**Calendar November 2020**

**Ministers Message**

You may recall that a few years ago I was invited to participate in “Men’s Health Forum” at Parliament. It was hosted by Baroness Floella Benjamin. Floella must be perhaps the most genuinely wonderful human being I have ever met. Lat Friday Christine Anstey, a member at Dunham Road told me that she was on “Desert Island Discs”. I listened to her wonderful life story. What was clear was the deep love and care within her, exemplified by her life. She spoke of her struggles as a black immigrant growing up the 1950’s and 60’s and her how she worked hard to develop her career. She has been a campaigner for so many groups of people. She also spoke about being appointed the chancellor of the University of Exeter and how instead of shaking hands with graduates she breaks tradition and hugs every single one. As someone who has received one of those hugs, I have never known a more loving one. Floella is one of those special people who lives by and through love and I believe is a wonderful example of what we can be if we live by and through love.

Now Floella came to fame as children’s tv presenter on “Playschool”. That night sue and myself watched a wonderful film “A Beautiful Day in the Neighbourhood. It tells the story of cynical journalist going to interview the much loved American children’s television icon Fred Rogers. It is a beautiful film about reconciliation and transformation as the cynical journalist Lloyd Vogel is transformed by the presence and love exemplified in the life of Rogers. He reconciles with his own father who is dying and who abandoned him and sisters in their childhood. At one point in the film it is suggested that Rogers could be seen as some kind of saint. Roger’s wife though disputes this and says if he was a saint then no one could aspire to live a life like him.

Roger’s shows his vulnerability and also talks of his own challenges as a parent. It would be difficult to be the child of such a person, just as it would to be the child of Floella too. As it is difficult for any of us to live up to any other ideal. That though does not mean that we should not true. The wonderful thing about the great examples is that they were very human, just like you and i. that does not mean that we cannot aspire to be like them.

I wonder who your heroes were, either as children and or adults. Who are the people who have or who still inspire you. Do you see them as humans or as saints. Perhaps this is something to ponder and perhaps continue to aspire to in this time of struggle and need.

Love and respect

Rev Danny

**Zoom Events this month**

All Zoom events, as well as the Sunday service can be accessed on the same ID 84190828195 no password required

Wednesday 4th November at 7pm “Living the Questions/Our Common Search for Meaning”: “Family, friendship, relationship and community in a time of physical distance.” A philosophical and spiritual conversation group

Thursday 5th November at 7pm “Consolation, sorrow and joy” A poetry evening.

Monday 16th November at 7pm “Colours of Grief: Our shared experience of love and loss” A grief support group

Thursday 19th November at 7pm “Consolation, sorrow and joy” A poetry evening.

Thursday 26th November at 7pm “Consolation, sorrow and joy” A poetry evening.

Monday 30th November at 7pm “Colours of Grief: Our shared experience of love and loss” A grief support group

**Other Material**

From “A Chosen Faith: An Introduction to Unitarian Universalism” by [Forrest Church](https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/search?author_first=Forrest&author_last=Church), [John A. Buehrens](https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/search?author_first=John+A.&author_last=Buehrens)

*John A. Buehrens and Forrest Church quoting Jacob Trapp's hospitality to the distinctive notes in each of the world's religions.*

"Each of the great religions has a distinctive note, to be likened to the strings of a harp.

"In Hinduism it is the note of spirit:  
a universe throbbing with divine energy and meaning.

"In Buddhism it is the wisdom of self-discipline:  
quenching the fire of desire in the cool waters of meditation.

"In Confucianism it is reciprocity:  
mutual consideration is the basis of society.

"In Taoism it is to conquer by inaction:  
be lowly and serviceable, like a brook; become rich by sharing.

"In Judaism it is exodus from bondage:  
the covenant of responsibility in freedom.

"In Islam it is the note of submission:  
'Our God and your God is one, to whom we are self-surrendered.'

"In Christianity it is that all may become one:  
'This is my body broken for you.'  
'Inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of these.' "

From “Meditations of the Heart” by [Howard Thurman](https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/search?author_first=Howard&author_last=Thurman) (slightly edited)

*A recognition that if all life is one, that changes the nature of injury.*

**All Life is One**

"They, as part of us, have done this to us."

"It was a very simple statement — 'They, as part of us, have done this to us.' Think it over very, very carefully. One of the most direct results of a sense of injury is the element of divisiveness or separateness that it introduces immediately. 'Look at what they are doing to me!' or 'Why do people treat me that way?' It is obvious how this mood, understandable as it is, cuts the tie that binds human to human. Such an attitude establishes a gulf between people, made possible by the effect of their deeds on their own kind. Often we say to ourselves that the only conditions under which it is possible for one person deliberately to injure another is for the injurer to be able to regard himself as being something other than, and perhaps more than, the injured one. There is something utterly fantastic about the thing that takes place in a personality before that personality is able to hurt deliberately. Some kind of immunity against feeling must be established. On the other hand, the injured person seems instinctively to feel that the person who injures him must be different, deeply and profoundly different or else the thing that was done would not have been done. Hence the cry, 'Look at what they are doing to me.' But when we begin with the basic idea that all life is one — that there is no such thing as an ultimate detachment of any part of life from the whole — then the meaning of the simple statement, 'They, as part of us, have done this to us,' begins to make sense. The moment that this is understood, two attitudes become at once apparent. One: it is no longer possible to separate oneself from another person even when that other person behaves as if he were not a part of one's self. What the other person does to me is, in some very real sense, a part of me doing that thing to a part of us. Two: it becomes a reasonable thing for me to hope to understand another person because of the hope that I can and may ultimately understand myself. This is the meaning of the statement, Know thyself, which has been taken more mystically from the statement, 'Thou hast seen thy brother, thou has seen thy God.' "

From “Unlearning Back to God: Essays on Inwardness, 1985 – 2005” by Mark Nepo

*Mark Nepo on sharing the same river and the earth together.*

**We Share the Same River**

"I see it moving through you.  
It makes you tremble. It makes you  
crumble before strangers as if the next  
step is too much to bear, and yet inside,  
way inside, it is refreshing, isn't it,  
to feel something that is not entirely yours  
course through you so unexpectedly. First  
it moves through you, and now it moves  
through me. We share the same river.  
It starts before us and rushes beyond us.  
Sometimes we run from the river though we can't.  
But now I bow to drink of it as it moves through you  
and you bow to drink of it as it moves through me,  
the wash spilling through us, breaking us of pride,  
the wash sounding out compassion, compassion. We  
share the same river. It makes the earth one living thing.  
Between us it pulls until strangers are no longer  
strange, until enemies forget why they fight.  
First it moves through you bringing sand  
from your ancestors to swell your tongue  
of its excuses. Then it moves through me  
breaking me of all difference. We share  
the same river and where it enters  
we lose our stubbornness the way  
fists wear open when held under  
in the stream."

From “Singing in the Night: Collected Meditations: Volume Five” edited by Mary Bernard. It is by David O. Rankin and is titled “Our Common Destiny”

“First, I must begin with my own creation. I must celebrate the miracle of evolution that resulted in a living entity named David. I must assist in the unfolding of the process by deciding who I am, by fashioning my own identity, by creating myself each day. I must listen to the terrors, the desires, the impulses that clash in the depths of my soul. I must know myself, or I will be made and used by others.

Second, I must learn to affirm my neighbours. I must respect others, not for their function, but for their *being.* I must put others at the centre of my attention, to treat them as ends, and to recognise our common destiny. I must never use people to win glory, or to measure the ego, or to escape from responsibility. I must listen to their words, their thoughts, their coded messages.

Finally, I must value action more than intention. I must feel, think, judge, decide, and then risk everything in acts of gratuitous freedom. I must batter the walls of loneliness. I must leap the barriers of communication. I must tear down the fences of anonymity. I must destroy the obstacles to life and liberty. Not in my mind (as a wistful dream). But in my acts (as a daily reality).

Can we live as one? At one with ourselves, at one with one another, at one with those people who we see as being different to ourselves, can we live at one with all of life? Well I believe it is possible. It begins within our own hearts and souls and in the ways that we conduct our lives. It will not be easy though, as the forces of division are all around us and indeed within us.

Therefore, it must begin within our own hearts and souls in the way we live our own lives. It begins by learning to revere life as the most precious God given gift there is, that all are made in that one image. If we do this, we will surely no longer be able to create divisions within ourselves, one another and all life.

“A Glimpse in the Pinewoods of a World That Could Be” by Parker J Palmer

I once had an encounter with an angry man. He was angry about something hopeful I’d said during a radio interview. My hopefulness convinced him that I was blind to all that’s wrong with our world. He called me a couple of names I’d not heard since I was at Berkeley in the ‘60s, en route to becoming a community organizer — such as “bourgeois evader of social responsibility,” or words to that effect.

I’m not unhappy with the way I responded to him. I began by affirming [what I found true in his statement](https://onbeing.org/blog/losing-our-illusions/) — God knows there IS a lot wrong with our world. Then I calmly disagreed with what I did not find true. I invited him to look at some historical evidence that hope can help us make progress on critical problems — if and when we’re willing to act courageously on our hope. But I’m afraid that what I said did little if anything to close the gap between us.

Today, at 5 a.m., in the course of my usual poetry browsing and reading, I found this poem by [Mary Oliver](https://onbeing.org/programs/mary-oliver-listening-to-the-world/) — or should I say, Saint Mary Oliver! Who’d’a thunk that a poem about two deer grazing in the pinewoods would take me back to my “angry man” encounter, but it did. The key is in those lines,

*“This / is not a poem about a dream, / though it could be. / This is a poem about the world / that is ours, or could be.”*

It’s also in that superb final stanza, which is about one way to [get to the world that could be ours](https://onbeing.org/blog/means-of-justice-must-match-its-ends/).

That angry man and I disagree on how to get there. But I’d like to think [we share the conviction](http://www.civilconversationsproject.org/) that there’s always a world that could be. What I know for sure is that it depends on us, on thee and me…

**5 A.M. in the Pinewoods**

I’d seen

their hoofprints in the deep

needles and knew

they ended the long night

under the pines, walking

like two mute

and beautiful women toward

the deeper woods, so I

got up in the dark and

went there. They came

slowly down the hill

and looked at me sitting under

the blue trees, shyly

they stepped

closer and stared

from under their thick lashes and even

nibbled some damp

tassels of weeds. This

is not a poem about a dream,

though it could be.

This is a poem about the world

that is ours, or could be.

Finally

one of them—I swear it!—

would have come to my arms.

But the other

stamped sharp hoof in the

pine needles like

the tap of sanity,

and they went off together through

the trees. When I woke

I was alone,

I was thinking:

so this is how you swim inward,

so this is how you flow outward,

so this is how you pray.

**Mary Oliver**

“Everything Is Waiting for You?” by David Whyte

After Derek Mahon

Your great mistake is to act the drama  
as if you were alone. As if life  
were a progressive and cunning crime  
with no witness to the tiny hidden  
transgressions. To feel abandoned is to deny  
the intimacy of your surroundings. Surely,  
even you, at times, have felt the grand array;  
the swelling presence, and the chorus, crowding  
out your solo voice. You must note  
the way the soap dish enables you,  
or the window latch grants you freedom.  
Alertness is the hidden discipline of familiarity.  
The stairs are your mentor of things  
to come, the doors have always been there  
to frighten you and invite you,  
and the tiny speaker in the phone  
is your dream-ladder to divinity.

Put down the weight of your aloneness and ease into the  
conversation. The kettle is singing  
even as it pours you a drink, the cooking pots  
have left their arrogant aloofness and  
seen the good in you at last. All the birds  
and creatures of the world are unutterably  
themselves. Everything is waiting for you.

From “Your Life Is Your Message: Finding Harmony with Yourself, Others, and the Earth”

**By**[**Eknath Easwaran**](https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/search?author_first=Eknath&author_last=Easwaran)

*Eknath Easwaran on patience as an important ingredient for self-transformation.*

"Patience is one of the most valuable allies in the difficult journey of self-transformation. . . . When you are able to be patient with others, you can be patient with yourself, and that will give you all the inner support you need to persevere and make the changes you want to make in your life. But patience can't be acquired overnight. It's just like building up a muscle. Every day you need to work on it, to push its limits. When people tell me they don't have any patience, I always say, 'that's only because you've never pushed it.'

"Every day I push my patience. Whenever people provoke me or cause me difficulties (which is seldom, but it does happen), I don't get agitated or give up on them or try to be critical. I say to myself, 'Here's a chance to extend my patience. Let me bear with him until he falls down, and then help him get up. Let me bear with her until she comes around, and then work with her in harmony.' That kind of gritting your teeth and bearing it, establishing your roots deeper and deeper in your consciousness, can bring you, as Gandhi proved, an endurance that no government or corporation or institution can shake.

"In Sanskrit, God is called *kshamasagara*, an ocean of patience. Look at all that we are doing to the earth, yet because God is an ocean of patience, when we learn to be patient with ourselves and others, we become humble instruments in his hands, bringing harmony and peace to the world."