



THE YORK UNITARIAN

St. Saviourgate Unitarian Chapel, York, YO1 8NQ

May 2021

FROM THE MINISTER

April may not be the cruellest month, as the poem has it, but for Unitarian ministers and chapel officers it's certainly one of most hectic, with Easter and all the activity surrounding the Annual Meetings. Like Marmite, the Annual Meetings seem to divide people. Some folk live for the annual opportunity to reconnect with long-lost friends and stay up late in the bar to talk of many things (perhaps not "shoes and ships and sealing wax, and cabbages and kings," but often an equally bizarre assortment of topics). Others visit once and swear "never again," worn out by the noise and frustrated by the processes of debating and voting.

I fall somewhere between the two extremes. The last few in-person annual meetings took place in Birmingham and generated a wonderful buzz, with lively worship services and social evenings, wide-ranging discussions and occasional fierce debate. That short period of intense activity is a joy, but it's also tiring, and afterwards it's all too easy to return to normal life with a sense of deflation, discouraged by the difficulty of narrowing the wide-ranging discussion and debate down to something practical and usable.

Last year, due to the pandemic, the business meetings were entirely abandoned and the

online meetings focused just on holding our sense of community, but this year the business was back, this time with a marathon day-long series of Zoom meetings preceded by a Friday night Zoom worship service. As with the in-person meetings, this format suits some and not others, and in future years both our denomination and our chapels will have the challenge of integrating the successful aspects of our hastily-improvised technological solutions into our return to in-person meeting.

For some, our virtual doors are the only practical means of access, so I'm delighted that at York we are progressing with plans for continuing to offer zoom access to Sunday services once we are back in chapel on Sundays. While many of us are overjoyed to meet face to face again,

reopening our physical doors will also prompt some natural anxieties. I found this article a useful reminder that, just as the onset of lockdown affected each of us differently, so will its lifting: <https://introvertdear.com/news/for-introverts-reentry-fear-after-the-pandemic-is-real/>

Let's make this, as the poets say, a "merry, merry month of May," but let's also remember that we will need to be gentle with each other and ourselves as the world shifts around us once again.

Stephanie Bisby



**A MONTH OF SUNDAYS
at 10.30 a.m. on zoom**

Sunday 2 May

Revd. Stephanie Bisby
What do we pray for?
Music by David Hammond
Zoom host David Zucker

Sunday 9 May

John Issitt
A religious approach to life
Music by Helen Drewery
Zoom host Janet Eldred

Sunday 16 May

Revd. Stephanie Bisby
The Spirit's breath
Music by David Hammond
Zoom host Laura Cox

Sunday 23 May

Revd Ralph Catts
What do you believe?
Music by Laura Jones
Zoom host Janet Eldred

Sunday 30 May

Revd Dr Claire McDonald
Hope is the thing with feathers
Music by Myrna Michell
Zoom host Dee Boyle

OTHER EVENTS IN MAY

Chapel Committee

Sunday 2 May 12 noon

Poetry Group

Wednesday 26 May: 7.00p.m.
For zoom link contact Dee Boyle.

Meditation Group

Every Thursday 11.00a.m on Zoom
For zoom link contact Dee Boyle

York Interfaith Group

Tuesday 4 May 7.30p.m.
David Midgley (Buddhist) 'Climate & ecology'
Zoom link contact Dee Boyle

Yorkshire Unitarian Union

Tuesday 18 May 2.00p.m. on zoom
Time Together with Joys and Concerns
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83470886465?pwd=aVg3V0F0VFN5ckRhMXIEek1iNnBMdz09>

Chapel in use as polling station

for election of Police Commissioner
Thursday 6 May

Tuesday Evening Discussion

Tuesdays 4,11, 18, 25 May 6.30p.m.

Stephanie Bisby writes:

In April the discussion group has moved away from the Bible to spend two sessions looking at essays by Emerson which have had a profound influence on Unitarian thinking.

In May, we return to the Bible to look at *the Sermon on the Mount* and *the Sermon on the Plain*. Suggestions for future topics – both biblical and otherwise - are always welcome. We meet on Tuesdays at 6:30pm, currently still on Zoom.

ABOUT PEOPLE

- Our very best wishes to former Chapel minister *Margaret Kirk* who has been in hospital for a new hip.
- *Ralph Catts*, who is leading our worship (by zoom) on Sunday 23 May was formerly minister of Hull Unitarians. He is married with York Unitarian *Sue Catts*. They now live in Ralph's native Australia. We look forward to welcoming them back visiting the UK when possible.
- *Jen Atkinson* welcomes her first grandson Lukas Korihi Tony, born in New Zealand on 9th April 2021 to Jen's son Chris and his wife Mira. Korihi is the Maori word for Song of birds, and Tony honours Jen's late husband. Aunties Sarah and Laurie share their joy.
- *Claire McDonald* who is leading our worship on Sunday 30 May began attending York Unitarians in 2009 and moved to London and trained as a minister in 2014/15. She is now minister at Lewisham Unity, a small active, green community in south London www.lewishamunity.org.uk. Claire writes about her theme:

"Hope is the Thing with Feathers. What does hope mean for each of us and all of us in 2021? Today we explore where poets, spiritual thinkers and writers find hope. We ask if there are differing kinds of hope, if there is such a thing as a theology of hope, and what we mean by 'active hope'. Together we will reflect and share what hope means to us, looking beyond this year towards the future we want to shape. Unitarians in south London. We look forward to welcoming Claire back among us as well.)

based on the work of Duke Divinity School's Gilbert Rendle, but also because "respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part"

is the much-quoted 7th principle of our US cousins, the Unitarian Universalist Association. We'd align ourselves behind a similar principle, we'd just call it something different. There are as many ways of expressing the underlying principle of religious living as there are religious traditions, and no doubt you have your own personal favourite. If I had to pick just one, I'd go for 'compassion' for reasons similar to those given by Karen Armstrong in *12 Steps to a Compassionate Life*.

COURAGE AND COMPASSION

"One of the chief tasks of our time must surely be to build a global community in which all peoples can live together in mutual respect; yet religion, which should be making a major contribution, is seen as part of the problem. All faiths insist that compassion is the test of true spirituality and that it brings us into relation with the transcendence we call God, Brahman, Nirvana or Dao."

This reminds me of a story in the Zen Buddhist tradition.

A young man came to a monastery to seek enlightenment, and was told by the Zen master that he could only join the community if he could bring a skill or a talent to contribute. The master asked him what he was particularly good at, and the young man, though not wishing to appear immodest, conceded that he had some prowess at chess.

"We already have quite a good chess player," the master said, "but come along next week, and if you can beat him you can join our community."

The young man spends the week practising, and returns at the appointed time, to find a chess board set out on a table in front of the gathered community.

"Before you start," the Master informed him, "there is one thing you must know. Whoever loses the match will be beheaded.

The young man was confident of his skills and sat down to begin the game, and sure enough it became apparent that he was far the superior player. As he took first one pawn then another, and then, thanks to a slip on his opponent's part, a knight, the young man saw that his opponent was beginning to sweat and to shake. At this point he began to think about what would happen if he won the match. He would join the community and take the place of this revered member, a man who had done, and continued to do, much good in the world, while the older man, the man sitting in front of him with trembling hands and downcast eyes, would be put to death.

The young man said nothing but he began to make silly mistakes, allowing the monk to take one piece after another until they were one move away from checkmate. Just as the monk laid his hand to his queen to make the final move, the Master stepped forward and swept the pieces to the floor.

"There is no further need for the game," he told the young man, "You are welcome to join our community, for you know the meaning of compassion."

Just like the story of Jesus, this is an uncompromising story which demonstrates that compassion is meaningless without the courage to act. Susan, when she told us about her aunt's memoir of her time nursing in fever hospitals, spoke about the nurses' courage along with their compassion. The poet and philosopher David Whyte writes,

"Courage is the measure of our heartfelt participation with life, with another, with a community, a work, a future."

It takes courage to invite in the world's suffering. Karen Armstrong cites the French philosopher Peter Abelard as suggesting that,

"when we look at the crucifix, our hearts break in sympathy and fellow feeling – and it is this interior movement of compassion and instinctive empathy that saves us."

This is the moment of connection, the moment of unexpected grace, I was thinking of when I chose for the title of this sermon a phrase from a poem by Anna Akhmatova:

"How the miracle of our meeting / Shone there and sang."

The poem ends:

“We, my dear, are only souls / At the limits
of the world,”

an image which recalls Rumi’s wonderful
words:

“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and
rightdoing there is a field. I’ll meet you
there. When the soul lies down in that grass
the world is too full to talk about.”

As religious, or spiritual, people, we might say
that we aspire to live our lives, or at least more
of our lives, in that field.

WHO DO WE SAY YOU ARE?

Like the disciples we are human and won’t
always achieve our aspirations, but we are most
human when we allow our hearts to open to the
suffering of others.

It’s not always an easy thing to achieve,
especially in times as trying as this last year, and
we should not judge ourselves, or others, when
at times we need to maintain our boundaries
simply to be safe, but as Karen Armstrong hints,
this should be a temporary survival mechanism
and not a permanent position, for

“nearly all the religious traditions put
suffering at the top of their agenda. We
would rather push it away and pretend that
the ubiquitous grief of the world has nothing
to do with us, but if we do that we will
remain confined in an inferior version of
ourselves.”

And so we say that,

“Love is the spirit of this church, and service
is its law.”

We say that like Sophie’s church we aspire to
honour our forebears by living out their values:
to act with both courage and compassion, for
ourselves, for each other, for our community
and for our planet. We say that we aspire – in
the words of Karen Armstrong again,

“to look into our own hearts, discover what
gives us pain, and then refuse, under any

circumstances whatsoever, to inflict that
pain on anybody else.”

Or, in the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark:

“to love the Lord your God with all your
heart, and with all your soul, and with all
your mind, and with all your strength”

and to

“love your neighbour as yourself,”

because at the end of the day,

“There is no other commandment greater
than these.”

ONE GOD: NO-ONE LEFT BEHIND

*In 2003 when the American Unitarian
Universalist journal UU World
promoted an ‘elevator-speech’ exercise
UUA President Bill Sinkford wrote:*

**“The Unitarian side tells us
that there is only one God,
one spirit of life,
one power of love.**

**The Universalist side tells us
that God is a loving God,
condemning none of us,
valuing the spark of divinity
that is in every human being.**

**So my version of what
Unitarian Universalism stands for is:
One God,
no one left behind.”**

UNI-NEWS: MARCH 2021

AGM 2021 Unitarian General Assembly will be holding its Annual General Meeting online on Saturday 24 April 2021. The deadline to register is Saturday 3 April.

BEYOND DARKNESS by Rev Cliff Reed. Book Launch hosted by Rev Kate Dean. Include readings from book and an interview with Cliff. [Find out more.](#)

TELL US YOUR STORY The best way to share our faith and to welcome new people is to share our personal stories. What led you to join your congregation? What does your spirituality mean to you? How has your faith changed you? We are looking Unitarians of all ages, backgrounds and beliefs to share their stories through video, text and other media. [If interested get in touch with our Communications Officer Rory Castle Jones](#)

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT COMIC BOOK

A "world-first" comic book about the 'mother of feminism' Mary Wollstonecraft is to be given away to primary schools in Hackney and Islington, with a 6 week lesson plan designed to fit with national curriculum. Mary Wollstonecraft belonged to Newington Green Unitarian Chapel.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT...

'Post-Christian' Britain: a spiritual enigma (*The Guardian*); Building Mental Wealth (*Dark Matter Labs*); The case for wooden pews: why hard religion is more important (*Deseret News*) Beyond survival: practical hope in powerful times (*Beyond Survival*); How Religious Community Is Linked to Human Flourishing (*Psychology Today*); ['Purim Teaches us to Embrace an Upside Down World'](#), by Rabbi Deborah Blausten (*Jewish News*)

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE met on 16 March via Zoom. Key messages were:

1) [New General Assembly website](#) varied reactions to it. A meeting was being arranged with groups that had expressed criticisms. The EC commended Chief Officer Liz Slade for providing this opportunity for listening and conversation. Suggestions for improvements were still being gathered, and changes identified. Conversations were also taking place with those keen to adopt (or adapt) new

designs. *Watch for the new design pack for congregations.*

2) The [Worship Studies Course](#) The EC expressed support for Unitarian College's involvement.

3) 2019-2020 GA accounts and annual report were approved and will be circulated soon.

4) Agreed that GA Investment Policy needed revisiting and reworking. A motion calling for divestment from fossil fuels would be put at the coming [Annual Meetings](#). EC would listen carefully to the debate. EC is not content with the current investment portfolio. EC response should make clear state of current holdings, and how they might fit with the motion's aims.

HISTORY & HERITAGE

[Culture Recovery Fund for Heritage Webinar - recording \(National Heritage Memorial Fund\)](#); [Historic gates and wall receive restoration boost from Government fund \(Leicester City Council\)](#); Rev David Steers presents a history of Non-Subscribers in Northern Ireland, our sister organisation.

ZOOM HELP

Unitarian College is offering Zoom Clinics for those who would like to improve Zoom skills. Rev Stephanie Bisby has created useful guides, [Beginners Guide to Zoom for Church](#), [Making your first Zoom meeting](#), and [Hosting in Zoom](#).

WE TRUST

that beyond absence
there is a presence;
that beyond the pain
there can be healing;
that beyond the brokenness
there can be wholeness;
that beyond the anger
there may be peace;
that beyond the hurting
there may be forgiveness;
that beyond the silence
there may be the word;
that beyond the word
there may be understanding;
that through understanding
there is love.

Author Unknown

TUESDAY LUNCHTIME CONCERTS

Subject to the current government regulations and guidelines and to a decision of the Chapel Committee to re-open the chapel building it is hoped that the new season of Chapel lunchtime concerts and recitals can commence on Friday 25 June. A full and exciting season has been organised about which Adrienne Wilson writes:

Dear concert-goers

Now that we have a roadmap out of lockdown, we sincerely hope to be able to offer Friday lunchtime concerts in the Unitarian Chapel. The 2021 season has 12 concerts arranged, beginning on 25 June.

Two artists who will be performing for us in August (Catherine Strachan, cello and David Hammond, piano) had the opportunity to record a 30 min recital for Aberdeen Art Gallery. It was live today (but recorded in York) and can be heard on this link for some time to come.

<https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/AAGM/whats-aberdeen-art-galleries-and-museums/lunchbreak-concert-catherine-strachan-cello-and-david-hammond-piano>

It will certainly whet your appetite!

Do let me know if you wish to be removed from this mailing list, or if you know anyone who would like to be added.

My preferred email is now adrienne.margaret@gmail.com

with warmest regards

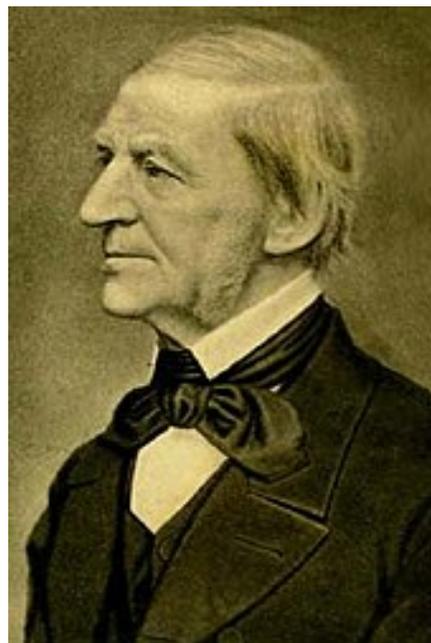
Adrienne

YORKSHIRE UNITARIAN UNION



for your diary
YUU visit to Yorkshire Sculpture Park
Saturday 10 July

EMERSON AT YORK



Chapel Discussion Group participants - recently struggled with the texts of two lectures (*Self-reliance* and *Nature*) by the American Unitarian minister and 'man of letters' Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882). This is Emerson's account of his one and only visit to York when he lectured at the York Mechanics Institute (now a Masonic Lodge) in St. Saviourgate just a few doors away from the Unitarian Chapel.

"In York minster, on the day of the enthronization of the new archbishop, I heard the service of evening prayer read and chanted in the choir. It was strange to hear the pretty pastoral of the betrothal of Rebecca and Isaac, in the morning of the world, read with circumstantiality in York minster, on the 13th January, 1848, to the decorous English audience, just fresh from the Times newspaper and their wine; and listening with all the devotion of national pride. That was binding old and new to some purpose. The reverence for the Scriptures is an element of civilization, for thus has the history of the world been preserved and is preserved. Here in England every day a chapter of Genesis, and a leader in the Times."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

GREEN POLICY

Adrienne Wilson writes: One step towards contributing to a green policy for ourselves and for the congregation would be to link up with St Nick's Centre for Nature and Green Living <https://stnicks.org.uk/>

I subscribe to their zero carbon monthly newsletter and will consider volunteering when Covid restrictions are lifted. Another local opportunity is provided by The York Environment Forum <https://yorkenvironmentforum.org.uk/> (membership is only £5 per year). A further small step is to change your bank - it was surprisingly easy for me to switch current accounts from Santander to Triodos (Home of Ethical Banking), which provides on-line banking for £3 a month.
AdrienneWilson

STOP PRESS FROM THE UNITARIAN GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETINGS

Our Chapel delegates were David Zucker and Jenny Jacobs.

Congratulations to Jenny Jacobs on joining the General Assembly Executive Committee.

It is a joy for York Unitarians that our new minister Stephanie Bisby was recognised as a minister on the Assembly's roll of ministers; and that the retirement of our former minister Nicky Jenkins was recognised

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 GiftAid if you are eligible for tax.

USEFUL CONTACT DETAILS



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Chapel Committee Members:,
Barbara Barnes, Dee Boyle, Elizabeth Faiers, Andrew Hill, Joan Sinanan, and the Officers

Colton's Hospital Trustees
Elizabeth Faiers (Treasurer), Stephanie Bisby, Dee Boyle, Trevor Gant, Marta Hardy, Simon Hardy, Nicky Jenkins (Chair), Joan Sinanan, Richard Thompson (registered charity: 221281)

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one human family on one fragile planet in one miraculous universe

Erik Walker Wikstrom