



THE YORK UNITARIAN

St. Saviourgate Unitarian Chapel, York, YO1 8NQ

January 2021

FROM THE MINISTER

Finally, we have passed the darkest point of the year. The solstice marked the beginning of the return of light. In our beautiful Christmas service, Andrew Hill reminded us that the story of the nativity is itself a tale of light coming out of darkness. The deepest message of the season remains the same regardless of which faith tradition's celebration of light most calls to you. In the words of the late, great, Rabbi Lord Sacks:

“Against the fundamentalisms of hate, we must create a counter-fundamentalism of love... ‘A little light,’ said the Jewish mystics, ‘drives away much darkness.’ And when light is joined to light, mine to yours and yours to others, the dance of flames, each so small, yet together so intricately beautiful, begins to show that hope is not an illusion. Evil, injustice, oppression, cruelty do not have the final word.”

The light of our Unitarian chalice may not be a huge flame (we are, numerically speaking, a relatively small movement). Still, when combined with the lights of our neighbours of all faiths and none, our small light, like Portia's candle, shines like

“a good deed in a naughty world.”

Though perhaps the adaptation of Shakespeare's words spoken by Gene Wilder at the climax of

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory is even more appropriate:

“So shines a good deed in a weary world.”

After long months of battling an invisible enemy, the world is indeed weary. Even those who have not been directly affected by loss of life or livelihood are weary: weary of restrictions on our movements and activities, and of separation from loved ones. Yet we can still hope.



We can hope that the beginning of vaccinations marks the turning of a tide when it comes to the pandemic. We can hope that the gains we have made during this slow time, of reduced pollution and better use of technology, will not be lost, and the lessons we have learned about global interconnectedness will not be forgotten. Nevertheless, in all probability, we have a long way to go before our world reaches anything approaching normality as we previously knew it. In

the meantime, we continue to make the most of what is still possible: meeting online, making phone calls, writing emails and letters, supporting the causes we care about as best we can, engaging in whatever creative pastimes inspire us – poetry, music, crafts – and, of course, joining in worship. Thank you for inviting me to share this journey with you.

(Rev.) *Stephanie Bisby*

A MONTH OF SUNDAYS

at 11.00a.m.

Sunday 3 January
The Revd. Stephanie Bisby
The Innocent Year
Music by Nick Morrice

Sunday 10 January
Claire Wilton
Thin places
Music by Helen Drewery

Sunday 17 January
The Revd. Stephanie Bisby
Broken Strings
Music by David Hammond

Sunday 24 January
David Zucker
Holocaust Memorial Day
Music by Laura Jones

Sunday 31 January
The Revd. Stephanie Bisby
Seeing Differently
Music by Myrna Michell

SERENDIPITY OFFERINGS

Sunday 27 December 2020

Below are listed the offerings made at our annual post-Christmas Serendipity service.

Serendipity: the faculty of making lucky discoveries - a word coined in 1754 by Horace Walpole. He took it from *The Three persons of Serendip*, a fairy tale whose leading characters 'were always making discoveries by accidents and sagacity of things they were not it quest of'. *Serendip* is an old name for Sri Lanka.

- Alan Pennington read from Scott's *Antarctic Diary*;
- Elizabeth Faiers spoke about a calendar she had received from her daughter Kathy and her grandchildren;
- John Issett spoke appreciatively about Unitarian radicalism;
- Margaret Issett told of teachers, parents and composite classes;
- Janet Eldred shared a piece by her friend and URC minister Jan Berry;
- Richard Brown read *New Year's Morning* piece by the American poet and social rights activist Helen Hunt Jackson;
- Stephanie Bisby read U.A.Fanthorpe's poem *BC/AD*;
- Claire Lee read Robert Frost's poem *Moon compasses*;
- Anneliese Emmans Dean read a poem *I won't arise now and go to Innisfree, I'll sanitise the door handle and make a cup of tea*;
- Anne Mills read *The gate of the year* by Mary Louise Haskins;
- Jennie Jacobs read from *The midnight clear* by Simon Cross;
- Barbara Barnes read a piece about *Human Kind - A helpful History*;
- Adrian Cooper read a *Taoist parable*;
- David Zucker read Wendy Cope's poem *The Orange*;
- Dee Boyle read her own poem *Review*;
- Jimmy Timiney read a passage from a novel by Yorkshire author Gervaise Phinn;
- Jen Atkinson showed and spoke about a green stone pendant from New Zealand
- Marta Hardy read a passage about the joys of a Christmas food court
- Sue Eliot read *Begin* a poem by Brendan Kennelly about bridges linking past and future

MINISTERIAL SUPPORT TEAM

The new team appointed to support the Minister and as a point of contact for the congregation is comprised of Richard Brown, Meike Dux-Harrap, Jenny Jacobs and Claire Wilton.

ABOUT PEOPLE

Our greetings to *Sue* and *Ralph Catts* in Melbourne who have had medical problems.

We were please to welcome Unitarian GA President *Anne Mills* who was with us for our post Christmas 'Serendipity' service.

CHAPEL COMMITTEE

The Chapel Committee will be meeting on Zoom after the service on Sunday 17 January

SEND A CHILD TO HUCKLOW FUND

The Chapel traditionally supports this Unitarian charity, which provides holiday for children at the Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow (more information is on page 7 of the December *York Unitarian*). If you haven't already made a donation, then donations may be made directly to SACH or via their website - www.sendchildtohucklow.org.uk

ANGLICAN YOUTH NETWORK NEPAL

£450 has been raised by York Unitarians for the Anglican Youth Network Nepal organisation over the last few days, to help victims of the lockdown situation there. Their latest newsletter opens with these words:

Greetings from Himalayans!

Tons of Praise to God Almighty and huge gratitude to all those who opened their hearts and hand to support underprivileged daily wageworker in the Lockdown situation caused by Covid-19 Pandemic. The whole initiation was very fruitful and blessing.

Thank you very much.

LETTER FROM NEPAL

Respected Uncle (Nick Morrice)

Namaste and jayamashi

Hope you and aunt are doing well.

Today I am writing this mail to say how the collected fund from respected Chapel members are going to spent.

First off all we the Anglican youth team wants to thank all respected Chapel members for opening your kind heart to support the needy and helpless people due to pandemic COVID-19. As you have open your heart to help, God will also open his heart towards you. This is how we believers share our Gods love.

Nepal is very poor country, People here, are poor, more over due to this COVID-19 people are in critical condition. They are suffering, really hard to get daily food too. I am sure your support will really help them.

We the Anglican youth team and our dear friends from different countries are trying best to give small relief aid.

Now I will write how the Chapels member support will be spent.

We give them small package, which contains Rice 30kg, lentils 2kg, oil 1 litres, salt 1 kg and 2 piece of soap. one package cost around Nepalese rupees 3000. And with the £570, we can provide support to about 24 families In Nepal.

Here In Nepal, lots of people are in need of daily food and warm clothes. but we will sort out the most needy people and provide support.

Later on when we distribute the package, I will take some photos of package and people receiving the relief aid. I will send to you.

For now I will stop here. Thank very much .

With love and respect

Your Godson

Niran

HANNAH LINDSEY

AND

SMALL POX VACCINATION

a story told on Sunday 20 December 2020

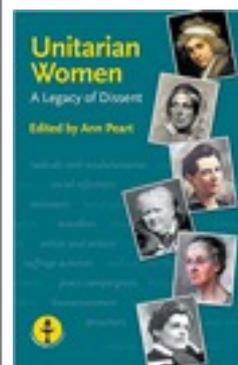
Inside our Chapel in St. Saviourgate - high on the wall between piano and pulpit - there is a memorial plaque to someone called Catharine.

Now, Catharine had a friend called Hannah and both girls were daughters of Church of England clergymen in north Yorkshire. Also both girls would marry clergymen: Catharine married Newcome Cappe a past minister of our chapel for almost 50 years; while Hannah married Theophilus Lindsey, the vicar of Catterick who left to become a Unitarian minister in central London (now Essex Church in Kensington).

Well, it's about Hannah that this story is really about because in 1796, while she and Theophilus were still living at Catterick, there was an outbreak of small pox and many local people were dying. So Hannah - whose brother was a doctor and whose uncle, an apothecary acquired a supply of the anti-small pox vaccine which had recently been developed by Edward Jenner and set about vaccinating all the local Catterick children.

So, maybe, in our present gratitude for the current development of anti-Covid 19 vaccines and for their anticipated arrival in these parts; and for the hope that mass vaccination will eventually reach and protect the whole world population; maybe - this Christmas - we could also spare a moment of thankfulness for the pioneering vaccination work of Edward Jenner late in the eighteenth century and in particular for the vaccination initiative in north Yorkshire of Catharine Cappe's friend and confidante Hannah Lindsey.

[for more on the friendship between Catharine and Hannah see the book 'Unitarian Women' by Ann Peart]



Unitarian Women: A Legacy of Dissent

Edited by Ann Peart, with contributions by Rory Castle Jones, Andrew Hill, Derek McAuley, and Alan Ruston.

Lindsey Press, 2019, ISBN 978-0853190929, softback, £10

HOPE

a sermon by Marta Hardy
on Sunday 29 November 2020

Back a lifetime ago when I was a student, one of the most important things I learned, in a speech class, was “Define your terms!” No doubt a lot of hot air would have been avoided had I always remembered that lesson. Indeed, I am sure that many an argument and worse could be avoided if we all made sure we defined our terms.

So to the word “Hope”. As I go on with this address please keep in mind that I am not talking about hope with a small H: “I hope you will feel better soon.” “I hope it doesn’t rain.” “I hope to see you on Tuesday.” This usage is a short-hand, a pleasantry, it trips off the tongue daily, a useful expression of good will or fleeting desire.

The hope I am talking about is defined in my American *Funk and Wagnall’s Dictionary* as “To desire with expectation of obtaining”. In the English *Chambers Dictionary* as: “a desire for something good, with some, or



a certain, expectation of obtaining it.” All of my life I have regularly been advised and encouraged to engage in this activity, very often from the pulpit, and being of a generally optimistic (“tendency to look on the bright side of things”) nature, I have spent what I now consider far too much time indulging in it.

Heaven knows there are enough familiar phrases warning against hope, in spite of its generally high reputation: vain hope, false hope, dashed hope, selfish hope, foolish hope, empty hope, irrational hope... Sound familiar? Hope has certainly not been universally highly regarded, and the story of Pandora had more than one interpretation from the beginning. *Pandora’s Box* was an important part of the Greek Creation Mythology—how did evil come into the world? Whether that thing called “Hope” that was left trapped in the box was actually a good thing for humankind or an evil one has been a matter of debate amongst scholars throughout the centuries—was Hope meant to feed comfort to us, or was it the last evil to escape from the box?

In the Creation myth I was brought up with I was taught that God’s first promise of a Saviour was expressed by Eve when, upon the birth of Cain, she exclaimed, “I have got me a man from the Lord!” Well, we all know what happened with Cain.

WHERE DID HOPE COME FROM?

Where on earth did the notion of hope come from anyhow? Myths of all sorts are full of fascinating things to think about, contain immense fundamental truths, and are great fun, but I imagine that hope, for good or ill, comes with our natural development.

Take a baby, any baby. A little bundle of urgent, overwhelming desire—food. From time to time the desire is fulfilled and experience begins to demonstrate that it is more quickly fulfilled when that baby produces loud sounds. Then maybe one day, with full stomach and dry bottom that baby sees something wonderful—say a bright yellow toy duck—and a new desire is born. A loud sound is called for—is that hope, or might that be the genesis of the scientific method?

Well, something to think about.

Now why am I so suspicious of hope? In the first place, I regard hope as passive. In Spanish the word *esperar* means both ‘to hope’ and ‘to wait’. I suggest a rather similar English word as a better alternative, ‘aspire’, which my dictionary defines as ‘to aim at, or strive for, high things’.

THE OPPOSITES - HOPELESSNESS

In thinking about hope, let us consider the opposites. Is the opposite of the so highly regarded hope just plain hopelessness, or fear (‘The hopes and fears of all the years’ as the carol has it), or despair?

What about hopelessness? In our September newsletter Andrew gave us a list of links to blogs by several British Unitarian ministers, and my eye was caught by the one by Rev. Andrew Brown of Cambridge. In his article he gave the link to a keynote speech given by Dr. Miguel de la Torres to the 2020 National Gathering of the U.S. Presbyterians. Dr. de la Torres has written a

book called *Embracing Hopelessness*. He argues that hope becomes a way of controlling people. He maintains that people are most dangerous to those in power when they have no hope, and asks if people fight for social justice issues, if they think they are going to win or because it defines their humanity regardless of consequences. He is a Latino, calling for radical, but ethical, action to bring change to power, and he believes that as long as we hold on to hope we will burn out quickly.

What of fear and despair? It can take a lot of mental energy, a lot of emotional wear and tear, to pit hope against either of these two opponents, and unfulfilled hope carries a high price. Better, when necessary, consider a future desired outcome, decide if we can influence it. If we think we can, then aspire to work upon it positively and plan how to go about it. After that, or if we conclude that there is no way we can affect things, we should return to where we dwell—the present. Dr. Bill Merrington is a therapist and chartered psychologist who sometimes writes a column in our local newspaper. In August he was discussing something called General Anxiety Disorder, which has been increasing worldwide, for all the obvious reasons. He referred to a book, *Active Hope*, by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnson, as giving pointers to a way of combating feelings of anxiety and helplessness. Their plan for active hope requires three simple steps: 1. Acknowledge reality and recognise the problems. 2. Think through how we would like things to change, and 3. Take small steps empowering ourselves to do what we can.

THE OPPOSITES - DISTRACTION

The second reason I recoil from hope is that it is so often a distraction. "Hope" as a concept is often linked with "dreams". Dreams are good and necessary as inspiration. Of course we must have dreams, goals, plans - aspirations, as I have said - but to repeat, the present is where we live. Literary intellectuals tend to despise, and 'the Nation' to adore, Kipling's poem *If*. While acknowledging that the poem covers all of the hard virtues and ignores the soft, and that the gendered language is now beyond the pale, I'm with 'the Nation' on this one: 'If you can dream and not make dreams your master, If you can think and not make thoughts your aim...' seems good advice to me. Are we really to be advised that dreams and hopes are the best refuge from fear and despair?

There is no way of living in the future, and I think we are very much mistaken to waste time concentrating our thoughts there. If one gives a lot of time to hope it seems probable that a lot of time will be taken up by fear and despair as well. Fear can be as counter-productive as hope: 'Fear is the mind killer' (Dune), 'We have nothing to fear but fear itself.' (F.D. Roosevelt)

THE OPPOSITES - DESPAIR

What of despair? I am taking despair in the Christian theological sense of being without hope of salvation, but with a non-Christian interpretation of the concept of salvation. A psychological description of that might be an emotional lack of purpose or meaning. David Whyte is a naturalist and poet born in the north of England, now living in the Pacific Northwest of America. One of our congregation, do let me know who, gave me a copy of an essay by him from a book called *Consolations*. I have excerpted a few sentences from that essay, as follows:

"Despair is a last protection. (It) is a necessary and seasonal state of repair. We give up hope when certain particular wishes are no longer able to come true, and despair is the time in which we both endure and heal. Despair turns to depression and abstraction when we try to make it stay beyond its appointed season and start to shape our identity around its frozen disappointments. (It) is kept alive by freezing our sense of time and the rhythms of time; when we no longer feel imprisoned by time, and when the season is allowed to turn, despair cannot survive. Despair needs a certain tending, a reinforcing, and isolation, but the body left to itself will breathe, the ears will hear the first birdsong of morning or catch the leaves being touched by the wind in the trees, and the wind will blow away even the greyest cloud; will move even the most immovable season; the heart will continue to beat and the world, we realise, will never stop or go away. The antidote to despair is not to be found in the brave attempt to cheer ourselves up with happy abstracts, but in paying a profound and courageous attention to the body and the breath, independent of our imprisoning thoughts and stories. It is a season, a wave form passing through the body, not a prison surrounding us. A season left to itself will always move, however slowly, under its own patience, power, and volition."

So that is an argument for accepting, even embracing, despair. Being without hope by no

means is necessarily to be in despair, but might it be that sometimes despair is actually better than hope?

I suppose, with grief, that many suffering people live in a world where it might be the case that hope is the only refuge. This may be true at times for some of us. Generally our reality, however painful our physical or emotional circumstances, has other things to offer than simply hope. I think cultivating an optimistic outlook is a good alternative to hope. It may be that hope can act as a spur. As we have seen on the TV, when confronted by a huge building collapsed into rubble, many people will start digging frantically for survivors without considering what likelihood there is that there could be any. And sometimes there are survivors. I think I would describe that as optimism, not hope. And I would be loath to champion pessimism over optimism when considering whether to take action.

Maybe the worst thing about hope is that it distracts from the wealth of all that surrounds us in the here-and-now. There will be times when we fall into despair, but is hope the best thing to pull us out? I don't think so. I think it will be either taking action because it is the right thing to do, as championed by Dr. de la Torres, or, to hark back to David Whyte's remarks, by the passing of time and the appearance of comforts of the present - absorption in one's own creativity, a friend, a garden, some music, a pet ... far better than another hope of something happening in the future with its accompanying fear (and good possibility) that it won't.

LIGHT DESPITE ALL THE DARKNESS

My conclusion is that hope may be a worthwhile state only if it is for a thing we might have in our power to bring about or at least affect and if we have the will to exercise that power. The only time we know we have is the present. Let us take our place in the moment, it contains so much.

I visited Don Walls, whom many of you will remember, in the hospice a few days before he died. He told me that he had been having an amazing time. Someone had brought some flowers and he said he had been contemplating a wonderful leaf for hours.

I would like to close with a definition of hope by Desmond Tutu: 'Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all the darkness.'

FROM UNITARIAN GENERAL ASSEMBLY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Executive Committee met via videoconference in November and share these key messages:

- Unitarians have been supporting the 'Reset the Debt' campaign led by churches, faith-based groups and secular organisations, for cancellation of debts built up during the covid pandemic for the poorest communities, which our General Assembly is a signatory to. Unitarian individuals and organisations like the Unitarian Women's Group have been writing to their MPs urging backing for this campaign.
- Jo O'Sullivan from our Brighton congregation has become the Unitarian representative to RADAR, the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland body which monitors (and responds to) the work of parliaments and assemblies in the UK. She now attends the monthly meetings of this body on our behalf.
- The EC are working with Simon Bland to look into how to support the management of buildings in the closure of congregations, to ensure that any assets can best support the future flourishing of the movement.
- Following the November meeting of the Unitarian Investment Panel, there has been discussion of fossil fuel divestment, including positive and negative screening of funds, and including the concept of sustainability. This will be further discussed by the EC's Finance Group.
- Staff at the Nightingale Centre remain on furlough, and this plus grants and donations have helped to keep the cashflow situation viable, while the centre awaits reopening.
- There was a discussion of GA governance to reflect on EC and staff roles and responsibilities, and how decisions are made to ensure smooth and effective working. This exploration will be continued in 2021.

Unitarian principles adapted for children:

1. Each person is important;
2. Be kind in all you do;
3. We're free to learn together;
4. And search for what is true;
5. All people need a voice;
6. Build a fair and peaceful world;
7. We care for Earth's lifeboat;

INTERFAITH WEEK REVIEW AND THANKS

Our Interfaith Week 2020 will be certainly one that we will all remember because of the strange situation and uncharted waters we found ourselves in. We had to be creative with thinking of different ways to put on our events virtually instead of actually and I have to report that it worked amazingly well. We had over 330 people 'attending' our events, which is far more than we usually get under normal circumstances. We think that the actual number may even be closer to 350 but it was not possible to count all the faces on some of the screens. It was an amazing turn out given the current situation though.

Our review of the week and comments received from people attending events leads us to believe that there may well be scope for us to include both actual and virtual events next year. This will allow for those who may be wary of coming out to events during the dark, cold and wet November evenings to still attend from the safety and comfort of their own homes.

The majority of the faith groups that make up membership of York Interfaith Group were able to put on an event this year which was really fantastic given the difficulties caused by the pandemic. There were events organised by the Mormons Church, the York Buddhist Network, The Baha'is, the Quakers, the Liberal Jewish Community, the Muslims, the Hindu and Sikh communities, plus additional events from the University of York and the York LGBT Forum regarding young people and their faiths. Our Interfaith Service to close the week's activities was hosted by members of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints Church and it was attended by 65 people, including the Lord Mayor of York Janet Looker and the MP for Central York Rachel Maskill. The service was entitled 'Faith in Unusual Times' and that is most certainly what it has been this year.

We extend our thanks out to all those faith groups who were able to organise and put on events and hope that you enjoyed putting these on as much as people enjoyed attending them. Many thanks too to everyone who joined us at events during Interfaith Week 2020. Here's to everyone keeping positive and safe over the coming festive season, however you manage to celebrate it and we are looking forward to another successful year for York Interfaith Group in 2021. *Dee Boyle for York Interfaith Group*

YORK INTERFAITH LOCKDOWN QUILT



I'm sure you will all be delighted to know that the amazing 'Lockdown Quilt' will hopefully be on view in various places in York in 2021 and we will keep you informed of any opportunity to have a look, other than virtually. We also had an email from Harriet Crabtree, the Executive Director of the Interfaith Network of the UK, to say that the image above was included on the National Interfaith 'thank you post' on Facebook, and it was one of the most 'liked' of the week!! Again, well done Dee and all those clever people who contributed to the making of this unique item.

Once again, a big THANK YOU to all who contributed to Interfaith Week, and indeed to all who lead/prepared or chaired monthly meetings in 2020, especially with all the challenges faced. We look forward to seeing as many of you as possible in 2021, preferably in one room with cake! (which developed as a bit of a theme during the Closing Service). *Dee Boyle*

**I get the blues thinking of the future,
so I left off
and made some marmalade.
It is amazing how it cheers one up
to shred oranges and scrub the floor
[D.H.Lawrence]**

YORK INTERFAITH GROUP 2021

The following is the planned programme. It is expected that meetings will continue to be on Zoom. Please continue to check the newsletter and website for current information as talks and speakers may be subject to change. All meetings will be on the first Tuesday of the month except the July visit.

- January 5 *Faith and Disability* Eleanor Tew (Quaker) and Dr. Sofia Chemma (Muslim)
- February 2: *Faith and LGBT* group led by Ben Arnup (Jewish)
- March 2 *What do people get wrong about my faith?* Professor Mohammad Gomati (Muslim) and panel from other faiths.
- April 6 *The role of faith in solving economic problems:* Dr Hooshmand Badee.
- May 4 *Climate and Ecology* David Midgley (Buddhist)
- June 1 *Planning meeting for Interfaith Week and 2022*
- July *Visit to Hindu Temple*
- August 3 *Love and charity in our scriptures: are there shared principles?* Panel and general discussion.
- September 7th: The stories we tell about science and religion: Professor Tom McLeish FRS and Dr. Amanda Rees
- October 5 The role of a prison chaplain (postponed from 2020)
- November 2 Greek and Roman religion, and parallels with other faiths: Rev. Dr. Michael Chester

NICK MORRICE'S NEW BOOKS

Dear friends and family: I have produced three new titles for Christmas, all in matchless verse and beautifully illustrated by my wonderful artist friends, Harold Gosney and Alex Crump. They are available in paperback for £4.99, or £2.99 on Kindle, or free if you have Kindle Unlimited. Perfect seasonal gifts, with a universal appeal.

1) "A Children's Bhagavad Gita"

https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B08PJPWLSV?ref=pe_3052080_397514860

2) "The Song of William Shakespeare"

https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B08PJPWLQQ?ref=pe_3052080_397514860

3) "Sixteen Tales of Paramahansa Yogananda"

https://www.amazon.co.uk/Sixteen-Tales-Paramahansa-Yogananda-Morrice/dp/B08P2TXB63/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=Sixteen+Tales+of+Paramahansa+Yogananda&qid=1606

Happy reading, and warmest wishes, Nick

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Barbara Barnes, Dee Boyle, Richard Brown, Elizabeth Faiers, Andrew Hill, Margaret Hill, Joan Sinanan, and the Officers

Colton's Hospital Trustees
Elizabeth Faiers (Treasurer), Dee Boyle, Trevor Gant, Marta Hardy, Simon Hardy, Nicky Jenkins (Chair), Carol Lawson, Richard Thompson, Geoffrey Williams, (registered charity: 221281)

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