

Service 20130609 Hull Unitarian Church *Adrian Worsfold*
Service based on:
Orders of Worship Service 5 (1932) and Finding Sanctuary (2006)

[Light the Chalice]

Life is an opportunity, benefit from it; life is beauty, admire it; life is bliss, taste it; life is a dream, realise it; life is a challenge, meet it; life is a duty, complete it; life is a game, play it; life is a promise, fulfil it; life is sorrow, overcome it; life is a song, sing it; life is a struggle, accept it; life is a tragedy, confront it; life is an adventure, dare it; life is luck, make it; life is too precious, do not destroy it; life is life, fight for it. [Mother Teresa]

[HYMN HL 172 Westminster](#)

Prayers

We recognise the transience of life, and its inherent tragedy, into which we inject and find the necessity of hope.

There is pain and suffering within life's path, but from this we form character.

There is what we could have done and did not do, and what we did and should not have done. For this we offer one another, and into the divine quality, our sorrow and make our requests for forgiveness. We wish to turn again, and do such no more, but we recognise the great likelihood of failure. Apology is the first move towards justice, and peace is always with justice.

We can celebrate that death, as the tragic end, gives shape to all else for ourselves and for others; it gives a biography to each and all, and that even the blackest story has little bits of light in it.

So let us live in the grace that character is formed, we make peace with one another, and life has its shape.

Restoring what has been lost, let us be at peace with one another and with the wider world.

We have grounds to give thanks. Thanks is our expression here and now for what we are about to receive, and for what we have received.

O Giver of life and Maker of souls, grant that we may be of one heart with all worshippers who look to your qualities in spirit and in truth. We are thankful for the precious gift of life, for the riches of nature, the truths of righteousness, the hope within mortality, and the love that binds us to the living and the dead. Assist in our rise above lowness of mind or sadness of spirit, and add to those traditions and teachings that show our work and our rest, our sins and our endeavours, our joys and our sorrows, in the light that comes from the Spirit. These insights uplift our hearts, confirm our trust, sanctify our affections, and let the veils that hide the divine from us be taken away.

Collect for Morning

O Giver of the light which gladdens the face of the earth, grant that we may be receivers of the light and of the day. Let the sun of righteousness shine in our hearts, enlightening our reason, making clear our conscience, kindling our love. We would give ourselves to the good of the Spirit, that all evil thoughts and desires may be driven from our hearts, and that we may walk with joy in the light of divine countenance and in the way of its commandments. Amen.

The following response is Based on Psalm 148

From the heavens, in the heights, all the messengers: **give praise!**
The sun and moon, the shining stars, the galaxies: **give praise!**
They all develop, they all expand, they were born and they will die.

Mountains and all hills, valleys and plains: **give praise!**
Fruit trees and all cedars, what grows, what becomes cultivated: **give praise!**
Varieties come and varieties go, for as long as the earth exists.

From the watery earth, sea creatures and all deeps: **give praise!**
From the landed earth, wild animals of valleys, plains and mountains, eaters and eaten: **give praise!**
From farm animals and all cattle, sheep and poultry, who give of themselves in the chain of food: **give praise!**
From our feet and above our heads, creeping things and flying birds, prey and predator: **give praise!**
They all evolve, they all change, they were born and they will die.

The weather of fire and hail, snow and frost: **give praise!**
Stormy wind ever strong, strong sunlight ever offering: **give praise!**
They all come about, they all swirl, they have origins and they cease.

Kings and presidents, earls and the commons: **give praise!**
Princes and all rulers of the earth: **give praise!**
Young men and women alike, old and young together: **give praise!**
The earth is but our cradle and our grave.

Let us all give praises, for the glory is here on earth and in the heavens.
Through their particular spaces, all these have risen higher;
Their names are exalted;
We praise for their becoming:
For what they have the potential to become.

Thanksgiving

We are thankful for the joy of all our days; for gladness that is born of strength and vigour, and for quietness and rest that dwell with age; for aims that have grown with knowledge, and purposes that have been quickened by the words and deeds of noble souls; for all that teaches us to know and serve better. For love that lightens labour and makes our life richer than we know, we give blessings and sing our song for the light of knowledge and the lessons of experience, and for all the joy and comfort and inspiration in our lives. Amen.

HYMN HL 174 Lancaster

Readings, both from *Finding Sanctuary* (2006) by Christopher Jamison

You cannot mistreat people one moment and then find sanctuary the next. Finding the sacred space begins with the recognition of the sacred in your daily living. [Jamison, 2006, 23]

There is no peace without sacrifice and there is no peace without justice. Those simple insights... apply to everybody's ordinary life and social relationships. [Jamison, 2006, 24]

The following reflection is Based on Psalm 27

Why should we be afraid and whom should we fear?
Evildoers, adversaries and foes wreak their havoc
But they shall stumble and fall.

Though an army can threaten, the heart shall not fear;
Though war can rise up, it is time to be confident.

We can live in the good house, all the days of our lives,
Where we make our holy altar
Where we give in confidence and receive in strength.
It is our harbour and our shelter for those days of trouble;
Even if the home is little more than a tent;
This home is set high on a rock and sees all around.

Now our heads are lifted up, even with enemies all around
How better we are, when we have friends all around.
So secure we can make our sacrifices with shouts of joy;
So happy we can sing away and make melodies day and night.

The Spirit of Truth and Comfort hides but is present;
No one is turned away, cast off or forsaken
Even if in life, others have rejected us.
Nothing undermines the one with a given resolve.

Our meeting place is a school of sanctuary
It leads us on a level path against enemies or with friends.
It develops our will for the other:
Not to buckle to our adversaries, nor false witnesses, nor the violent,
But to stand up in the goodness of the Spirit in the land of the living.
Have patience; be strong, and let your heart take courage.

[Music is Chris Hadfield singing *A Space Oddity* from space.](#) I'll be referring to this in my sermon.

A Litany of Faith

O eternal and ever blessed source of the light and love that never fails; lead us in truth and draw us nearer to trust and love.

By all thy marvellous works, thy wonders in the heavens and on the earth; by the order which reigns over all, the beauty which shines through all, and the bounty which blesses all:

We learn the road towards the altar of sanctuary.

remembering ancient mercies and the witness of unfading care; by the revelation found in saints of old and in the noble and true-hearted in our own day; by every holy record of wisdom and piety; by every faithful restrained speech, and by every good example:

We learn the road towards the altar of sanctuary.

By the grace and truth of prophetic figures; by the quickening power of the Spirit; through the ideal of true personhood in the building of the good; by faithfulness unto the gift of death, and the triumph of the love released beyond the power of death; and in the joyous fellowship working together and in the service of the other:

We learn the road towards the altar of sanctuary.

By all the experience and discipline of life, in health and sickness, in failure and success, in sorrow and joy; by the conflict of our souls with temptation; by our shame and defeat, and by our aspiration, striving, and victory:

We learn the road towards the altar of sanctuary.

By the loving-kindness from the beginning of our days until now; by the sanctities of home; by the love of children; by the eagerness and zest of youth; by the affection and fidelity of adult friends; by the wisdom of the years; in the trials and bereavements which chasten and hallow our earthly love; by all remembrance of those before us into the light:

We learn the road towards the altar of sanctuary.

O wisdom of minds, the strength of wills, the joy of hearts; grant us so to listen before we speak, find true humility and build up courage, and give before we receive, and do this in the honour of expressing what is holy and what is ever profound. Amen.

Intercession

We pray for people of faith that they may use the resources at their disposal to enhance the trust they have in one another and their deeds to those outside. We think especially of our Unitarian communities in all their varieties of riches.

We pray for the world and that it may find not simply tranquillity but peace

with justice. We think especially of...

We pray for those who are unwell, that they may find comfort in their afflictions and come to good health. We may have in mind...

We pray for those who came before us, who have helped make us who we can be. They have come so far on the road, and we take up the baton and proceed further, until others take it from us.

[Short silence] Amen.

Liturgy of Seeking Sanctuary

The following liturgy is based on Christopher Jamison's book Finding Sanctuary: Monastic Steps for Everyday Life, though one should not assume he would approve of this liturgical use of his work. Christopher Jamison is Abbot of Worth Abbey, a Benedictine monastery. His own work derives from insights given by the Rule of Benedict, Benedict being the Abbot of Monte Cassino some 1500 years ago. The seven steps is a process that leads towards finding sanctuary, a true state of peace, that is found not alone but with others and drawing on the resources of religion.

First we take on board silence. Our silence is the removing of the trivial. We find positive silence in ourselves and so we restrain the urge to speak, and through such restraint comes the ability to be aware and to listen. Silence lets us see the real state of things, but we see that silence is hard work, a challenge for every individual. Indeed, when we try to be silent, the untrained mind will race with thoughts, and so we can build silence through meditation and prayer. It is our prayer to build silence. [Be silent]

With the commitment to silence, finding sanctuary involves contemplation. We meditate, with techniques of breathing and chanting mantras for mind development, but this can be mixed with prayer. The best prayer is that which listens. In prayer, let us draw on and engage through the resources and practices of familiar traditions of the holy. Our communal prayers allow engagement with difficulty, sorrow and being thankful. We accept our wrongdoings, we apologise, we give thanks, we pray for the world because we give attention to the world. Also we read sacred texts and carefully, attentively, even repeatedly and in discussion.

Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who

searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.
[Matthew 7 v.7-8] [repeat]

How do we ask? Whom do we ask? What is it to receive and what is received? Why does everyone who searches find, and how come that for everyone who knocks the door is opened? [Silence]

For seeking sanctuary we absorb obedience. To be obedient means enhancing one's freedom. Obedience is only obedience when entered by choice. In obedience one freely pursues what is better for someone else, restraining one's own will. It means listening, which we can do thanks to silence and in prayer. From deep listening comes the exercise of conscience, and we know that holy conscience is not the same as following feelings. Let us find our true conscience. We find true discovery in that inner space. Let us discover what is true, beautiful and holy.

From obedience we come to adopting humility. Ignoring the apathetic and inactive, or even introverted, our being human is intimately connected with the humus, or from the well-grounded. Being humble needs conscious development in being well-grounded. We descend by exaltation and ascend by humility. There is no delight in satisfying desires, but instead embrace patience; in humbleness with one's spiritual director we give our secrets and engage in radical self-honesty and self-abasement. We become content to work lowly, to become inferior to all via an inner conviction that keeps a common rule and understands those who have the greater experience. In developing being humble, let us restrain from such speech as grumbling and gossip. Humility, we know, is only evident in action - with a strong will for the other and out of humility comes the sense of awe revealed by the holy.

We recognise the importance of community. It's the demanding work of engaging with other people and they with each one of us. Our tradition emphasises individuality, but we do this together. The trend at large has been away from joining communities, but we say joining our community gives individual benefit. One might seek one's own sanctuary but even hermits should have lived with others for a long time. We understand the tasks of living, and that it involves being with and listening; in a community: we obey, we enjoy its stability, and we share its common ownership. Let us find the capability to stay in one place and work through one community in the sense that we find heaven together or not at all. We work through conflicts. We do not just seek tranquillity but the peace that is grounded in fairness and respect. Our rituals together assist building this community, as in our meals, in the kitchen, in gatherings for discussion, and decision making. We also have a duty towards guests and to receive them generously helps us to avoid

grumbling and builds the confidence for guests to come within. Let us be a welcoming community of windows and an opened door.

Let us recognise each other with offering a sign of peace.

So many outside our windows also recognise that there is more to life than production and consumption. What is spirituality? The early Church said it is godly and generous living, but body and soul were seen to be separated with a later stress on the inner life of soul over externals. Now we have psychological individual mystical experience plus the golden rule. So much modern spirituality can be purchased. At best, religions are humbling and communal, and give an educative process with obedience, going beyond one's personal boundaries. Religion is prophetic and challenging. The claim here is giving commitment within an identity rather than being a religious shopper. We identify with the historical stretch of the English Presbyterian and Unitarian traditions. Religion in its fullness offers a vision of being fully human, a vision of purpose. Finding unity and purpose are divine qualities and from such goals can come the enhancing of individuality and its insights.

So we build the spiritual in the religious, in the context of being humble, a commitment, in a community, and a pursuing a prophetic challenge. So far sanctuary is nearly built.

Sanctuary is built and maintained once we also have hope. Hope is not to deny death but is about dying well in the dying process. Mortality adds a sense of urgency; death before one's eyes strips away inessentials. As such death can be a supreme moment of gift of what is important and therefore hope. Within life, to sacrifice, is to make holy, and the holy gift comes in with the positive material offering made out. Just as the altar is the place for sacrifices, finding sanctuary is like finding the altar, the place of sanctuary and we find it here, with others. Religion in sacrificial action provides: the gift of hope against despair and the love to drive out fear. The religion we have holds the sanctuary together for us all and cements it. It is like a school of justice. Let us engage in intense, humbling and trusting prayer to build lasting peace, the peace that is the fruit of justice, because here we are in a religious school offering wisdom and guidance and being the place of love and hope.

In his Prologue to the *Rule*, Benedict lays down a simple basic marker about finding the sacred sanctuary: 'Let us ask the Lord: "Who will dwell in your tent, O Lord: who will find rest upon your holy mountain?" After this question, brothers, let us listen to what the Lord says in reply, for he shows us the way to his tent. "One who walks without blemish," he says, "and is just in all his dealings, who speaks the truth from his heart and has not practised deceit

with his tongue" [*Rule of Benedict*, Prologue, 23-6, in Jamison, 2006, 23]

HYMN HL 175 Break Bread Together

SERMON

Last week two happenings made today's service. One was Stephanie making reference in her sermon to Abbot Christopher Jamison's book from 2006, *Finding Sanctuary*, based on the television series when five men entered Worth Abbey for forty days and nights to uncover spiritual issues in their lives. The book is itself a manual for spiritual progress, upholding the importance of collective religion in community. I've used it to make a liturgy. Secondly I was told by Bryan that in all the years he has known me he has not known what I believe. That's quite an achievement. So I'm going to suggest what I do believe and each of you can compare and contrast.

To cut to the chase. No, I do not believe in a personal God, nor do I think in most other definitions of God existing. Am I then a non-realist and what does that mean, or can I just about manage something called Real Absence, the *via negativa* of what *we do not call* God, as associated with the Welsh poet and priest Ronald Stuart Thomas?

Perhaps I think religion is weak. Let's examine this by comparing and contrasting religion as a symbol system with other forms of reality.

Mathematics is a symbol system and it frays at the extremes but, other than that, it is robust and extremely reliable. It doesn't matter whether you live in Britain or Togo, speak Dutch or Swahili, or apply it to our earth or Pluto, maths is the same. Language and culture matters little.

Then comes science, in that science has debatable large scale paradigms of meaning but, crucially, upheld or brought down by falsification experiments. The current physics paradigm has debatable points as its maths leads to experiments, but the Darwinian nature of biology is now reinforced and reinforced again into the genetics age. So science has cultural aspects - including what interests scientists today and where the funding is - but it is pretty robust and again applies no matter where you go.

Social science is more culturally affected because it deals with human behaviour and its quantitative results can only reflect consensual human actions, plus much deeper research is small group based and about

interactive meaning. So there is some give and take in social science, but it is still capable of repeating results and giving unwanted results. There are social causes for individual actions.

But the arts are various and difficult in establishing objectivity in research. History and Geography have developed rules for investigating, such as History's stress on primary documents. But the artistic arts, so to speak, are highly subjective. How do we agree, for example, on what is better music or better painting. We can't.

Now it is my view that religion as belief is closest to the arts of painting and music. It deals in mystery and conscience and is beyond experiment. It is highly individualist. Religion is toughened up when it borrows from history and social sciences, and indeed science, but if it does, it produces problems.

Now I am most familiar with the Christian tradition. There is a claim about the virgin birth of Christ, and if this is poetry, then that's fine. But if there is a claim that this is actual, then it concerns science and history. First of all, there is no historical method available to find out whether Jesus's mother was a virgin. Second, regarding science, a freak virginal conception might produce a female offspring, at the very best. So I conclude that you cannot claim an actual virgin birth. It is a cultural, belief, phenomenon, only, and I don't share it because it is arguably harmful as a belief. The historical basis for a resurrection is little better, and is confused between spirit and body. Plus the science is that when someone dies, the brain rots rapidly, and is not reusable. So I do not believe in a resurrection of the body as meaningful, and certainly not that someone who died and was transformed had the same consciousness. What history tells us is that the New Testament is, at its sources, primary documents of the early Christian communities, addressing its questions and its answers. I am not a Christian, because the historical and scientific tests simply fail, and it is not enough for me to be a cultural or textual Christian, for example the idea that there is revelation into the text, that within the text one finds the transformative kerygma. I don't even know what that means, even when I understand what it is supposed to mean.

This does not deny that Christianity and Judaism have great cultural and ethical traditions and treasures, but simply that they are cultural.

I apply the same kinds of tests to Islam, Baha'ism, Buddhism, even and Hinduism and Paganism. These are cultural and ethical traditions too, and there is much to learn, some of them newer and creative and some old.

However, there is something at the heart of these religions where I think there

is an anchor and it is where theology and social anthropology come together.

This is in how communities bind together. People make an effort to along to some place or space, give something into it, in order to receive, in some form of exchange, and as a result of the exchange we are more strongly bound together than we were. Economics works through exchange, and we pay in and receive back in satisfaction, or we make a profit on what we sell. Sex works like this too - sex is like the activity, but making love is the value added, and the result is binding two people together. I might talk and you might talk, but conversation is more than talk, and the result is knowing one another better and a binding together. And religion is to bind.

In religion, there is an overall perspective: there is a coming together, a giving materially, and a waiting in hope for a spiritual gift. That spiritual gift starts in the affirmation of one person by another, and what is important about that person as a whole human being. So religious rituals that give and take through some token exchange are very important, although it is enough simply to make the effort to come together and come away having encountered in prayer the issues of importance in an overview of life.

So what do I believe? Well not in Gods, nor the supernatural, nor in magic. I think language games in maths, science, social science and the arts go through different degrees of objectivity and subjectivity, and religion is highly subjective and therefore variable. But in one place it is not so subjective, and that is in the anthropological realities of exchange and gift. And it may further be that the spiritual gift is where one finds the divine as a concept – the gift of peak experience, the gift of beauty, the gift of love, the gift of hope.

Now perhaps you see the attraction of Christopher Jamison's scheme to me. Because he is saying, first: quieten down and get rid of the trivia, and listen more to the other. He is saying, then: contemplate on the deeper meanings of things. He then says: do these things together, and draw on one of the vast cultural and ethical religious traditions that exist in order to feed on what is important and deep. Now I differ from him in that I think we can draw on more than one tradition, with the point that a syncretistic tradition like ours is still a tradition! Importantly, we do it together, and then we do it through exchange at the space called the altar. Don't panic at this, because the altar can be anything, including this building, or in a circle, or on a hill, or at sea, or on a stone slab, but in that space and place of exchange there is hope - hope that life has gained meaning and benefit, that we bind to each other, and that life has shape.

Recently a Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield, up in space, looking out upon

our blue globe, sang his version of a song *Space Oddity*. Chris Hadfield made a lot of effort to connect with others on earth, particularly children, and enthused about space and science. In that song, about the loss of the inspiring vision of the blue globe, and the threat of death in his risky return, he gave a weightless material-offering using his simple guitar. In the exchange, of our seeing and hearing, we looked and we listened, and sang along too, the spiritual gift is to reflect on our future place in the world and the blue globe's future too. We are all, in some sense, Major Tom. His song is another liturgy, secular yes, but he was not alone in singing his song, and it was an offering.

Offering and Notices

HYMN HL 176 Come Together

Benediction

Here is a test to find out whether your mission in life is complete.
If you're alive, it isn't. [Richard Bach]

Love the earth and sun and animals,
Despise riches, give alms to everyone that asks,
Stand up for the stupid and crazy,
Devote your income and labour to others...
And your very flesh shall be a great poem.

[Walt Whitman]

A *Space Oddity* as by Chris Hadfield (originally David Bowie)

Ground control to Major Tom!
Ground control to Major Tom!
Lock your Soyuz hatch and put your helmet on.

[countdown] Ground control to Major Tom!
Commencing countdown engines on.
Detach from station and may God's love be with you.

This is ground control to Major Tom!

You've really made the grade,
and the papers want to know whose shirts you wear,
But it's time to guide the capsule if you dare.

This is Major Tom to ground control!
I've left forever-more,
And I'm floating in most peculiar way,
And the stars look very different today.

For here am I sitting in a tin can,
Far above the world:
Planet Earth is blue and there's nothing left to do.

Though I've flown one hundred thousand miles,
I'm feeling very still;
And before too long I know it's time to go.
Our commander comes down back to earth, and knows!

Ground control to Major Tom!
The time is near, there's not too long.
Can you hear me Major Tom?
Can you hear me Major Tom?
Can you hear me Major Tom?
Can you...

Here am I floating in my tin can:
A last glimpse of the world.
Planet Earth is blue and there's nothing left to do.

Jamison, C. (2006), *Finding Sanctuary: Monastic Steps for Everyday Life*,
London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Unitarian and Free Christian Churches (1932), *Orders of Worship for use in
Unitarian and Free Christian Congregations*, Fifth Service, 50-62, London:
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