

**Service created by Roger Newton
Sunday 25th October 2020**

Opening Address

Welcome to our Chapel this morning, whether you're here in person or online on zoom. As Unitarians, if that is the appropriate way to describe us, we don't have lists of things we must believe. Instead, we think everyone has the right to reach their own conclusions. Religious freedom for each individual is at the heart of Unitarianism. What follows started off life as my personal experience of bereavement, but I soon found that the worst enemy of the bereaved, namely loneliness, is currently exacerbated by the Covid crisis. The limitations imposed on us under Tier 3 lockdown are a direct threat to my well-being as well as that of countless others. As a person who has heart failure and relies heavily on the defibrillator fitted in my chest, I am probably high on the 'at risk' list. In listening to today's service, you will, I hope, realise that to me face to face communication without endangering oneself or other people must still be possible indoors and outdoors given the strict observance of social distancing and the wearing of masks.

Lighting the Chalice

We light this chalice as a symbol of the spark of life which abides within us and around us. May it be as a light in a dark night, a light in a window that welcomes the weary traveller home. May it be as a light in the hand of a trusted friend, that guides us along the path.

1st Song 167 Purple Hymn Book Flying Free by Don Besig

There is a place I call my own
Where I can stand by the sea
And look beyond the things I've known
And dream that I might be free
Like a bird above the trees
Gliding gently on the breeze
I wish that all my life I'd be without a care and
flying free
But life is not a distant sky
Without a cloud without rain
And I can never hope that I can travel on without
pain

Time goes swiftly on its way
All too soon we've lost today
I can not wait for skies of blue
Or dream so long that life is through
So life's a song that I must sing
A gift of love I must share
And when I see the joy it brings
My spirit soar to the air
Like the bird up in the sky
Life has taught me how to fly
And now I know what I can be
And now my heart is flying free

Some thoughts on 'lockdowns' read by Susan Toulson

For many people who live alone, self isolation for any length of time and reliance on telephone calls to friends and the rest of the outside world, falls a long way short of being acceptable. It has been noticeable that there has been an increase in the mention of mental health issues in recent times on the media.

The charity Mind tells us about a recent survey which revealed that the consequences of lockdown have been dramatic, particularly upon the nation's mental health. Furthermore, a greater toll took place on

women's mental health than men's, whilst those whose employment status changed, through furlough or unemployment, were more affected than those who did not experience such a change. Their survey also suggested that poorer mental health during this pandemic was the result of inability to see one's own family, loneliness, not being able to go outside, concerns about the virus itself, and boredom. Without doubt, the worst of these is loneliness. Loneliness is at the top of the agenda for most individuals who have lost a long term partner. After the dust has settled and the funeral ended and all that need to be contacted have been informed, a kind of vacuum is created. The time that the widowed person spends alone every evening seems to last for an eternity. It must surely be possible to be able to visit a friend or a neighbour at their home, keeping of course a safe social distance just to talk for an hour about anything but the pandemic, without transmitting the virus one to the other. It is the meeting and the reading of the other person's body language that is just as important as what is said. This cannot be achieved at the other end of a telephone or in a zoom meeting. Put simply, we are social animals. Without being able to meet and chat to our friends and neighbours face to face, we are effectively not a lot better off than prisoners in their own isolation. Even prisoners have the ability to talk to cellmates.

2nd Song Blue Boat Home ~Peter Mayer https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WhsXl1_rEwI)

Though below me I feel no motion
 Standing on these mountains and plains
 Far away from the rolling ocean
 Still my dry land heart can say
 I've been sailing all my life now
 Never harbour nor port have I known
 The wide universe is the ocean I travel
 And the Earth is my blue boat home

Sun, my sail and moon, my rudder
 As I ply the starry sea
 Leaning over the edge in wonder
 Casting questions into the deep
 Drifting here with my ship's companions
 All we kindred pilgrim souls

Making our way by the lights of the
 heavens

In our beautiful blue boat home

I give thanks to the waves upholding me
 Hail the great winds urging me on
 Greet the infinite sea before me
 Sing the sky my sailor's song
 I was born upon the fathoms
 Never harbour or port have I known
 The wide universe is the ocean I travel
 And the Earth is my blue boat home
 The wide universe is the ocean I travel
 And the Earth is my blue boat home.

An extract from *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson

read by Jane Moore

There was once a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings. The town lay in the midst of a checkerboard of prosperous farms, with fields of grain and hillsides of orchards where, in spring, white clouds of bloom drifted above the green fields. In autumn, oak and maple and birch set up a blaze of colour that flamed and flickered across a backdrop of pines. Then foxes barked in the hills and deer silently crossed the fields, half hidden in the mists of the autumn mornings.

Along the roads, laurel, viburnum, and alder, great ferns and wild flowers delighted the traveller's eye through much of the year. Even in winter the roadsides were places of beauty, where countless birds came to feed on the berries and on the seed heads of the dried weeds rising above the snow. The countryside was, in fact, famous for the abundance and variety of its bird life, and when the flood of migrants was pouring through in spring and autumn, people travelled from great distances to observe them. Others came to fish the streams, which flowed clear and cold out of the hills and contained shady pools where trout lay. So it had been from the days many years ago when the first settlers raised their houses, sank their wells and built their barns.

Then a strange blight crept over the area and everything began to change. Some evil spell had settled on the community: mysterious maladies swept the flocks of chickens; the cattle and sheep sickened and died. Everywhere was a shadow of death. The farmers spoke of much illness among their families. In the town the doctors had become more and more puzzled by new kinds of sickness appearing among their patients. There had been several sudden and unexplained deaths, not only among adults but even among children, who would be stricken suddenly while at play and die within a few hours.

There was a strange stillness. The birds, for example - where had they gone? Many people spoke of them, puzzled and disturbed. The feeding stations in the backyards were deserted. The few birds seen anywhere were moribund; they trembled violently and could not fly. It was a spring without voices. On the mornings that had once throbbed with the dawn chorus of robins, catbirds, doves, jays, wrens, and scores of other bird voices there was now no sound; only silence lay over the fields and woods and marsh.

The book from which this opening extract comes, first went into print in the USA in 1962 and is sinisterly prophetic in its content. We can, all of us do something to reverse this awful creeping paralysis.

An extract from 'The man who planted trees' by Jean Giono

read by Janet Rowson

The shepherd who didn't smoke went and fetched a little bag and emptied a pile of acorns onto the table. Then he began to inspect them closely, separating the good from the bad. I smoked my pipe. I offered to help. He said he had to do it himself. And seeing how carefully he worked I didn't insist. That was all the conversation we had. And when he had collected a large enough heap of good acorns he divided them up into groups of ten. As he did so he discarded those that were too small or had a tiny split; he examined them minutely. Once he had sorted out one hundred perfect acorns, he stopped and we went to bed.

It was peaceful to be in his company, and next morning I asked if I might stay all day and rest. He found this quite natural; or rather he gave me the impression that nothing disturbed him. I didn't absolutely need to rest, but I was intrigued and wanted to know more. He let out his flock out of the fold and led them to pasture. Before leaving home he took the little bag in which he'd put his carefully chosen and counted acorns, and dipped it in a bucket of water.

I noticed that instead of a stick he carried a steel rod as thick as a man's thumb and about a metre and a half long. I followed a path parallel to his, strolling along like someone taking it easy. He took his sheep to a hollo and left them there to graze, guarded by his dog. Then he came up to where I was standing. I was afraid he was going to object to my intrusion, but not at all. He had to come this way anyhow, and he invited me to go with him if I hadn't anything better to do.

When he reached the place he was aiming for, he began making holes in the ground with his rod, putting an acorn in each and then covering it up again. He was planting oak trees. I asked him if the land was his. He said it wasn't. Did he know who the owner was? No, he didn't. He thought it must be common land, or perhaps it belonged to people who weren't interested in it. He wasn't interested in who they were. And so, with great care he planted his hundred acorns.

After the midday meal he started sorting out more acorns to sow. I must have been very pressing with my questions, because he answered them. He'd planted a hundred thousand of them. Out of those, twenty thousand had come up. Of the twenty thousand he expected to lose half, because of rodents or the unpredictable ways of Providence. That still meant ten thousand oaks would grow where before there was nothing.

3rd Song Green Book No. 14 The Beauty of the Earth

performed by: Mike Curb Congregation https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTcJ_SQruhE

For the beauty of the earth,

For the splendour of the skies,
For the love which from our birth
Over and around us lies.
*For all these with joy we raise
This our song of grateful praise.*

For the wonder of each hour
Of the day and of the night,
Hill and vale, and tree and flower,
Sun and moon and stars of light,

For the joy of ear and eye,
For the heart and mind's delight,
For the mystic harmony
Linking sense to sound and sight,

For the joy of human care,
Brother, sister, parent child,
For the fellowship we share,
For all gentle thoughts and mild,

Reflection and meditation

Something to think about. A quotation from E.B.White (1899-1985) an author of several highly popular books for children.

"I am pessimistic about the human race because it is too ingenious for its own good. Our approach to nature is to beat it into submission. We would stand a better chance of survival if we accommodated ourselves to this planet and viewed it appreciatively instead of sceptically and dictatorially."

Lord's Prayer

Music Intermezzo from Cavalleria Rusticana by Pietro Mascagni.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8xxjkNP8R1U>

Talk by *Roger Newton*

Bereavement is an awful experience. One way or another it happens to all of us some time in our lives. The most frequent thought in the time leading up to the event and the mourning period after the funeral is why did it have to happen to me? We were making so many plans about our retirement time together. Why didn't I die first?

There is no answer to any of these questions, at least none that I am smart enough to be able to discover. I am here, the time is now and there is not a lot of point in feeling sorry for myself. Only depression leads in that direction, and for better or worse I have always tried to take an optimistic view on life.

How do I do that alone? Yes, I have a family, two sons each with a wife and two children and their own lives and careers and health to think about and yes they are helpful to me, do things for me which I am grateful for, but they cannot be with me night and day. Loneliness is not pleasant. The human being is a social animal. We relate to other people in ways that even now each one of us doesn't fully understand. We try to impress, or to appear intelligent, or to have answers to all the world's problems, or put simply we want to relate to strangers in the hope that the seeds of friendship can be sown and developed into more meaningful relationships. Our aloneness happens every day whether it be morning, noon or night and always at a time when what we really need is an opportunity to discuss things that trouble us with someone who is prepared to listen.

I have attended a bereavement counselling session which lasted six weeks and started some five or six months after my wife's death, and yes, there were many tears shed and awful events remembered for the first week, but as the course developed, the tendency was to steer away from the past and begin to ask the question, 'What now?' This was something I had already spent a lot of time thinking about. Upon reflection now some two years after the end of the counselling, I can say that above everything else, the most important lesson I learned was that listening to other people's points of view and 'always looking on the bright side of life' were at the top. Being in the presence of others and listening to their cares and worries was, believe it or not, therapeutic. I learned that there are many different ways of looking at seemingly insurmountable problems, loneliness being high on any individual's list of dislikes.

Feeling somewhat revitalised after this 'social experiment', I began to think about ways in which I could become involved with others. Thoughts like, joining a choir, helping other recently bereaved people, writing short stories, going to U3A lectures about art, history, philosophy all raced through my brain one after another. In fact any opportunity to meet other people was thought about and analysed.

Out of all the light bulb ideas that passed through my mind, the most consistent ones were that I liked to be creative, to use my knowledge to some good end, and to solicit other people's view on the world at any suitable moment.

Then along came Covid. With it came daily televised bulletins about numbers of deaths, dramatic figures about overloaded and overworked hospitals and their staff, a whole new lexicon of words like pandemic, bubbles, social distancing, shielding, stay safe, self isolation, etc. Enough, enough, I say. A kind of mass acute paranoia seems to have set in. We are now in the era of short sharp total lockdowns.

I am a one person bubble, because if I attach to one or other of my children's families, the rules say that I can visit one household but not the other, however I can meet whoever I want, as long as the group is no more than six, and we are all outside. With winter approaching, such external meetings will be limited.

Here at the chapel we have managed to start Sunday meetings again albeit on a limited basis. There are still restrictions about what we can and can't do. The media (bless their hearts) tell us that one negative result of our attempts to control the spread of this confounded virus has been an increase in the incidence of serious mental health problems. It is quite clear to me that the very last imposition any of us need is severe limitations on our ability to meet and discuss affairs with other people, and yet here we are being forced to do precisely that. Telephone calls, Zoom discussions and religious services are a poor second best to the real thing, chiefly because of the lack of direct personal contact. I find that watching carefully how the person to whom I'm talking reacts to things I've said or studying their demeanour and the way they move their heads, hands or feet, all help me to gain a better opinion of whether or not they are comfortable in my presence. This is something that I believe cannot be done remotely.

Perhaps the only positive aspects emerging from this horrible pandemic (Sorry, I tried very hard to avoid using the word) are that I have been re-introduced to the beauty of nature in this relatively unspoiled part of England and, during the 'lockdown' I have actually saved a lot of money. I have tried to follow Boris's insistence that we get out more for healthy exercise and continue to go walking every two or three days. Barn owls, green finches, green woodpeckers, dippers and grey wagtails have made themselves visible to me during the past eight months and the whole randomness of nature when it is allowed its own freedom of expression continues to take my breath away. I spend quite a bit of time walking along the banks of the Derbyshire Derwent and often see remnants of human interference of the flow of this majestic river, with weirs and dams and other past remnants of an industrial age that has long ago moved away. The woods and marshes grow completely freely now and the population of this wetland at the confluence of the Stoke Brook with the river Derwent must house a myriad of insects and animals. The old cotton mills have been converted into apartments and peace reigns in conjunction with Mother Nature. My two companions give me the latest news on their employment or the lack of it due to the fact that they are both working in the beauty business and find their activities severely restricted and their ability to earn a living badly compromised.

What is the reality then? Are we able to say that after a set number of days of isolation from the rest of humanity, the virus will have been beaten, provided that everyone obeys the self isolation programme to the letter? We already know that such an outcome is simply not possible. There is absolutely no point in commenting about the mistakes that have already been made. Our only hope is to look to the future and take much more seriously the parlous state of our economy. We have to face the fact that this country along with all the others in this world have to learn to live with virulent viruses. These hazards are not new, and, being viruses, they continue to make the lives of researchers and scientists a real challenge in their

efforts to find a suitable vaccine. The truth is that this is a never-ending search. We need look no further than the influenza virus, which over the many years that have elapsed since the virus was identified, has mutated and left behind it a trail of misery. We know much more about it now, but not how to eradicate it.

Unless we focus on finding ways of boosting the economy rather than ruining it and unless we finally face the fact that we will never reach an agreement with the EU over Brexit and, even more important than any of these, we focus our attention on saving this planet on which we all depend for the very future of mankind, then it is an absolute certainty that everyone will lose.

For whatever purpose I was destined to serve, I am certain that it was never intended to be the life of a hermit. I thrive on communicating with other people. We all benefit from such interaction.

4th Song Green Book No.226 Song of Peace

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 as 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, thou God of all the nations,
 A song of peace for their land and for mine