**Minister’s Message**

Hi folks how are we all doing? These are difficult days. We are in the middle of a deeply challenging winter, all wondering how the days and weeks pan out. There is real hope that at some time in the not too distant future, with the new vaccines, that life will return to some kind of normality in the not too distant future, that we will be bale to truly be together again; together with our loved ones and of course fully together as a congregation. We are truly in this together, all the way, let us continue to take care of ourselves and one another.

I write this message one day after the inauguration of new US President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, a day of hope and renewal. That said yesterday truly was a mixed day, a classic example of what Moses described as the blessings and curses that come with choosing life. Yesterday we suffered the highest death rate caused by Covid 19. Yesterday we lost 1820 people in the UK, by the weekend over 100,000 souls will have been lost to this virus. The loss in this land and every land on this earth breaks my heart, I weep in sorrow for the loss. It is of course not just the loss of life it is the effect it is having on society and each of us as individuals. It is imperative that we do all that we can to support one another and those in wider society. We all have a part to play.

So yesterday, like most days, was a very much a day of blessings and curses. It did feel like the first stirrings of a new hope, coming to life in frozen ground of a cold dark winter. It felt like new light was coming through, a new hope, a fresh hope. Hope born by the loving action of the whole of humanity, a hope that we must all bring to life. It is our task, for by goodness our whole world needs it. We all of us hold the whole world in our hands.

Love and respect

Rev Danny

**Activities on Zoom**

Please note that all activities can be accessed via Zoom ID 84190828195 no password required. They can also be listened to via telephone by dialling telephone number 01314601196 or 02030512874 All you have to do is call the number and when prompted simply type in the Zoom ID 84190828195

Monday 1st February at 7pm “Colours of Grief Our Shared Experience of Love and Loss”

Wednesday 3rd February December at 11am “Coffee and Conversation”

Wednesday 3rd of February at 7pm”Living the Questions” “Impermanence: Is Change the Nature of Life” co-hosted by Geoffrey Little

Thursday 4th February at 7pm “Consolation, Sorrow and Joy: Together in Poetry and Verse” poetry night on Zoom only

Friday 5th February “Quiz” at 4pm

Wednesday 10th February at 11am “Coffee and Conversation”

Thursday 11th February at 7pm “Consolation, Sorrow and Joy: Together in Poetry and Verse” poetry night.

Friday 12th February “Quiz” at 4pm.

Monday 15th February at 7pm “Colours of Grief Our Shared Experience of Love and Loss”

Wednesday 17th February December at 11am “Coffee and Conversation”

Thursday 18th February at 7pm “Consolation, Sorrow and Joy: Together in Poetry and Verse” poetry night on Zoom only

Friday 19th February “Quiz” at 4pm

Wednesday 24th February at 11am “Coffee and Conversation”

Thursday 15th February at 7pm “Consolation, Sorrow and Joy: Together in Poetry and Verse” poetry night.

Friday 26th February “Quiz” at 4pm.

**Extra Material**

Please find below extra material which you may choose to include in the calendar. I will begin with the incredible poem shared by the US  Youth poet laureate Amanda Gorman. It stole the show and so many hearts yesterday.

“The Hill We Climb” by Amanda Gorman written for and shared at the inauguration of President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris

**W**hen day comes, we ask ourselves where can we find light in this never-ending shade?
The loss we carry, a sea we must wade.
We’ve braved the belly of the beast.
We’ve learned that quiet isn’t always peace,
and the norms and notions of what “just” is isn’t always justice.
And yet, the dawn is ours before we knew it.
Somehow we do it.
Somehow we’ve weathered and witnessed a nation that isn’t broken,
but simply unfinished.
We, the successors of a country and a time where a skinny Black girl descended from slaves and raised by a single mother can dream of becoming president, only to find herself reciting for one.

And yes, we are far from polished, far from pristine,
but that doesn’t mean we are striving to form a union that is perfect.
We are striving to forge our union with purpose.
To compose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters, and conditions of man.
And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us, but what stands before us.
We close the divide because we know, to put our future first, we must first put our differences aside.
We lay down our arms so we can reach out our arms to one another.
We seek harm to none and harmony for all.
Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true:
That even as we grieved, we grew.
That even as we hurt, we hoped.
That even as we tired, we tried.
That we’ll forever be tied together, victorious.
Not because we will never again know defeat, but because we will never again sow division.

Scripture tells us to envision that everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree and no one shall make them afraid.
If we’re to live up to our own time, then victory won’t lie in the blade, but in all the bridges we’ve made.
That is the promise to glade, the hill we climb, if only we dare.
It’s because being American is more than a pride we inherit.
It’s the past we step into and how we repair it.
We’ve seen a force that would shatter our nation rather than share it.
Would destroy our country if it meant delaying democracy.
This effort very nearly succeeded.
But while democracy can be periodically delayed,
it can never be permanently defeated.
In this truth, in this faith, we trust,
for while we have our eyes on the future, history has its eyes on us.
This is the era of just redemption.
We feared it at its inception.
We did not feel prepared to be the heirs of such a terrifying hour,
but within it, we found the power to author a new chapter, to offer hope and laughter to ourselves.
So while once we asked, ‘How could we possibly prevail over catastrophe?’ now we assert, ‘How could catastrophe possibly prevail over us?’

We will not march back to what was, but move to what shall be:
A country that is bruised but whole, benevolent but bold, fierce and free.
We will not be turned around or interrupted by intimidation because we know our inaction and inertia will be the inheritance of the next generation.
Our blunders become their burdens.
But one thing is certain:
If we merge mercy with might, and might with right, then love becomes our legacy and change, our children’s birthright.

So let us leave behind a country better than the one we were left.
With every breath from my bronze-pounded chest, we will raise this wounded world into a wondrous one.
We will rise from the golden hills of the west.
We will rise from the wind-swept north-east where our forefathers first realized revolution.
We will rise from the lake-rimmed cities of the midwestern states.
We will rise from the sun-baked south.
We will rebuild, reconcile, and recover.
In every known nook of our nation, in every corner called our country,
our people, diverse and beautiful, will emerge, battered and beautiful.
When day comes, we step out of the shade, aflame and unafraid.
The new dawn blooms as we free it.
For there is always light,
if only we’re brave enough to see it.
If only we’re brave enough to be it.

**“The Point of Arrival”**by Carrie Newcomer

At first it felt like a bitter pill,
A rubber band stretched until it snapped,
Sitting cross-legged on the floor,
Looking at my empty hands,
Wondering what would become of me,
Now that there is nothing else
But surrender.

First we fold in,
And then we open out.
Acceptance is a kind of ending
And yet, it is the point of arrival.

This is where I lay down
What can no longer be carried.
This is when I see my hands
Which at first felt so empty
Are filled with
Hallelujah.

“The Growing Edge” by Howard Thurman

“Look well to the growing edge. All around us worlds are dying and new worlds are being born; all around us life is dying and life is being born. The fruit ripens on the tree, the roots are silently at work in the darkness of the earth against a time when there shall be new leaves, fresh blossoms, green fruit.

Such is the growing edge. It is the extra breath from the exhausted lung, the one more thing to try when all else has failed, the upward reach of life when weariness closes in upon all endeavor. This is the basis of hope in moments of despair, the incentive to carry on when times are out of joint and men and women have lost their reason, the source of confidence when worlds crash and dreams whiten into ash. Such is the growing edge incarnate. Look well to the growing edge.”

“Breathe in my life, breathe out my gratitude” (Adapted) by Parker J Palmer

One of my favourite poets is Wendell Berry the following is often seen as a poem about death and dying but really it is about generosity the most living giving of all virtues “Sabbaths” by Wendell Berry

**Sabbaths – 1993, I**

No, no, there is no going back.
Less and less you are
that possibility you were.
More and more you have become
those lives and deaths
that have belonged to you.
You have become a sort of grave
containing much that was
and is no more in time, beloved
then, now, and always.
And you have become a sort of tree
standing over a grave.
Now more than ever you can be
generous toward each day
that comes, young, to disappear
forever, and yet remain
unaging in the mind.
Every day you have less reason
not to give yourself away.

Generosity does not require material abundance. When I think back on the many people who have been so generous toward me, I never think of money or “things.” Instead, I think of the way they gave me their presence, their confidence, their affirmation, support, and blessing — all gifts of “self” that any of us can give.

And where does generosity come from? Perhaps from another life-giving virtue, the one called gratitude. When I take the time to breathe in my life and breathe out my gratitude for the gifts I’ve been given, only one question arises: “How can I keep these gifts alive?”

I know only one answer: “Become a giver yourself, pass your gifts along, and do it extravagantly!” As [Wendell Berry says](http://www.onbeing.org/program/ellen-davis-and-wendell-berry-the-poetry-of-creatures/feature/wendell-berry-reads-his), “Every day you have less reason not to give yourself away.”

From “The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life” by [Parker J. Palmer](https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/search?author_first=Parker+J.&author_last=Palmer)

*Parker Palmer on opening our eyes to wonder and sacredness.*

"Normally, when we are taken by surprise, there is a sudden narrowing of our visual periphery that exacerbates the fight or flight response — an intense, fearful, self-defensive focusing of the 'gimlet eye' that is associated with both physical and intellectual combat. But in the Japanese self-defense art of aikido, this visual narrowing is countered by a practice called 'soft eyes,' in which one learns to widen one's periphery, to take in more of the world. . . .

"Soft eyes, it seems to me, is an evocative image for what happens when we gaze on sacred reality. Now our eyes are open and receptive, able to take in the greatness of the world and the grace of great things. Eyes wide with wonder, we no longer need to resist or run when taken by surprise. Now we can open ourselves to the great mystery."

Extract from “Song of Myself” Stanza 51 by Walt Whitman

The past and present wilt—I have fill'd them, emptied them.
And proceed to fill my next fold of the future.

Listener up there! what have you to confide to me?
Look in my face while I snuff the sidle of evening,
(Talk honestly, no one else hears you, and I stay only a minute longer.)

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

I concentrate toward them that are nigh, I wait on the door-slab.

Who has done his day's work? who will soonest be through with his supper?
Who wishes to walk with me?

Will you speak before I am gone? will you prove already too late?

From “On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century” by Timothy Snyder

*A lesson on resisting tyranny by affirming people.*

**Make eye contact and small talk.**

"This is not just polite. It is part of being a citizen and a responsible member of society. It is also a way to stay in touch with your surroundings, break down social barriers, and understand whom you should and should not trust. If we enter a culture of denunciation, you will want to know the psychological landscape of your daily life.

"Tyrannical regimes arose at different times and places in the Europe of the twentieth century, but memoirs of their victims all share a single tender moment. Whether the recollection is of fascist Italy in the 1920s, of Nazi Germany of the 1930s, of the Soviet Union during the Great Terror of 1937u – 38, or of the purges in communist eastern Europe in the 1940s and '50s, people who were living in fear of repression remembered how their neighbors treated them. A smile, a handshake, or a word of greeting – banal gestures in a normal situation – took on great significance. When friends, colleagues, and acquaintances looked away or crossed the street to avoid contact, fear grew. You might not be sure, today or tomorrow, who feels threatened in the United States. But if you affirm everyone, you can be sure that certain people will feel better.

"In the most dangerous of times, those who escape and survive generally know people whom they can trust. Having old friends is the politics of last resort. And making new ones is the first step toward change."