



Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: November 2016

What's On...

Thursday 3rd November, 7-8pm
'Heart and Soul': 'Bridge Building'
Led by Brian Ellis and Sarah Tinker

Sunday 6th November, 11am-noon
'Animal Service'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Thursday 10th November, 7pm
London Playback Theatre
'Ageing: Combatting Loneliness'

Sunday 13th November, 11am-noon
'Remembrance Sunday'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 13th November, 12.30pm
Inclusive Communion
Led by Jane Blackall

Thursday 17th November, 7.00pm
Management Committee Meeting

Sunday 20th November, 11am-noon
'The Art of Conversation'
Led by Roy Clark & Sarah Tinker

Sunday 20th November, 12.30-1.15pm
'Finding Your Voice'
Singing workshop with Margaret

Sunday 27th November, 11am-noon
'A Theology of Migration'
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker
This service will include a charity collection for Send a Child to Hucklow

Wednesday 30th November, 5-7pm
Creativity Group
Working on Seasonal Wall-Hanging or Bring Your Own Craft Work

Dates for Your Diary:

Sunday 11th December, 11am
Christmas Carol Service and Lunch

Thursday 15th Dec, 6.30-8.30pm
A Celebration of Seasonal Traditions
with Carole Grace and Sarah Tinker

Community Builders A Message from our Minister



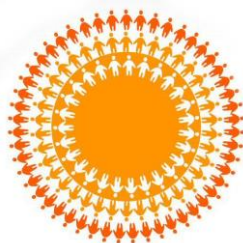
Community Builders. You'll probably know some. You probably are one. They come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. They behave in lots of different ways. They display a rich array of skills and experiences. And what they do, surprise, surprise, is to help build communities. But they may not set out each morning with that plan in mind. They're simply living their lives in a certain way. Particular values are shaping their actions.

If we're searching for a core way of being that community builders share, it's perhaps an approach to life that's outwards focused rather than focused primarily on themselves. They're looking for ways to make a difference, in the lives of those around them and in the communities of which they are part. But they also are aware that they themselves benefit from this outward focus.

Think of us Kensington Unitarians here at Essex Church, a small group in the midst of a big city, yet what a lot of community building is going on. Our foyer is often buzzing with conversation as local people gather for meetings, groups, classes, services of their own faith – around 40 different activities every month that we host. This is a conscious decision made by successive church committees, to have our building used well and to employ a warden to deal with all the work such lettings entail.

Within our own group, I'm grateful to all the people who notice a need and take action to sort it, those who remember a newcomer's name or ask about someone they've not seen for a while. Our building is looking smarter than it has for years and that is partly due to the generous donations we've been receiving that have helped us raise the necessary funds. It's also because people with skills and time offered to help get jobs done. Our fundraising for charities has increased this last year and that's because some of our members have made an effort to focus on specific causes to support. The task of building communities is never completed but occasionally it's good to stop for a moment and reflect on what has been achieved. Let's think of all the different places and ways in which we each build community and give ourselves a pat on the back. We're doing our bit to help the world.

Rev. Sarah Tinker



*"Community means strength that joins our strength
To do the work that needs to be done.
Arms to hold us when we falter.
A circle of healing. A circle of companions.
A place where we can trust and feel free.
Strengthened once more, we turn outwards to help our world."*

Adapted from words by Starhawk

In this month's newsletter...

* Thematic Ministry * Report on our recent 'Something More' Course by Corrina Dolso * Alternative Services around the District * Good Cause Collection: 'Send a Child to Hucklow' * 'Spirituality and Art' by Heidi Ferid * Photos from our Harvest Festival and 'Rumi Night' * News of Carole and Juliet's Walk in aid of Children in Need * Winter Coat Collection * IARF Meeting * 'Nothing Lasts?' sermon on impermanence by Rev. Sarah Tinker * and more...

Kensington Unitarians

At Essex Church (founded 1774), Notting Hill Gate

Kensington Unitarians are a community of kindred souls who meet each week at Essex Church in Notting Hill Gate to explore, reflect, converse, be still, share joys and sorrows, and support one another on life's journey. We are proud to be part of a worldwide and historic liberal religious tradition.

Our main activity is Sunday worship and we hold a service each week at 11am. All are welcome. Services are usually themed and include readings from a variety of sources, prayers, music, singing, stillness, and a short sermon. Our children's leaders provide an alternative programme of activities for younger people.

Small-group activities are another key part of our programme. We offer courses and one-off workshops exploring spiritual and religious matters and considering life's meaning together with others on the spiritual journey.

If you are aware of any member of our community who is unwell or suffering in some way and who would welcome contact from others in the church, please contact our minister.



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'I remember talking with a friend who has worked for many years at the Catholic Worker, a ministry to the poor in New York City. Daily she tries to respond to waves of human misery that are as ceaseless as surf in that community. I asked her how she could keep doing a work that never showed any results, a work in which the problems keep getting worse instead of better. I will never forget her enigmatic answer: "The thing you don't understand, Parker, is that just because something is impossible doesn't mean you shouldn't do it!"

I have another friend who has devoted most of his adult life to resisting the madness of war through actions of justice and peace. He has done everything from painfully unearthing the seeds of violence in his personal life to living in poverty so as to stay below the taxation level. He owns nothing in his own name because, if he did, the government could collect it as back-taxes. The money he "should" have given the government over the years, and more, he has donated to peace and justice projects.

Does he have any results to show for his efforts? Has he been effective? Hardly — at least, not by the normal calculus. His years of commitment to peace-making have been years of steady increase in wars and rumours of wars. So how does he stay healthy and sane? How does he maintain a commitment to this sort of active life? His answer completes the koan offered by my friend at the Catholic Worker: "I have never asked myself if I was being effective, but only if I was being faithful." He judges his action, not by the results it gets, but by its fidelity to his own calling and identity.'

Quaker Activist Parker J. Palmer

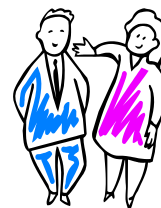
Creativity Group

Wednesday 30th November, 5.00-7.00pm
Here in the Hall at Essex Church



Our once-a-month creativity group will once again meet on the last Wednesday of the month in November. Please note, however, that we are now going to meet at the earlier time of 5.00-7.00pm. Sue Smith is encouraging people to participate in making another embroidered wall-hanging for the church, this time to represent the seasons of spring/summer. Alternatively you can bring along your own art/crafts and simply spend an evening being creative in good company. We will be meeting in the hall. Please do speak to Sue, Juliet, or Jane if you have any questions.

Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



Stewarding:

6th November: Alice Lambert
13th November: John Hands
20th November: Brian Ellis
27th November: Michaela von Britzke

Coffee:

6th November: Sue Smith
13th November: Juliet Edwards
20th November: Jane Blackall
27th November: Sue Smith & Helena Coope

Greeting:

6th November: Brian Ellis
13th November: Gina Bayley
20th November: Liz Tuckwell
27th November: Julia Alden

We circulate the rota list each month by email. Please contact Jane if you are willing to be on the rota mailing list.

rotas@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Report from our Recent Course: 'Something More'



I attended my first spiritual course at Kensington Unitarians which came to an end last week. Over four Thursday evenings we gathered in a small circle to explore ways of finding something beyond in our everyday lives within ourselves, our connections with others and the wider world. Themes were chosen from John Pritchard's book which also included darker aspects of life like suffering.

The course was very warmly facilitated by Jane and Sarah and allowed each of us to explore these themes in relation to our lives and experiences.

Alongside shared discussions and readings there were various activities presented in the form of some playful handouts and thought provoking questions. These tools gave me a way of asking myself questions and coming to realise the deeper meaning in my own life and how easily I could take more notice of this. There was never a feeling of giving the wrong answers and I felt that everyone in the group was made to feel at ease enough to share whatever they wanted or not and listen respectfully to others.

I thoroughly enjoyed the course and grateful for the opportunity to share and be inspired by the others participants. I have also found something more here at Kensington Unitarians and look forward to my next visit.

Corrina Dolso

'This "something more" is the subject matter of spirituality, which in Rowan Williams' definition is "the cultivation of a sensitive and rewarding relationship with eternal truth and love." Note the outward-facing nature of that definition. It's far removed from the self-absorption of some understandings of spirituality. It's the seriously fascinating business of exploring the nature of reality and our relationship with it.'

'In [a novel by Sarah Winman] the narrator is talking to an old family friend and asks if he believes in God:

'Do I believe in a mystery; the unexplained phenomenon that is life itself? The greater something that illuminates inconsequence in our lives; that gives us something to strive for as well as the humility to brush ourselves down and start all over again? Then yes, I do. It is the source of art, of beauty, of love, and proffers the ultimate goodness to mankind. That to me is God. That to me is life. That is what I believe in.'

Here is a description of subtlety, looking for an understanding of the divine that encompasses life, purpose, art, love and more.'

From 'Something More' by John Pritchard

Thematic Ministry



We're starting our thematic approach to ministry in December when our theme will be traditions. One of the aims of this approach is to engage our congregation, so do have a think about winter traditions that are important to you and let one of us know. Perhaps there's a favourite carol you'd like us to sing at our carol service, or something special you'd like to cook for our lunch, or a poem that means a lot to you that you'd like to suggest for inclusion in a service sometime.

Sarah, Jeannene, and Jane

Good Cause Collection of the Month

Send a Child to Hucklow



Collection on Sunday 27th November

"Send a Child to Hucklow" Fund is a Trust to arrange and administer holidays at the Unitarian Holiday Centre, Great Hucklow, Derbyshire in the United Kingdom for groups of disadvantaged children, having no regard to religious, political, racial and other considerations. The only condition is that the children selected would not otherwise have a holiday.

For more information: www.sendachildtohucklow.org.uk

Previous Charity Collections:

Thank you for your generosity in contributing to recent charity collections. I am pleased to let you know that we will be sending the following donations to good causes:

August – Mayhew Animal Home - £61 + Gift Aid

Sept – Red Cross (Clara Barton Fund) - £229 + GA

Extra Emergency Collection for Haiti - £199 + GA

October – Prison Phoenix Trust - £220 + Gift Aid

'Heart and Soul'

Midweek Spiritual Gatherings

Thursdays 3rd November
and 1st December from 7-8pm

Gathering at 6.45pm downstairs in the library
Followed by social time and refreshments



Come and join us for our monthly alternative spiritual gathering, with music and silence, words and prayers, and a chance to explore the evening's topic in relation to your own life. This will be followed by refreshments (Jane's home-made cake!) and fellowship. All are welcome to join us. Sarah and Brian will be co-leading in November on 'Bridge Building'.

If you would like to know more about 'Heart and Soul' gatherings email jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk

Alternative Services Around the District

As well as our monthly 'Heart and Soul' gatherings at Essex Church, some other London Unitarian chapels are offering alternative opportunities for spiritual nourishment.

Effra Road Chapel, Brixton

63 Effra Road, London, SW2 1BZ

Weekly from Wednesday 2nd November at 1pm

'Soul Space' – 'A midweek service, which is a spiritually inclusive service focused on mindfulness, meditation and fellowship, and which will serve those taking a break from work as well as those with a little more time'.

Please contact them if you'd like more information.

Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel

Hampstead, London, NW3 1NG

Monday 21st November at 7pm

(and every 3rd Monday of the month)

'Heart and Soul' – 'A gentle, informal and interactive service with a mix of readings, meditation and sharing.' Leighton Cole will be leading in November on 'Simplicity'.

Jeannene Powell

Inclusive Communion

Sundays 13th November, 18th December 2016
at 12.30pm Down in the Church Library



Once a month we hold a small-group communion, after the main morning service, downstairs in the library. A team of volunteers take turns in leading the services so we experience a variety of approaches. All are welcome to participate. If you would like to find out more about these services then please feel free to speak to Jane Blackall or Tristan Jovanović.

13th November – led by Jane Blackall

18th December (irregular date) – led by Tristan Jovanović



World Congress of Faiths Youngusband Lecture

'The Riddle of the One and the Many:
Reflections on Spirituality and the Brain'

Wednesday 9th November, 6.30-9.00pm

Heythrop College, 23 Kensington Square, London W8 5HN

As part of its 80th Anniversary Celebrations, the World Congress of Faiths is delighted to welcome Dr Iain McGilchrist to present its annual lecture, honouring the founder Sir Francis Youngusband. Dr McGilchrist has published original articles and research papers in a wide range of publications on topics in literature, philosophy, medicine and psychiatry. He is the author of the groundbreaking *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and The Making of the Western World* (Yale 2009), acclaimed as 'a dazzling masterpiece' and 'splendidly thought-provoking'. He is a former Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, a Fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, and former Consultant Psychiatrist and Clinical Director at the Bethlem Royal & Maudsley Hospital, London.

Tickets are £20 including buffet reception after lecture.

See: www.worldfaiths.org/youngusband-lecture-2016
or email jenny@worldfaiths.org for more information



Sponsored Walk

I was very pleased to have walked 5 miles on the sponsored walk for 'Children in Need'. I was particularly grateful to Juliet for accompanying me on the journey and sharing her sandwiches with me.

I want to say 'thank you' for the generosity of everyone. People sought me out to wish me well and it felt that we had that good will helping us as we became tired. The walk was very pretty, we started in Richmond and followed the river until we got to Ham House and then re-assessed our abilities to carry on we climbed up to Richmond Park. It rained, of course, we were suitably clad however, and came to no harm. My special moment was after the rain had finished and Juliet and I sitting overlooking Richmond and resting on my 'fur-lined' raincoat come cushion. Her sandwiches were delicious so refreshed we made our way home.

In total I raised £181. Thank you for your generosity.

Carole Grace

International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF)



Unitarians were founder members of the IARF and have been involved in its vital work since its inception in 1900. IARF was the first world organisation to encourage interfaith co-operation towards a common goal of increased freedom of religion and belief the world over and its members continue to promote dialogue and understanding in many ways. We recently provided meeting space for the IARF Peace Commission meeting here at Essex Church, organised by our friend Richard Boeke who lived here in the 90s with his minister wife Jopie. As part of our lettings policy we try to offer free meeting space for Unitarian groups whenever we can.

One Light Spiritual Gathering



'Commitment'

**Friday 11th November - 6.45 for 7pm start
Here at Essex Church, Notting Hill Gate**

A OneSpirit Interfaith Service for people of all faiths and none. This One Light Spiritual Gathering is offered by Christopher, Bernd and Alison. We will welcome you to the Remembrance Day OneSpirit Non-denominational Ceremony. This service includes healing and music with guests the Threshold Choir.

For further information contact: admin@osif.co.uk

False Bodies, True Selves: Exploring Body Image through a Spiritual Lens



One Sunday afternoon in October twelve women gathered in the library here at Essex Church to explore our sense of identity. Facilitated by Nicole Schnackenberg, and based on her recently published book, (pictured; copy now available in our church library).

This was a gentle yet deep exploration of our sense of self as women, and the disconnects we sometimes experience between our physical and inner senses of who we truly are. We considered the messages we receive from many sides about the ways we 'should' look and what it means to be a woman. These are not easy topics, yet Nicole held the group so well that we felt able to speak honestly with one another.

Thank you to Carolyn Appleby for suggesting and organising this event.

'Rumi Night' Concert



Some photos of the Rumi Night concert of gnostic rhythms performed by The Caravan of Love musicians from Brighton, who brought their beautifully meditative chanting to our service earlier this year.

'If spiritual teachings are to really transform our lives, they need to oscillate between two levels, the profound and the mundane. If practice is too profound, it's no good. We are full of wonderful, lofty insights, but lack the ability to get through the day with any gracefulness or to relate to the issues and people in ordinary life. We may be soaringly metaphysical, movingly compassionate, and yet unable to relate to a normal human or a worldly problem.

On the other hand, if practice is too mundane, if we become too interested in the details of how we and others feel and what we or they need or want, then the natural loftiness of our hearts will not be accessible to us, and we will sink under the weight of obligations, details, and daily-life concerns. This is when the master says, 'If you have a staff, I will give you a staff; if you need a staff, I will take it away.' We need both profound religious philosophy and practical tools for daily living. This double need, according to circumstances, seems to go with the territory of being human.'

Zen Teacher Norman Fischer

Photographs from our Harvest Festival Service

Stephanie Saville and Michaela von Britzke prepared a spectacular display for our harvest service. Photos by Jane and Juliet.





Our determined cupboard-builders Kamil and Mirek working against the clock to get all the work done in between bookings.

London Playback Theatre and GlobalNet21 Present:

Ageing: Combatting Loneliness



7pm, Thursday 10th November, at Essex Church

London Playback Theatre is collaborating with GlobalNet21 to open dialogue about ageing, the problems of isolation, and loneliness. At this event, we will share feelings, exchange experiences and stories on this growing problem. London Playback Theatre is a company of internationally experienced professional theatre practitioners, consultants, educators and therapists, creating instant theatre from real life stories. GlobalNet21 is a forum for education, social engagement and change, discussing the great issues of the 21st century to develop a new form of democracy, where people can again be involved.



Warden's Column



Monday morning at 8am Polbud (Polish Builders) arrived to start constructing the new storage cupboards in the church. They're on a tight schedule because it's half term - the only week the building is empty enough for them to have time to work. During school terms we have so many children's classes in the church it's only free for a few hours at a time. However they work fast and by the end of the day the shell of one of the cupboards walling off the side of the altar platform is already in place. By the end of Tuesday, they've built the replacement for the stewarding cupboard by the front doors and one of the little side cupboards to fit between the radiators. This is a phenomenal rate of work, but it's still going to be a race against time to finish by the end of the week because they can't work Wednesday or Friday - due to other activities in the space. One of them grimly says that they will start Saturday morning and keep going till they finish - even if they have to work all night. We decide on water-based varnish to minimise the impact of the smell on people using the space.

We've been waiting a long time for these cupboards. When we dug out Jane's original diagram of the design, it was dated 2010. However it didn't seem sensible to put built-in cupboards in place until we'd redecorated - and it didn't make sense to redecorate until we'd fixed the roof... Feels amazing that in a few days, all of those things will have fallen into place - and a brand new streamlined heating system - and the worship space will probably look better than it has since it was built. The final step will be to sand and re-varnish the floors - which we plan to get done at Christmas - and finally say goodbye to the old organ.

Meanwhile, we face the challenge of fitting everything we need to store there into the new cupboards. Although the ones each side of the altar are very big, they need to accommodate stacks of armless chairs and folding tables, the sound system and the filing cabinet of music - so that won't actually leave much spare space. Similarly the stewarding cupboard by the door has been designed to hold all the hymnbooks - but not a whole lot more. The cupboards we used to have between the old gas fires were much bigger than the ones that fit between the radiators, so it will be a bit of a juggling act to find new space for everything.

We do have a secret weapon though - as well as all the obvious new cupboards in the church, there are also two hidden ones whose location I'll reveal in my next column :-)

Meanwhile, you're very welcome to see if you can spot them - show me if you think you've found the secret!

Jenny Moy

Winter Coat Collection Here at Essex Church



This year we're supporting the Calling London voluntary organisation with their winter coat collection. They have many collection points all round London and we're going to provide space free of charge for them to sort all the coats out before they're distributed to those who need to keep warm. They're looking for clean coats in good condition, for men, women and children. So let's all check our cupboards and see what we can donate. You can bring coats to church anytime between 19th November and 9th December, in a bag labelled 'winter coat collection'.

Sarah Tinker



Thanks to Greta from our children's group for this picture of Icarus, who flew a bit too close to the sun.

'Breath for Life'



**Workshops on Breath for Depression.
Mental Health and for Accelerated Healing**

**Sunday 13th November, 3pm and 5.10pm
Held Here at Essex Church**

Ben Wolff is a tutor for Uma Dinsmore-Tuli's Yoga Nidra Teacher Trainings. In her words "Ben Wolff is a Yoga Teacher, Clinical Hypnotherapist and Dream Yoga practitioner, with a profound depth of experience and understanding of Yoga Nidra. He has an acute and wide understanding of contemporary scientific research into meditation, neuroscience and other fields related to Yoga Nidra."

Ben's Yoga Nidra credits include The Life Centre and Simon Lowe's Yoga Garden Party. He also lectures with Dr Lucy Clarke and Nirlipta Tuli on "Yoga and Clinical Psychology in Society" to post-graduate PHD level psychologists at Salomans, Canterbury Christchurch University.

Additionally Ben is part of the recently launched think tank by Heather Mason "Yoga 4 the NHS" and is co-course designer and co-tutor of the CPD Advanced Yoga Nidra for teachers and therapists. He also teaches private group classes, including to people who work in Government at Westminster and breath for advanced yoga teachers at Norman Blair's studio.

Ben's key teachers include Dr Richard Brown, Dr Patricia Gerberg, Norman Blair, Uma Dinsmore-Tuli and Nirlipta Tuli, Heather Mason and Rebecca French. As a self-styled breathmaster he has first-hand experience of the healing power of the breath and fully understands that the breath can be the most powerful tool we have. "The breath is my yoga and my yoga is the breath".

Workshop Details:

**3.00-4.50pm - Breath for Depression
and Mental Health - £20**

**5.10-7.00pm - Breath for Accelerated
Healing and Rapid Mending - £20**

(£35 for both workshops)

**For more information contact Catia
Torresin: ctorresin@hotmail.com**

Spirituality and Art

For the purpose of this talk I will refer to West European and American painting. There are of course wonderful examples of spiritual art in many cultures and in many different art forms but for today I would like to concentrate on the area I am most familiar with.

I will look at three different areas. First narrative painting, secondly painting inspired by nature, and thirdly abstract painting.

We all need a narrative to give our lives a sense of direction, meaning and spiritual guidance. The Medieval western church gave painters the task to make the biblical stories visible and many artists responded to this call and created very beautiful works. Giotto and Botticelli are outstanding examples of this tradition. There are many other narratives that have inspired and fascinated people throughout the centuries. I have chosen the story of Peter Pan. On our walks after the Sunday service, John and I often see the Peter Pan statue in Hyde Park. The story of this boy who refuses to grow up, who calls children to adventure, but also has a very dark and dangerous side, is a modern myth. I have depicted Peter Pan with butterflies. Trying to catch these beautiful and elusive creatures seems an appropriate preoccupation for an ambiguous figure like Peter Pan.



The second aspect of spirituality in art is nature. For centuries artists have not only tried to copy nature but to find deeper meaning in their preoccupation with all the visual inspiration provided by nature. The nineteenth century was the time when the most important landscape paintings were produced, and Turner's work is a supreme example of someone who went far beyond copying the visual world. I include one of my own paintings of a volcanic explosion which is something I have never seen but nevertheless visualised as a reminder of powerful forces alive in nature.



The third aspect I want to look at is so-called abstract art. Paintings where recognisable images completely - or almost completely - disappear, where colour and composition are the main elements started to appear in the twentieth century. It might come as a surprise to see these paintings as spiritual, yet Kandinsky - one of the most important pioneers of abstract art - wrote a book with the title *Concerning The Spiritual In Art*. It was first published more than one hundred years ago in 1912. For Kandinsky colour and shape had quite distinctive spiritual significance, and he developed fairly complex theories around this. In the second half of the twentieth century, Mark Rothko produced a body of amazing abstract work, some of which can be seen at Tate Modern. Unlike earlier twentieth century painters, Rothko refused to put any definite interpretations on his work. He wanted the viewers to be free to find their own way of engaging with his paintings, but he said his work was for him part of a religious experience.

I have started to produce a series of abstract paintings and it has had a very liberating effect on me. I find it quite exhilarating to engage directly with colour and composition. All these paintings are part of a fairly lengthy process, putting layer upon layer and allowing a process of transformation to happen, which often surprises me.

I hope my paintings (two are pictured here) might give the viewers a sense of enjoyment and inspiration. I realise of course that there are many different ways of getting in touch with our creativity, and painting is just one of them.

Heidi Ferid

'A piece of my soul might be encased in a gallery in Seattle or Rome or Brussels. In fact, I have found lost portions of my soul in these very places. I remember walking up a curving stairway in the magnificent art museum in Brussels and discovering a great piece of my identity in the twelfth-century stone reliefs I saw there. I suspected before but never knew so palpably that I have some kind of life in that century, or that it has a place in mine. I have no doubt that the experience that day was one of remembering, for it had all the emotions of recognition, not discovery.'

Thomas Moore

'Nothing Lasts? A Service on Impermanence'

Address by Sarah Tinker from 9th October 2016

This sermon is also available online as a podcast.

My hope is that coming to church is going to be useful for each of us in the living of our daily lives. This story gives us all a helpful suggestion of how to get out of a difficult situation. And that situation is - if you ever break something that belongs to someone else, something really special, and you don't know how to tell the person that you've broken their special object.

The Zen master Ikkyu was always a quick thinker. It helped him out of a pickle in his youth. Here is what happened a long time ago. As a young monk, Ikkyu accidentally dropped his master's tea cup, breaking it into many pieces.

This was serious, because the tea cup was the master's favourite; a rare treasure, beautifully crafted from precious material. Of all of the master's possessions, it was probably the one thing he cherished the most - and now it was hopelessly smashed!

Ikkyu felt dreadful that he'd broken the teacup, but before he could come up with a plan a plan to run away, he heard footsteps approaching. He swept the broken pieces together and, blocking them from view with his body, turned to face the door just as his master entered.

When they were within speaking distance, Ikkyu asked: "Master, why must people die?"

The master replied: "It is perfectly natural. Everything in the world experiences both life and death."

"Everything?"

"Everything."

"So it is not something we should feel upset about?"

"Ah no, dear Ikkyu. There is no need to be upset. Everything is part of the great cycle of life" The Master loved to teach on this particular subject and soon got into his swing reminding Ikkyu of their tradition's teachings on this subject of impermanence, that no thing can last for ever. It was a subject that Ikkyu's teacher loved to teach about - and talk about - often at great length!

Eventually the crafty young monk Ikkyu moved aside to present the broken pieces. "Master... your cup has experienced its inevitable death..."

(story from taoism.net - repeated here with thanks.)

Something alerted me the other day to the fact that I started teaching religious education as a subject some 35 years ago. They say that time flies when you're having fun don't they, but that seems an eternity ago. And teaching teenagers a subject they often don't want to be taught can make time seem to move very slowly indeed. But over the years I found that certain aspects of the subject could grab their attention. And one of those aspects - is this topic we're exploring in today's service - impermanence - the spiritual teaching 'that nothing lasts'. I think this teaching is a compelling one, it's also a really difficult one to understand fully. And when you meet a spiritual teacher who lives from this essential truth of impermanence you know you're in the presence of someone special. Years ago up at Findhorn I was fortunate to meet a Tibetan Buddhist lama called Lama Yeshe.



There's lots I remember about him. He'd spent 12 years on silent retreat before turning to a life of teaching. 12 years without speaking!! He'd spent years, as many Tibetan monks do as part of their training, meditating in front of the carefully stacked bones of their fellow monks who'd died before them. And he was filled with joy. 'I wake each morning' he said 'and I say to myself - I'm a lucky lucky lama, lucky lama Yeshe!' And the source of his joy was the sense of aliveness that can come when we know that all life must perish, all tea cups must break, we are all on our way out.

The chant we just sang, with its first line, 'many things will change, we feel it and we know' - the words were written by Matthew Smith minister in Framlingham and Bury St Edmunds, and it's becoming a new favourite with me. But every time I sing it, I think of Matthew and want to say to him - 'not many things Matthew - every thing will change - but we don't always want to feel it or know it. We'd rather live as if everything was going to last forever, thank you very much'. But try singing that!

The Buddha's teachings on impermanence are worth careful study. No thing, no material thing can last forever, yet it is human nature to crave permanence. We become attached, says the Buddha, and our attachment is the source of our suffering. We try to make things stay the same - in our relationships with one another, in our societies, in ourselves, yet change is built into the very structure of existence. But there is something in human nature that encourages us to pretend that life is permanent and fixed. We find it hard to allow ourselves and others to change and grow in relationships. George Bernard Shaw's quote on this subject is a healthy reminder: 'The only man I know who behaves sensibly is my tailor; he takes my measurements anew each time he sees me. The rest go on with their old measurements and expect me to fit them.'

Dear Lama Yeshe, who I mentioned earlier on writes in quite a challenging way about knee pain and as I know several of you are experts on this topic you may wish to disagree with him when he writes that,

'Every aspect of your body and mind is impermanent: changing, changing, changing. Even when your knee hurts, it's not as bad as you think - your ego exaggerates the pain. It solidifies the feeling, makes it feel unchangeable, like iron. This is a totally wrong conception, a completely unrealistic interpretation. If you can realize this, the pain will be digested by your wisdom and disappear. Why? Because the pain you feel in your knee does not arise by itself but in combination with ego activity. When one of these elements disappears, the combination also disappears.'

One to discuss further I think.

‘Nothing Lasts?’ *(continued)*

Address by Sarah Tinker

If impermanence is within the very nature of all that exists and if change is inevitable, then life is completely uncertain. But to face life's uncertainty is a very big ask for most of us. It's a scary prospect. Each time we greet one another, can we greet them as if we might never see them again? Each time we take breath, can we breathe as if it might be our last breath? When we get in a tizz about life's vital issues – like being late, or something precious getting broken or having a painful knee or someone saying something hurtful, or a government behaving in a manner we find frankly reprehensible, - can we hold an awareness that all these human edifices will fall away into nothingness – in the blink of an eye – from the aspect of eternity – as Spinoza – 17th century Dutch philosopher famously explored.

‘A change is gonna come’, that is for sure, but quite what that change may be is less under our control than we might care to imagine. Susan Jeffers, wrote a really useful book called *Embracing Uncertainty* – and one of her suggestions was that for a day we try adding the word ‘maybe’ to every sentence and every thought. It's a helpful reminder of how certain we prefer to feel about life.

It's in our natures to live as though life is certain, so we have to help one another to live with uncertainty. Spending time with people who are newly bereaved is one of the most moving aspects of ministry. It's a privilege to be allowed into the life of an individual, of a family at a time of such raw emotion. One of the most revealing aspects for me is that we do all cope with loss, and we do it in our own personal ways. We each of us have our particular life teachings and sources of comfort that help us through. And these understandings can provide comfort to others in their turn. We all have insights and understandings to offer one another.

Change is gonna come. But we don't get to choose what form change will take. It may be sudden or slow. Some of us have experienced the shock of sudden changes, the phone call we'll not forget, the life changing conversation, the painful news delivered kindly or harshly. We also know the changes life brings more slowly – our growing or dwindling abilities and strengths, the colour of hair or the suppleness of body. Our life task is to adjust to the changes we must live through.

Nothing lasts, not even this lengthy sermon. But if you look in the order of service you'll see that ‘nothing lasts?’ has a question mark. That question mark points us towards some timeless values that we humans can pass on, one to another, values we live by. These are the qualities we share when we silently hold the hand of a friend who is newly bereaved, when we walk and talk with someone whose relationship has just come painfully to an end, or who has recently received a scary health diagnosis. These are the qualities we share when we hear someone's hopes and dreams, their plans for next steps, their new awareness of possibilities. Isn't this what it is to be human – to share our experiences, our glimpses of reality, to find timeless values by which to live our temporary and oh so precious lives. I'm glad to be sharing that living with all of you, amen.

Social Action: What We Do



We've been working on a more active approach to social action this last year and are looking for more causes to get involved with in the year ahead. But we thought people might find it helpful to read about the social action commitments our congregation already have. Firstly we commit usually the fourth Sunday in the month collection to a chosen charity, which alternates generally between Unitarian and wider causes. We've made a year-long commitment to support Simple Gifts, the Unitarian social action project in Bethnal Green that is doing so much innovative work to bring diverse communities together and to meet specific groups' needs. We were glad to buy them a set of yoga mats for a new fitness class.

Our congregation has long held shares in Traidcraft and is a Fairtrade Church, using fairly traded products whenever we can and encouraging our user groups to do the same. Thanks to the encouragement of the Blair family, we give at least £1,000 a year to SOS Villages to support the education of two teenage girls in Swaziland. We make donations during the year to groups that make particular appeals and especially have a commitment to supporting Glassdoor, the West London Churches Homeless Shelter charity, based at the Methodist Church in Kings Road, and running winter night shelters in various local churches. Our building does not lend itself to having people sleep here overnight so we raise money to help the scheme function as well as it does. We also give £25 a month to the St Mungos charity that works with homeless people throughout London, running many innovative support projects. In the past our church staff have apparently had to be quite firm in stopping rough sleeping in the front garden and this monthly payment is a small way to offer some support to those who find themselves without a home here in London. Our church lettings policy allows us to offer reduced price or even free meeting space to worthy causes and our hall has been used for sponsored yoga events and fundraising concerts.

Do let us know if you have a social action project you'd like us to support.

Carole Grace and Liz Tuckwell

‘Kindness is the loveliest flower in the garden of virtue. It blooms in every kind of soil, and often in the darkest corners. It knows no particular season, and it flourishes in every latitude.’

Harry M. Tippett

Services at Essex Church in November



Sunday 6th November, 11am – ‘Animal Service’

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Join us in a celebration of all creatures great and small, our pets, the wild animals that share our planet earth home and even the pests that plague us. Do bring a photo or favourite cuddly toy with you, or any living creature that likes to come to church on a Sunday.

Sunday 13th November, 11am – ‘Remembrance Sunday’

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Our service will particularly honour those whose lives were ended in warfare and who never had the opportunity to fulfil the promise of their young lives. Do let Sarah know if there is a life you would like us especially to honour.

Sunday 20th November, 11am – ‘The Art of Conversation’

Service led by Roy Clark and Sarah Tinker

In this service we will consider how simple communication can make such a difference to a day and to a life.

Sunday 27th November, 11am – ‘A Theology of Migration’

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

The Scriptures of all the world's religions contain stories of migration. How might they help us retain an open hearted response to 21st century seekers of better, safer lives.



‘Finding Our Voice’ Monthly Singing Workshops



Sunday 20th November (no class in December)
after the service from 12.30 to 1.15pm

Margaret Marshall has worked as a professional singer all her adult life and is also a very experienced singing teacher. She is leading monthly sessions to help us all find our voice. These workshops are for anyone who is prepared to open their mouth and make a sound. Margaret will show us how to improve the quality and strength of our voices. Using a few simple exercises we'll gain joy and confidence in our singing by learning how to produce and develop the voice, something everyone can do. We'll work with the breath and overcome unconscious blocks that can prevent us singing with our true potential. Fun and achievement are guaranteed and these sessions are designed for everyone, whatever your experience or ability. All welcome.

Christmas at Essex Church Dates for Your Diaries



Carol Service & Congregational Lunch Sunday 11th December, 11am onwards

Invite your friends and join us for a rousing carol-singing service and a shared Christmas lunch afterwards on 11th December.

A Celebration of Seasonal Traditions Thursday 15th December, 6.30-8.30pm

A celebration of seasonal poetry, music and other treats led by Carole Grace and Sarah Tinker. Let us know if you plan to come and if you have a favourite wintry poem you would like to read during this evening's festive gathering.

Candlelit Christmas Eve Gathering Saturday 24th December, 5-6pm

We will be holding our traditional, rather meditative, carol service on Christmas Eve once again this year. It is likely that a group will go out for dinner at a local restaurant after the service. Please let Jane know if you are interested.