

ORDER OF SERVICE

WELCOME

CHALICE

HYMN **RED** **9** ***O life that makest all things new***

PRAYER

READING

HYMN **GREEN** **20** ***My God, I thank thee, who has made***

READING

MEDITATION

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HYMN **GREEN** **311** ***With joy we claim the growing light***

ORDER OF SERVICE

WELCOME - welcome to you all this morning. Before we begin I want to say thank you , thank us, for our generosity when I asked for a retiring collection to add to the funds for rescue and rebuilding Haiti after the terrible earthquake and its many aftershocks. I gave a bag of money to our Chapel Treasurer yesterday containing £176, and he said he was going to add something to that. I have done a little research and it seems to me that the best place to send the money is.....and the treasurer is sending a cheque from the Chapel.

CHALICE

The Chalice light is a symbol of freedoms won
Across the world it is kindled in faith by those who seek truths
It is kindled in trust by those who dare to reach out beyond the known
To touch the mystery and be uplifted.
It is kindled in hope by those who walk alone in darkness
To lead them home.
It is kindled in joy by those who gather together to share the journey
Hand in hand to seek out meaning, and be glad.
We light this chalice today as a symbol of freedoms won
In trust, in hope, in joy.

HYMN RED 9 O life that makest all things new

PRAYER – save for the opening line, this prayer is found in “Songs for Living”

– I have adapted it slightly.

In openness may we bring our selves to prayer:

This is my chapel. It is composed of people like me.

We make it what it is.

I want it to be a chapel that is a lamp to the path of pilgrims,

Leading them to goodness, truth and beauty.

It will be if I am.

It will make generous gifts to many causes,

If I am a generous giver.

It will bring other people into its worship and fellowship,

If I bring them.

It will be friendly if I am.

It will do great work if I work.

It will be a chapel of loyalty and love, of fearlessness and faith;

A church with a noble spirit - if I, who make it what it is, am filled with

these.

Therefore, I shall dedicate myself to the task of being all of these things I

want my chapel to be.

AMEN

READING: The Soul’s Religion, by Thomas Moore, from page 202 & 203
The passage I have taken this reading from was rather too long and so I have taken out references to works by several romantic poems, but I feel I should mention that there are many who speak in the language of those I am about to mention.

“As Emerson says, we have only to give attention to some aspect of nature to make a day holy.

Thoreau’s contribution to the idea was to focus on the specific natural environment in which we live and move. Know your seasons, your animals, your trees, and you know not only a great deal about yourself but also the particular path to transcendence available in the place where you live. And we all live in particular places. There can be no abstract spirituality. The ultimate paradox taught by many religions is that the absolutely sublime is to be found in the absolutely ordinary. The universality so loved by the spirit can be discovered only in each locality.....

....No one appreciated the deep values of nature more than Thoreau. Here, from *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, is one sample among hundreds of his formulation of this mystery:

The winter is lurking within my moods,

And the rustling of the withered leaf

Is the constant music of my grief. (page 307 – 1985 edition)

Thoreau hear echoes ancient ideas connecting the human being to the natural environment. Boethius, author of the *Consolation of Philosophy*, said that the seasons of the year are the music of the soul, and those seasons mark the rhythm of a human life as much as the timing of the sun and stars. Taking the whole of life into us is a step on the mystical way; it helps give to the ego the background and context it requires so as not to be the dominant thing in a personality or a life.”

HYMN GREEN 20 My God, I thank thee, who has made

READING “Expect Life”, by Elizabeth Tarbox is really a meditation, it comes from “Stirrings 1996” (a publication put together by the ministerial students at UCM – and I was the editor for this particular piece) Expect Life was first written in 1994, was later edited and published in Elizabeth’s second and last book of meditations “Evening Tide” shortly before her untimely death.

After reading Expect Life I will leave a short time of silence before sharing with you a meditation I wrote for that same "Stirrings" publication – I called it "Ten minutes to wait" and this is the first time I have ever used it myself, though I know others have.

But first, Expect Life:

"Expect Life:

Do not live too far in the past or the future; live now.

Expect next moment a miracle: ten kinds of birds at the feeder, and the tracks of a fox in the snow.

Know always that joy and sorrow are woven together, one cannot be without the other. If you love, know that your love will bring you tears sometime; if you grieve, know it is because you were willing to love sometimes.

Pick up a magnifying glass and scrutinise that crocus, and see the pollen at the centre of the daffodil, life's dust, death defying life. Be astonished at the flower, arrested by its beauty.

Run naked as you dare in the garden early in the morning and hope the wild geese fly by.

Laugh loudly and get silly with your grandchildren, or your grandparents, and refuse to leave the dead behind but bring their memory to all your chores and games and corners of quiet warm tears.

Do not be afraid to die. But expect life."

MEDITATION: "Ten minutes to wait" by Celia (Keating) Cartwright
from "Stirrings 1996"

"Early for an appointment, alone in an unfamiliar room, quietly and patiently I must wait. Ten minutes to be anxious, ten long empty minutes to wait.

An old clock ticks, the mellow sound marking the seconds. Sunshine pours in through a large sash window beyond which is a garden; I gaze into its emptiness....and then....

Across the leaf strewn grass a magpie struts and skips, his jet waistcoat sparkles like shot silk in the sunlight, his comic antics make me smile.....

Beneath the window, a playful breeze catches a single nut-brown fallen leaf, makes it dance, whirling and twirling.....then bored with the game the breeze moves on....

A flash of blue and yellow catches my eye and a blue-tit lands at an impossible angle on the oak tree, dances round the bark looking for insects; he disappears from sight behind the trunk, I watch hopefully, but he does not return.....

Blackbird, female, brown tail feathers raised to balance on the wire-topped fence, darting cautious glances this way and that. Her beak parts and her throat quivers with glorious song; I cannot hear it through the glass, but in my head its echoes ring....

A robin now alights, beneath the oak, watching, listening, basking in the sharp winter sun, his bright eyes searching. Startled by I know not what he flies away out of sight.....

Blackbird, male, glistening like wet coal digs untidily in the fallen leaves, his brilliant yellow beak seizes a worm.....

A squirrel, bright eyed and brash tip-toes daintily over the wet grass.(Oh, I remember another, long ago, who used to come to the kitchen for food....)

Sitting upright he notices me behind the glass, silently we communicate.....

Out of sight the magpie calls, a rude and raucous sound. His cry is answered.

Two magpies sweep by the window, is it "two for joy"?.....

The garden is suddenly empty.

Inside the room the old clock begins to chime. Ten minutes have gone.

There is no longer any time to 'wait'.

My heart offers a silent prayer of thanks for the precious gift of time. Ten minutes, in which my soul has been refreshed.

Time, I realise, is a gift of God, It is ours to treasure and use wisely."

ADDRESS

Sing in celebration, time to remember.... It's a great hymn, it reminds us that we have our feet firmly planted, that this faith we value is no flash in the pan, no whimsical cult that will blaze brightly for a moment and fade, but one in which we can feel pride, comfort, strength, and wonder. Sing in celebration, time to remember... but do you ever feel, like me, that it might need another verse or two, to recognise that we should not simply celebrate the past, but perhaps we might consider it good to "Sing in celebration, time to embrace this moment," or "Sing in celebration time to plan the future....."

Each have a bearing on both the spiritual and physical depth and breadth of our lives.

"Sing in celebration, time to embrace this moment," Embrace now, be grateful, happy, celebratory about right now, with what we have at this moment. "Be Here Now" the Buddha teaches, be here in this moment, recognise it, fully, concentrate on the moment you are experiencing now. Be mindful of all that is now, glean every drop of wonder from each moment; dwell not on the past or the future but on this moment, and live it. Expect Life, says Elizabeth Tarbox, "Do not live too far in the past or the future; live now.....Do not be afraid to die today. But expect life." And, I want to add, "celebrate what comes", if we look there is always something to delight your eye, your heart, your mind. I saw four swans together on the river last week; a watercolour sky on Friday draped with gossamer fabric dipped into beautiful if faint colours of turquoise and salmon, golden and azure stopped me in my tracks; love between two people has brought another booking for a wedding to this chapel; yesterday I found a little note in my kitchen when I got up at 7:00am, left by my daughter before she went to work at 6:00am to say "hello, love you, see you tonight". Blessing are all around us, in each

moment, it is up to us to catch them before they fly away. "Emerson says that we have only to give attention to some aspect of nature to make a day holy." (*Thomas Moore, The Soul's religion – pg202*)

Oh I know, that's easy to say, and sometimes it's difficult to be open to the small blessings that flood our lives each day, too difficult to feel the holiness of our lives, sometimes we are hurt, angry, in pain, sad, lost, lonely, too busy, frustrated, worried, anxious, cold, or suffering from any number of negative conditions which keep us from looking up from our own darkness to see the wonders of nature, to see the light; especially when the view is also winter dark. Thorough writes:

*The winter is lurking within my moods,
And the rustling of the withered leaf,
Is the constant music of my grief.*

The Christianity which ultimately wiped out all but the traces of our pagan heritage strove to wipe any sense of our human's alignment with the rest of nature and yet it failed, for we are bound to the nature of which we are a part. We understand our own existence in common with all nature, the romantic poets have utilised the natural world to explore the human experience, and though we descent into darkness we know that eventually spring will come, the leaves grow yet again upon the boughs and through the ice-hard earth fragile blooms emerge, the sun's warmth will gain strength, and like nature we too will emerge from our cold darkness and "expect life" again, will look to nature to make holy our days, and to celebrate.

Looking again at this hymn, I also want a verse that starts with , "Sing in celebration, time to plan the future....." As I often remark, it is often so much easier to look over our shoulders and smile at what is gone rather than look ahead with as much delight. The future is uncertain; there is so much that is unknown and as yet untried, amd after all we might die today,

and what then of the future? Certainly there is some truth in that, and I am not being morbid when I say that one day that will be true and that "today" will be our last, and yet surely while we live we should live, it is not how long we live but how much we live during that time that matters, and the future we plan will be enjoyed by more than simply our selves. We talk of life, physical and spiritual, as a journey; and journeys need excitement sometimes to keep the journey worth the doing, the excitement of expectation. Who here is not looking forward to the spring, to the beauty of spring flowers. Who is not looking forward to seeing our beautiful chapel garden in all its glory, to smell the heady scent of old roses as we walk through the archway towards the chapel in summer? Sometimes it is the thought of summer that get us through the winter!

I have spend a goodly time this week organising for things that will not happen until May this year – or rather they will not be officially recognised as completed until May 1st. On Monday last the Growth and Renewal group met, ten of us there were, and we made "final plans". On May 1st and 2nd we would celebrate the beginning of a new chapter in this chapel's history. Katy showed us the preliminary sketches of her design for the archway mural just inside the gateway to the chapel, and I have to tell you she has somehow managed to incorporate all our ideas. Sue reported that the new signage has been ordered and will arrive shortly. Jo reported that the painter is all geared up to repaint the archway. All that being done, we began to plan the grand opening; an article in the Westmorland Gazette, floral displays in the chapel, informative displays about Unitarianism (to be borrowed from Essex Hall), an historical "timeline" , also in the hall, to show how this chapel came to be here, and refreshments, invited guests, President of the General Assembly, Kendal's mayor, perhaps even our MP, representatives of local churches and interfaith groups..... and then a special party in the evening, a hog roast, a Beltane fire, and music to entertain us. Not everything is organised yet, and things may have to change, but the plans are in place and I hope you will all join in the looking forward, add your ideas to the mix, offer your

services.....but if you do nothing else, I hope you will add your good will to this new chapter in the life of this chapel and its congregation.

Long ago, during a period of convalescence, I learned how to do counted cross stitch; and I designed a kind of sampler, on which I embroidered the words "life is for living". There is no real divide between our spiritual and physical lives, even if sometimes it feels as if there is, in truth they flow in tandem, each fed and informed by the other, and each is enriched by living fully, using past wisdom, present wonder and future hopes to make it good and rich. Let us expect life and let us live that life to the full, mindfully, purposefully, and in glorious celebration.

AMEN

HYMN RED 442 Backward looking o'er the past

OFFERTORY

NOTICES

BENEDICTION

From our past we receive wisdom,
In our present we find wonder
To our future may we give of both.

AMEN

**HYMN GREEN 311 With joy we claim the growing
light**