



# THE YORK UNITARIAN

*St Saviourgate Unitarian Chapel, York, YO1 8NQ*

*June 2022*

## *From the Minister*

I've never wanted to be one of those people who starts every sentence with, "When I was at Oxford..." When older people told me their school, or college, days were the best days of their lives, I used to wonder what on earth they'd been doing since. Nevertheless, when the sun starts coming out and the air smells of freshly cut grass, I sometimes feel nostalgic for the whole package of Pimms, punting, picnics and plays on the lawns. But then I remember all the things that went along with the idyllic image: essay deadlines and exams, factions and rivalries among friendship groups and sports teams, and ever-present worries about money and the future. Problems of privilege, of course, but problems all the same.

I recently came across a book which American psychologist and creativity expert Eric Maisel wrote in 2013, *Why Smart People Hurt: A Guide for the Bright, the Sensitive and the Creative*. Maisel suggests that what thinking people have in common is important. A smart person "is her smartness in a way that she is not her height, her gender, her moods or her experiences." What he calls smart people – which is, it is worth noting, are not necessarily the same thing as academic people – experience a particular set of challenges due to their sense of being different from the mainstream.

Maisel says that "a smart person has a desire to think, a need to think, and an ability to think. But the nature of family, school, and work; the

structure of society; and the proclivities of the people around him often conspire to put out that fire. His family is unlikely to inspire him or flame his desire to think... his job is unlikely to inspire him; his pastor is unlikely to inspire him..." The last is particularly true because in the main, the function of churches over history has been to uphold the status quo. They have encouraged people to accept a meaning imposed by the ecclesiastical powers, rather than to find meaning for themselves.

Maisel is clear that there are many advantages (particularly financial ones) that come with being smart, however we define it, but he also argues that "Meaning is a smart person's most difficult challenge." We often ask just what, in our busy, secular society, the Unitarian Church can uniquely contribute, and I think one of its most important contributions is this. It is a place where people who like to think are encouraged to do so, rather than silenced because of the threat they pose to the existing political and economic system. A place for making meaning. A place where smart people don't have to hurt, but when they do, at least they can share that experience with others who understand, and then rekindle their fire to change and improve the world.

***"Life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by lack of meaning and purpose." Viktor Frankl***



**A MONTH OF  
SUNDAYS  
at 11am  
In Chapel and on Zoom**

**June 5, Stephanie Bisby**  
*Being Together*  
**Music: David Hammond**

**June 12, Louise Reeve,  
Newcastle-upon-Tyne,**  
*A Celebration of Love*  
**Music: Laura Jones**

**June 19, Stephanie Bisby**  
*PRIDE*  
**Music: David Hammond**

**June 26, Dee Boyle**  
*Refugee Week, "A Time for  
Healing"*  
**Music: David Hammond**

**July 3, Stephanie Bisby**  
*350 Years and Counting*  
**Music: David Hammond**



Joan Sinanan working on the Pride bench while the book group meets in Chapel

***Refugee Week Lunch - Sunday 26th  
June***

**By Dee Boyle**

To mark the end of Refugee Week (19th to 26th) York Unitarians will be hosting a special service at 11am. The theme for the week this year is 'Healing' and so the title of the service will be 'A Time for Healing'.

This will be an opportunity to reflect what the different faiths teach about caring for refugees and will include readings from various faiths as well as from some of the organisations offering help and support to refugees in York. The service will be led by Dee Boyle, who is vice-chair of the York Interfaith Group.

Following the service there will be a 'bring and share' vegetarian meal just after 12 o'clock so that those attending the service can have some time to chat over lunch with each other. We have not been able to do this service and shared lunch for the last two years, although we were able to welcome the Interfaith Group for the closing worship for York Interfaith Week in November.

Do come if you can, and bring along some of your favourite (meat-free) food to enjoy and share.

At our national meetings in Birmingham in April, Nick Morrice led a session on behalf of the Unitarian Music Society, of which he is chair, celebrating the life and work of Unitarian musician and composer David Dawson. You can find the recording here: <https://youtu.be/Et3nqSXj4ng>

## DIARY DATES

*Thursdays at 11am*, congregational meditation group in Chapel and on Zoom, contact Dee or Stephanie for details

*Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> June 1pm*

Late Music Concert: Amanda Crawley (soprano) and Josephine Peach (piano)  
Sounds of the Unexpected

*Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> June 7.30pm*

Late Music Concert: Trilogy Ensemble (flute, viola and harp)

*Friday 10<sup>th</sup> June* Lunchtime concert: Val Parker, Tim Tozer: mezzo soprano/piano

*Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> June* Stall at York Pride, and Rally

*Friday 24<sup>th</sup> June* Lunchtime concert: Antero Pellikka and Alice Thompson, guitar/flute, Just a Duo, muse of fire, music for flute and guitar inspired by Shakespeare

*Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> June* Poetry group meets online and in members' homes. Details from Dee or Marta.

*Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> June* Let's Share Our Good Read (see back page)

### Looking further ahead:

*Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> & Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> July*

York Unitarians 350th Anniversary Celebrations

*Friday 8<sup>th</sup> July* St Crux fair

*Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> July* Yorkshire Unitarian Union Summer Gathering at Scarborough

## LIBRARY BOOKS

**'Somebody I used to Know'**  
by Wendy Mitchell  
Reviewed by Sue Elliott

Published in 2019 this is Wendy's profoundly moving account of her experience of being diagnosed with early onset dementia at the age of 58. She gives a clear picture of how the disease has affected her physically and psychologically, whilst giving some useful examples of ways in which she has managed it on a daily basis. The book also demonstrates how a positive mindset and the love between her and her daughters has helped her to remain highly active throughout her decline.

----

Other new books added to the library this month (purchased at the Annual Meetings with a generous grant from the Yorkshire Unitarian Union) are:

- Why are we Here: Discerning our Unitarian Mission in an Upturned World, ed. Jane Blackall
- Faithful practices: Everyday ways to feed your spirit, ed. Eric Walker Wikstrom
- Soul to Soul: Fourteen gatherings for Reflection and Sharing: Christine Robinson & Alicia Hawkins
- Listening hearts: Fourteen gatherings for Reflection and Sharing, Christine Robinson & Alicia Hawkins
- BLUU notes: An anthology of Love, Justice and Liberation ed. Takiyah Nur Amin and Mykal Slack
- The Shared Pulpit by Erika Hewitt

## Who Are We to Judge?

By Richard Brown  
Sermon from May 8th

This week is Mental Health Awareness Week and I will be doing my bit locally by joining in with the events and campaigns organised by York Against Stigma, formerly the York branch of Time to Change, a voluntary organisation of people with lived experience of mental health problems campaigning against stigma and discrimination.

One of the questions we ask each other in the group is “Why did you not speak up about your mental health problems?” The most frequent reason given is - “I was afraid of being judged.” So it seems that fear of being judged by others prevents people with mental health problems from being open, talking freely about their illness and from seeking help. That’s clearly a big problem.

But, if it is not healthy to judge others, then evidence points to it being just as harmful to judge ourselves. Anyone who, like me, has learnt mindfulness meditation, will know about the seven pillars which are the guiding principles to help with meditation practice. I used to meditate daily but these days I’m not so disciplined. If you asked me what are the 7 pillars I would struggle to name them all. However there is one which I always remember - “non-judging”. At first, I wasn’t even sure what exactly that one meant. It seemed rather abstract but in fact it only seems that way because we are in the main unaware of just how much we judge both ourselves and others every single day.

It was because of mindfulness that I developed an interest in Buddhism and, for

a while, I thought of myself as a Buddhist Christian. Although the life stories of Jesus and the Buddha are remarkably different, there is considerable overlap between their teachings and many contemporary theologians have made a case for the compatibility of the two faiths.

Both Jesus and the Buddha warned us not to judge others, although they both had a slightly different take on the matter. Jesus’s words are contained in an often quoted passage from the Gospel of Matthew: “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged; for with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the log in your own eye?”

The implication here is that if you judge others, you too will be judged. I think this is true but, rather than retribution being the cause, I think that the reason has to do with judgement being an essential part of human nature. It is instinctive, almost *primaeval*, and that is because, like many such innate behaviours, it serves us well in certain situations, keeping us safe and helping us to solve problems. When you are driving a car in busy traffic you have to make a series of judgements, most of them unconsciously, in order both to keep you safe and to ensure that you get where you want to be. Many of the problems I encounter in my job are nuanced and ambiguous and I remember when we queried a former boss about things, he would frequently tell us to “use our professional judgement”.

But when we judge situations we are usually in full possession of the facts and this enables us to make a reasoned



judgement. However, when we turn our judging habit toward other people we are rarely, if ever, in full possession of the facts. We are not mind-readers, nor are we aware of all the thoughts, feelings and accumulated experiences of other people, even those closest to us. We cannot hope to make informed decisions about the nature of other people based solely on external appearances, yet it is something that we are all guilty of to some extent. When we judge others, we deceive ourselves. We can never truly know the motivations of others but neither can we be certain of the validity of our judging them in the first place. A monk named Migsala claimed to know what would be the future punishments of criminals. Buddha rebuked him saying “How do you know the complexity of human character? ... whoever judges others digs a pit for themselves.”

Judging others reflects our own unhappiness and insecurity. It says more about us than the subject of our criticism. We might be envious or jealous of the other person because of their possessions, their talents, or their success. Very often, when we judge in this way we only make ourselves even unhappier. But all too often we judge because we recognise in the other person something which we dislike in ourselves. It is this hypocrisy and lack of self-awareness which Jesus was referring to when he used the metaphor of having a log in your eye. Combined with what sociologists call “othering” the person, seeing them as not being of your “tribe”, not your kind of person, such judging is dangerous as it can lead to prejudice and discrimination.

Both Jesus and the Buddha taught that, rather than judging, we should cultivate compassion, even for strangers, even for

those who wish us harm or have hurt us. Open-hearted awareness can bring us closer to truly knowing both ourselves and our fellow human beings.

But recognising human nature as essentially flawed does not mean that we should stand idly by when we witness the abuse or oppression of others, or that we should put up with it when we are the target of such behaviour. This is where we should recognise the difference between judgement and justice. Of course, when we serve justice we also make a judgement- but we are judging the actions or behaviour, we are not judging the person.

In his book “Living Non-Violent Communication” Marshall Rosenberg states: “Accepting others doesn’t mean that we have to like what they are doing. In some cases, when people are behaving in a way that threatens our needs or safety, we may even use protective force.”

Nick Gier, a professor of philosophy and religion at the University of Idaho, puts it like this: “We should of course always empathize and try to understand, but we are also obligated to seek justice. Compassion and justice are virtues that we all should strive to attain, and that means that we must find the right balance between them.”

I’d like to close my address today with these very apt words by the author Doe Zantamata:-

“It’s easy to judge. It’s more difficult to understand. Understanding requires compassion, patience, and a willingness to believe that good hearts sometimes choose poor methods. Through judging, we separate. Through understanding, we grow.”



***St Crux fund raising day***  
**Fri 8th July 2022**  
**From Dee Boyle**

We are booked in for our usual fund-raising day at St Crux but this year we plan to do things a little differently than in previous years. We will not be selling any bric-a-brac this year as we find it more difficult to transport it down there, display it and then to dispose of afterwards. It started to look like we were just dealing with people's rubbish at times rather than actually having items that would sell. Instead we will be concentrating our efforts on having just three stalls outside.

There will be the book stall which will include CDs and DVDs. There will be another stall that will be 'regifted items' and this will include all sorts of new items that have been given as gifts but are unwanted or unused. We also hope to have a craft stall where any home-made items can be sold and these can include jams or chutneys. There may be scope for a plant stall providing someone is able to organise it.

We will of course still have the café sales as the main part of our fund raising day and so that will need various donations of home-made / baked items to sell throughout the day. We will need plenty of people to volunteer their help during the day and so a rota will be up on the vestry wall in chapel this month. Please sign up to help, even if it is just for a few hours.

Please note that unless we get enough people volunteering to help out on the day it may not be able to go ahead and this could be our last year of doing the St Crux fund-raising day.

**WEBSITE**

Our new website is now live at [yorkunitarians.org.uk](http://yorkunitarians.org.uk), although there are still some small changes to make. Jenny will be asking for votes as to which logo best represents us. And we will be adding a video about Unitarianism and why people joined the Chapel - if you'd like to be included, please let Stephanie know.

You may also have noticed a change in our social media, as Dylan has been helping to create some new and more striking graphics advertising our Sunday services.

Find us at [facebook.com/Yorkunitariancongregation](https://www.facebook.com/Yorkunitariancongregation) and on Twitter and Instagram as @Yunitarians

**WHY ARE WE HERE?**

Members of York Unitarians and other YUU and neighbouring congregations are invited to an online discussion group in July and August based on 'Why are we Here? Discerning our Unitarian Mission in an Upturned World'. The book has been published this year by the Lindsay Press. You don't have to have read the book to take part, but there is a copy in the library if you want to have a look, and the essays in it are based on last year's Hucklow Summer School theme talks, which are still available online to listen to at <https://www.hucklowsummerschool.co.uk/>

Sessions are at 6.30pm on 12<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> July and 9<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> August, and generally last around an hour. Stephanie will be coordinating the group and would be happy to have volunteers to do readings and/or co-lead sessions.



## Poetry Corner

### Courage

Courage is living what the heart knows,  
no matter what the silence says  
at three in the morning in a dark room  
when you're woken by the sound of a train passing  
and wish you could board it to some distant destination  
where nobody can tell you who you are supposed to be.

Courage is living what the heart knows,  
no matter what the world says;  
no matter what the voices in the air say:  
the television and the radio,  
the whisperers in conference rooms  
and cat-callers in the park.

Courage is answering with the heart's knowledge,  
each time the world asks what you think you are doing  
with your one wild and precious life.  
It's speaking for the silent and the forgotten,  
the scared and the unsafe; for the broken parts  
of your past, and the shape of your undreamed future.  
Courage is living what the heart knows.

*Stephanie Bisby*

*I wrote this for the poetry group's May meeting, on the theme of Courage and Fearlessness. I enjoy the poetry group because people choose to share such a variety of things, from poetry they've written themselves, to well-known classics which have inspired them, as well as some lesser-known gems, especially if the topic is an unusual one. Sometimes you'll spot selections from poetry group meetings turning up in services a few weeks later; it's amazing how often by chance something connects with a planned theme.*

*If you'd like to suggest a theme for a future service, or a reading which connects with one of the advertised themes, do let me know! If you'd like to know more about the poetry group, ask Dee Boyle, Marta Hardy or me.*

*The anniversary celebrations on 2<sup>nd</sup> July will include a poetry open mic night at 6.30 - please let me know in advance if you'd like to come along and read a poem or two. You're also welcome to come and listen - booking not required.*

**Let's share your good read**  
**By Meike Dux-Harrap**

**Our next meeting will be on**  
**Thursday, 30 June, 2-4 pm.**

I hope our meeting on 31st March has left you inspired to spend more time in your happy place with a book. After our meeting I counted more book titles on my list than people - something unplanned may have happened, this is now exercising my editing abilities and possibly your patience.

Here is a provisional list of books we shared. Looking at the list, I see there are a number of fiction books written by authors who are still alive. Uplifting books, individually described as soul-book, emotionally competent, civil, concerned with duration and time, empowering. Thank you for those personal recommendations and I can't wait to share more of our reading.

Around Ireland with a Fridge

Tony Hawks

Doctor for Friend and Foe

Rick Jolly

All among the Barley

Melissa Harrison

Little Paris Bookshop

Nina George

Autumn (part of a series)

Ali Smith

The Salt Path

Raynor Winn

Big Magic

Elizabeth Gilbert

The Tao of Inner Peace

Diane Dreher

Leonardo and the Last Supper

Ross King

If you would like to make a one-off donation to York Unitarians CIO by BACS, the details are:

York Unitarians CIO  
 Sort Code: 40-52-40  
 Account number: 00032702

A Monthly Standing Order is particularly welcome. Please also consider Gift Aid if you are a taxpayer. More information from the Treasurer  
 Richard Brown

**USEFUL CONTACT DETAILS**

York Unitarians,  
 St Saviourgate Chapel,  
 St Saviourgate, York YO1 8NQ  
[www.yorkunitarians.org.uk](http://www.yorkunitarians.org.uk)

*Minister:* Rev Stephanie Bisby  
 07930 390686  
[reverendstephaniebisby@gmail.com](mailto:reverendstephaniebisby@gmail.com)

*Chairperson:* David Zucker  
[davidgzucker@gmail.com](mailto:davidgzucker@gmail.com)

*Secretary:* Jenny Jacobs  
 01423 548793  
[yorkunitarians@gmail.com](mailto:yorkunitarians@gmail.com)

*Treasurer:* Richard Brown  
 01904 705382  
[richardcabrown@btinternet.com](mailto:richardcabrown@btinternet.com)

*Chapel Committee Members:*  
 Barbara Barnes, Dee Boyle,  
 Laura Cox, Elizabeth Faiers,  
 John Issitt, Dylan Nykamp,  
 Joan Sinanan, and the Officers

*Colton's Hospital Trustees:*  
 Nicky Jenkins (Chair),  
 Elizabeth Faiers (Treasurer),  
 Stephanie Bisby, Dee Boyle,  
 Joan Sinanan, Mike Tyler,  
 Richard Thompson, Leslie Wilkinson  
 (Registered charity: 221281)

**The York Unitarian Newsletter Team**

*Editor:* Stephanie Bisby  
 07930 390686  
[reverendstephaniebisby@gmail.com](mailto:reverendstephaniebisby@gmail.com)

*Proofreader:* Janet Eldred

***Please send your contributions for  
 the next issue to Stephanie.***

