
May its glow fill our spirits, our hearts, and our lives.

1st Reading

John O'Donohue was born in 1956 and grew up in Connemara, in the West of Ireland. He was ordained a Catholic priest, and earned his PhD in Philosophical Theology. His first published work, *Anam Cara* (which means 'soul friend') was an international best-seller. He left the priesthood, and in addition to writing and public speaking, he devoted his energies to environmental activism in the west of Ireland. In 2007, he died suddenly in his sleep, just two days after his 52nd birthday.

from essay: To Retrieve the Lost Art of Blessing

When I was a young priest I had occasion to visit a contemplative community of sisters. An old sister opened the door. Knowing that I was a new priest, she asked for my first blessing. I stood over this contemplative and drew on every resource I knew, to invoke the most intimate blessing. As I was completing the blessing, it struck me how ironical this situation was; here was a contemplative who had spent over sixty years of her life navigating the searing silence and darkness of God, yet she was asking a twenty-five-year-old for his blessing. When she stood up I decided to kneel down and ask her for her blessing. She seemed utterly taken aback; she mumbled something and practically ran out of the room. She must never have had such a request for her blessing before. This was a woman who practised a totally contemplative life, and yet the system made her feel that she could not bless, and, conversely, it made me think I could. This experience led me to question who had the authority and power to bless.

Kindness

There is a kindness that dwells deep down in things; it presides everywhere, often in the places we least expect. The world can be harsh and negative, but if we remain generous and patient, kindness inevitably reveals itself. Something deep in the human soul seems to depend on the presence of kindness; something instinctive in us expects it, and once we sense it we are able to trust and open ourselves... If we did not feel that some ultimate kindness holds sway, we would feel like outsiders confronted on every side by a world toward which we could make no real bridges...

Despite all the darkness, **human hope** is based on the instinct that at the deepest level of reality some intimate kindness holds sway. This is the heart of blessing. To believe in blessing is to believe that our being here, our very presence in the world, is itself the first gift, the primal blessing...

You can just read the hymns, or sing them (in tune, or out of tune) – whatever feels good to you

Hymn Purple Book No. 208 When our Heart is in a Holy Place Joyce Poley b. 1941

*When our heart is in a holy place,
when our heart is in a holy place
we are blessed with love and amazing grace,
when our heart is in a holy place.*

When we trust the wisdom in each of us,
every colour every creed and kind,
and we see our faces in each other's eyes,
then our heart is in a holy place.

When we tell our story from deep inside,
and we listen with a loving mind,
and we hear our voices in each other's words,
then our heart is in a holy place.

When we share the silence of sacred space,
and the God of our heart stirs within,
and we feel the power of each other's faith,
then our heart is in a holy place.

Prayer *A Blessing of Angels – John O'Donohue*

May the Angels in their beauty bless you.

May they turn toward you streams of blessing.

May the Angel of **Awakening** stir your heart to come alive to the eternal within you,
to all the invitations that quietly surround you.

May the Angel of **Healing** turn your wounds into sources of refreshment.

May the Angel of the **Imagination** enable you to stand on the true thresholds,
at ease with your ambivalence,

and drawn in new directions, **through** the glow of your contradictions.

May the Angel of **Compassion** open your eyes to the unseen suffering around you.

May the Angel of **Wildness** disturb the places where your life is domesticated and safe,
take you to the territories of true otherness

where all that is awkward in you can fall into its own rhythm.

May the Angel of **Eros** introduce you to the beauty of your senses
to celebrate your inheritance, as a temple of the holy spirit.

May the Angel of **Justice** disturb you, to take the side of the poor and the wronged.

May the Angel of **Encouragement** confirm you in worth and self-respect,
that you may live with the dignity that presides in your soul.

May the Angel of **Death** arrive only when your life is complete
and you have brought every given gift to the threshold where its infinity can shine.

May **all the Angels** be your sheltering and joyful guardians.

Time of Silence

2nd Reading

Thresholds

Looking back along a life's journey, you come to see how each of the central phases of your life began with a decisive threshold where you left one way of being and entered another. A threshold is not simply an accidental line that happens to separate one region from another. It is an intense frontier that divides a world of feeling from another. Often a threshold becomes clearly visible only once you have crossed it...

This is where we need to retrieve and reawaken our capacity for blessing. If we approach our decisive thresholds with reverence and attention, the crossing will bring us more than we could ever have hoped for. This is where blessing invokes and awakens every gift the crossing has to offer...

To be in the world is to be distant from the homeland of wholeness. We are confined by limitation and difficulty. When we bless, we are enabled somehow to go beyond our present frontiers and reach into the source...

We never see the script of our lives; nor do we know what is coming towards us, or why our life takes on this particular shape or sequence. A blessing is different from a greeting... it opens a different door in human encounter. One enters into the forecourt of the soul, the source of intimacy.

Our longing for the eternal kindles our imagination to bless. Regardless of how we configure the eternal, the human heart continues to dream of a state of wholeness... To invoke a blessing is to call some of that wholeness upon a person, now...

When someone blesses you, the fruits of healing may surprise you and seem to come from afar. In fact, they are your own natural serenity and sureness awakening and arriving around you...

Hymn

Green Book

No. 117

Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee

Joyful, joyful, we adore thee,

God of glory, Lord of love;

Hearts unfold like flowers before thee

hail thee as the sun above!

field and forest, vale and mountain,

blooming meadow, flashing sea,

chanting bird and flowing fountain

call us to rejoice in thee.

Thou art giving and forgiving,
 ever blessing, ever blest,
 well-spring of the joy of living,
 ocean-depth of happy rest!
 Thou our Parent, Christ our Brother, -
 all who live in love are thine;
 teach us how to love each other,
 lift us to the joy divine.

Mortals join the mighty chorus,
 which the morning stars recall;
 parent-love is reigning o'er us,
 kindred love binds each to all.
 Ever singing march we onwards,
 victors in the midst of strife;
 joyful music lifts us sunward
 in the triumph song of life.

3rd Reading

When you invoke a blessing, you are creating a ‘sheltering wall’ of rest and peace around a person. Ultimately, nothing need be deemed negative if embraced rightly. So much depends not on how awkward destiny is, but rather on **how openly it is embraced**. This is what the ‘sheltering wall’ of blessing can enable...

When you bless another, you first gather yourself; you reach below your surface mind and personality, down to the deepest source within you – namely, the soul. Blessing is from soul to soul. And the key to who you are is your soul...

We go on with our everyday lives as if we are completely dependent on our own ability, though aware of how frail and limited that can be. The world of spirit is strange; it is subtle and concealed; it will wait for our calling. If you never think of your soul but confine it to some vague region of spiritual fantasy, you squander an infinite energy at the heart of your life. Once you awaken to your soul, you know that you are no longer alone; nor are you at the mercy of your own frailty and limitation...

Our grounding in the soul means that regardless of how badly we think of ourselves, there is a wholeness in us that no one has ever been able to damage. The intention of friendship, love and prayer is to allow your heart to enter this inner sanctuary where it can regain its confidence, renew its energy, and quicken with critical and creative vision. The soul is the home of vision.

This is the secret heart of the whole adventure of blessing. It's not the invention of what's not there, nor the glazed-eyed belief that the innocent energy of goodwill can alter what is destructive.

