**Calendar March 2021**

**Minister’s Message**

During the recent “Impeachment” of former US president Donal Trump, the lead prosecutor Jamie Raskin referenced Thomas Paine several times, particularly his pamphlet “Common Sense”. His closing remarks hit me in both the head and the heart, they stirred my soul. I was already aware of the personal tragedy that he and his family had recently struggled with. On the 5th of January he had buried his son Thomas who had sadly taken his own life following a struggle with deep depression. He had persuaded several members of his family to attend the capitol building, to be together on January 6th, they day of the attack that led to Trump’s impeachment. Raskin seems to be a man of deep integrity with sense of duty and purpose. Quite remarkable really in this day and age, to stand up and do your duty, even though you and your loved ones were suffering the deepest kind of grief. Raskin though clearly has a sense of a higher purpose than just himself. Of course, his grief was not only for the loss of his son, but also for what had happened to his country.

Throughout the trial Raskin invoked Thomas Paine, who his son Tommy was named in honour of. Paine authored the pamphlet “Common Sense”, in which he famously advocated for American independence in 1776. Raskin stated "Senators, America we need to exercise our common sense about what happened," He continued, "Let's not get caught up in a lot of outlandish lawyers theories here. Exercise your common sense about what just took place in our country." Later he paraphrased Paine again, from another pamphlet called "The Crisis". "Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered, but we have this consolation: The more difficult the struggle, the more glorious in the end will be our victory." During the trial he said “I’m not going to lose my son at the end of 2020 and lose my country and my republic in 2021. It’s not going to happen.” He closed the prosecution case by updating some of Paine’s language, to be more gender inclusive stating “These are the times that try men and women’s souls.” Raskin appealed to common sense throughout his addresses, urging the 100 hundred senators who were the jury to use theirs “Common Sense is also the sense we all have in common as a community…Exercise your common sense about what just took place in our country” when deciding whether to impeach former President Donald Trump.

“Common Sense” seems vital right now. There has been an urgent appeal to it these last 12 months as we have struggled to live through this pandemic. In an age when trust in “experts” has eroded people have struggled to know who they should trust. Sadly, we are living in the age of the “ultracrepidarian”.

I was very grateful last week that both myself and Sue were able to get our first dose of the Astra Zeneca vaccine, due to our work. I do hope that we will all be in this position soon and that we can begin to return to live the lives we would like, to return to a full common community.

The season of Lent has just begun. People often give things up for Lent. I personally though prefer to think of what I can give towards the common good, it makes sense to me, rather than give things up. I suspect that we have all had to give up enough this last year. So, let us instead focus on what we can give to the common good, seems like common sense to me. To quote Representative Raskin once again “Common Sense is also the sense we all have in common as a community.”

So how do we find the common sense, which seems so un-common at times; how do we trust that sense that we all have in common? Maybe Jamie Raskin can be the example to follow. He stayed true to his moral compass, he followed the greater common good, despite living with intense personal grief. He is certainly an example to me in this time when such people are portrayed as folk who should not be trusted. We have lived through a difficult year, there is light at the end of the tunnel. There is a fresh hope. there is “Respair”, if we remain sensible if we live with common sense, a sense that we all have in common a sense that considers the common good, the good of all. It is up to us; it is up to all of us.

**Events in March 2021**

Sunday Services are still taking place in Chapel for those who wish to attend but can also be accessed on Zoom for those who prefer to stay at home.

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 March at 7pm “Colours of Grief Our Shared Experience of Love and Loss”

Wednesday 3rd March at 11am “Coffee and Conversation”

Wednesday 3rd March at 7pm ”Living the Questions”, “Morality and Ethics: How do we live an ethical and moral life? co-hosted by Adie Tindal

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

Friday 5th March “Quiz” at 4pm

**Sunday, 7th March at 11.30 am, Sunday Service Live in Chapel and on Zoom**

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

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

Friday 12th March “Quiz” at 4pm

**Sunday, 14th March at 11.30 am, Sunday Service Live in Chapel and on Zoom “Mothering Sunday/ Mothers Day”**

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

Wednesday 17th March at 11am “Coffee and Conversation”

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

Friday 19th March “Quiz” at 4pm

**Sunday, 21st March at 11.30 am Sunday Service Live in Chapel and on Zoom**

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

Thursday 25th March at 7pm “Consolation, Sorrow and Joy: Together in Poetry and Verse” poetry night

Friday 26th March “Quiz” at 4pm

**Sunday, 28th March at 11.30 am Sunday Service led by**

**Tom Grimshaw of Chorlton Unitarians Live in Chapel and on Zoom**

(N.B. Carolyn Jones is hosting this Zoom service. Meeting ID: 926 9675 8975. https://zoom.us/1/92696758975.)

Monday 29th March at 7 pm “Colours of Grief: Our Shared Experience of Love and Loss”

Wednesday, 31st March at 11 am “Coffee and Conversation”

**Extra Material**

“Psalm 23 for This Moment” by Kevin Tarsa *Psalm 23 re-cast in the language of Love*

May I remember
in this tender moment
that Love is my guide,
always,
shepherding me toward ways of openness and compassion.

I have what I need, really,
with Love at my side,
above me, below me, in front of me, behind me,
inside every cell of me,
Love infused everywhere!

Just when the weight of the world I inhabit
threatens to drop me in place
and press my hope down into the ground beneath me
Love invites me to rest for a gentle while,
and leads the center of my soul to the quiet, still,
restoring waters nearby that,
somehow,
I had not noticed.

And so, Love,
quietly,
sets me once again on its tender and demanding path.

Even when the walls close around me
and the cries of death echo through untold corners,
gripping my heart with fear and sadness,
I know...
I know
that all will be well,
that I will be well,
when Love whispers
near to me,
glints at the corner of my eye,
rests with gentle and persistent invitation upon my shoulders.

Yes, Love blesses me,
Even as the sources and symbols of my pain look on.
Love blesses me from its infinite well,
And I turn
and notice...
that goodness and kindness and grace,
follow me everywhere,
everywhere I go.

I live in a house of Love,
Love that will not let me go.

I live in a house of love,
And always will.

From “An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith” by Barbara Brown Taylor

“What is saving my life now is the conviction that there is no spiritual treasure to be found apart from the bodily experiences of human life on earth. My life depends on engaging the most ordinary physical activities with the most exquisite attention I can give them. My life depends on ignoring all touted distinctions between the secular and the sacred, the physical and the spiritual, the body and the soul. What is saving my life now is becoming more fully human, trusting that there is no way to God apart from real life in the real world.”

Barbara Brown Taylor

“A Seed Knows How to Wait” excerpt from “Lab Girl”by Hope Jahren

Hope Jahren is a geochemist and geobiologist at the University of Oslo in Norway.

A seed knows how to wait. Most seeds wait for several years before starting to grow; a cherry seed can wait for a hundred years with no problem. What exactly each seed is waiting for is known only to that seed. Some unique trigger-combination of temperature-moisture-light and many other things is required to convince a seed to jump off the deep end and take its chance—to take its one and only chance to grow.

A seed is alive while it waits. Every acorn on the ground is just as alive as the three-hundred year-old oak tree that towers over it. Neither the seed nor the old oak is growing, they are both just waiting. Their waiting differs, however, in that the seed is waiting to flourish while the tree is only waiting to die. When you go into a forest you probably tend to look up at the plants that have grown so much taller than you ever could. You probably don’t look down, where just beneath your single footprint sits between one hundred and one thousand seeds, each one alive and waiting... When you are in the forest, for every tree that you see, there are no less than three million more trees waiting in the soil, fervently wishing to be.

When the embryo within a seed starts to grow, it basically just stretches out of its doubled-over waiting posture, elongating into official ownership of the form that it assumed years ago. The hard coat that surrounds a peach pit, a sesame or mustard seed, or a walnut’s shell mostly exists to prevent this expansion. In the laboratory, we simply scratch the hard coat and add a little water and it’s enough to make almost any seed grow. I must have cracked thousands of seeds over the years, and yet the next day’s green never fails to amaze me. Something so hard can be so easy if you just have a little help. In the right place, under the right conditions, you can finally stretch out into what you’re supposed to be.

Each beginning is the end of a waiting. We are each given exactly one chance to be. Each of us is both impossible and inevitable. Every replete tree was first a seed that waited.

“A Seedbed for the Growing To Come” by Parker J. Palmer

Millions of people suffer or have suffered from depression and I’m one of them. In the past 30 years, I’ve made three deep dives into the darkness.

As I’ve worked to integrate those experiences into my sense of who I am, I’ve found it important to write and speak on the topic. “Going public” this way is not only therapeutic for me. It also gives me a chance to stand in solidarity with others who suffer, to let them (and those who care for them) know they’re not alone.

My writing on the subject includes chapter IV in *Let Your Life Speak* and the poem below. The poem came to me during a time of deep depression when I was out in the country walking past a recently harrowed field.

Writing the poem was a healing experience. It helped me understand something I’m glad I know: the hard times we all go through plow up our inner ground and turn it over, giving us chance after chance to “plant a greening season” in and through our lives.

**“Harrowing”** *by Parker J. Palmer*

The plow has savaged this sweet field
Misshapen clods of earth kicked up
Rocks and twisted roots exposed to view
Last year’s growth demolished by the blade.

I have plowed my life this way
Turned over a whole history
Looking for the roots of what went wrong
Until my face is ravaged, furrowed, scarred.

Enough. The job is done.
Whatever’s been uprooted, let it be
Seedbed for the growing that’s to come.
I plowed to unearth last year’s reasons—

The farmer plows to plant a greening season.

Offered by Angela Fowler from Helen Keller's "The Story of my Life"

Angela reflected: I think Helen Keller shows the pleasure of feeling in her hands the things she finds in the garden, her sense of touch made more sensitive to compensate for her Blindness.

“Sometimes I rose at dawn and stole into the garden while the heavy dew lay on the grass and flowers. Few know what joy it is to feel the roses pressing softly into the hand, or the beautiful motion of the lilies as they sway in the morning breeze. Sometimes I caught an insect in the flower I was plucking, and I felt the faint noise of a pair of wings rubbed together in a sudden terror, as the little creature became aware of a pressure from without.

Another favourite haunt of mine was the orchard, where the fruit ripened early in July. The large, downy peaches would reach themselves into my hand, and as the joyous breezes flew about the trees the apples tumbled at my feet. Oh, the delight with which I gathered up the fruit in my pinafore, pressed my face against the smooth cheeks of the apples, still warm from the sun, and skipped back to the house.”

**“**[**Self Portrait” by David Whyte**](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/5166826.Self_Portrait_by_David_Whyte)

It doesn't interest me if there is one God
or many gods.
I want to know if you belong or feel
abandoned.
If you know despair or can see it in others.
I want to know
if you are prepared to live in the world
with its harsh need
to change you. If you can look back
with firm eyes
saying this is where I stand. I want to know
if you know
how to melt into that fierce heat of living
falling toward
the center of your longing. I want to know
if you are willing
to live, day by day, with the consequence of love
and the bitter
unwanted passion of your sure defeat.

I have heard, in that fierce embrace, even
the gods speak of God.”