**Minister’s Message**

As some folk know I have a deep love of the origins of words. I have a keen interest in old words that have gone out of common usage, or words that have changed in meaning over time. One of my favourite things on “Facebook” is “Grandiloquent: Word of the Day”. I recently learnt the origins of the world “Aftermath”. In its most common understanding “Aftermath” means “the consequences or after-effects of a significant unpleasant event. There is though a second meaning. It is a farming term meaning “new grass growing after mowing or harvest. This second understanding is closer to the original meaning of “aftermath”, which dates back to the early 16th century meaning a second crop of grass grown on the same land after the first had been harvested, also known as aftercrop, aftergrass and or lattermath.

Here’s an example from the poem “Aftermath” by Longfellow

When the summer fields are mown,

When the birds are fledged and flown,

And the dry leaves strew the path;

With the falling of the snow,

With the cawing of the crow,

Once again the fields we mow

And gather in the aftermath.

So, as you can see “aftermath” means something very different to what it used to. It’s original meaning had positive connotations, like a bonus crop that can be harvested again. Yet today when we think of “aftermath” this is not what we understand; today the meaning has only negative connotations.

Some say that we are living in the aftermath of the pandemic, although truth is that it is not over. Certainly not here, but especially in other parts of the world. That said aftermath isn’t about starting over it is about growing from what is already there. No one gets to start over in life. There are no clean slates or blank sheets. We live from where we are, life goes on from the moment it is in. “Aftermath” does not only mean what follows a disaster, a terrible event, it also means a new growth of grass following one or more mowings, which may be grazed, mowed, or plowed under. Perhaps this concept of aftermath can help us in our time and place.

We have to metaphorically speaking at least, graze on what we have, we have to mow on and plough on what we have, we cannot just simply begin again. We have all been through a difficult time there has been much grief on so many levels, not just in recent days, but throughout our lives. We have live with this and grow from this. So let’s rake that ground again and try to grow something new. Let us live in and by “Aftermath”

**Activities on Zoom during July.**

Please note that the Friday quiz will be taking a break for a little while. I have also decided not to host “Living the Questions” this month. This will return again. Hopefully in the coming weeks these groups will be able to meet in person once again.

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

Thursday 1st of July at 7pm “Consolation, Sorrow and Joy: Together in Poetry and Prose”

Wednesday 14th July “Coffee and Conversation”

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Thursday 15th of July at 7pm “Consolation, Sorrow and Joy: Together in Poetry and Prose”

Wednesday 21st July “Coffee and Conversation”

Thursday 22nd of July at 7pm “Consolation, Sorrow and Joy: Together in Poetry and Prose”

Wednesday 28th July “Coffee and Conversation”

Thursday 29th of July at 7pm “Consolation, Sorrow and Joy: Together in Poetry and Prose”

**Extra Material**

“Let it Show” by Michael Dadson

Meister Eckhart has been quoted as saying that there is no such thing as a spiritual journey...but if there were, it would be ‘only a quarter-inch long, though many miles deep.’

We know, don’t we, that weightless state of being in tune with the depths and the heights of whatever is our spiritual alignment? The momentary experience of truth and beauty lifts us out of time and space, transcending our perspectives and renewing our sense of being in the flow of life itself.

But is that it? Is that the point and purpose of our spiritual seeking ever to increase the ability to notice, contrive, and perhaps extend, such moments of realisation, that we live ever more nearly with our spiritual truth?

Or is there an outward corollary to this inner process; an imperative not simply to know and feel something, but to show and share it?

Thank-you: to the lorry-driver who had pulled over, not to use his mobile or read his paper, simply to enjoy the view that had appeared in front...prompting others to notice and breathe in the same view.

Thank-you: to the woman on the Underground train. Surrounded by those tight hard faces, her hair wafting in the sooty breeze, she stood with her eyes defencelessly closed, and a look of calm delight on her face. She was obviously there, but clearly somewhere else as well – and not minding who saw it and knew it. The rattle-bang of the carriage became a softer and lighter place for the seeing.

Is your spiritual balance for your own benefit, or is it for the sake of leaking peacefulness into your surroundings, or shedding gentleness into your relationships, of witnessing depths into a shallow world?

**"Map of the Journey in Progress" by Victoria Safford**

Here is where I found my voice and chose to be brave.

Here’s a place where I forgave someone, against my better judgment, and I survived that, and unexpectedly, amazingly, I became wiser.

Here’s where I was once forgiven, was ready for once in life to receive forgiveness and to be transformed. And I survived that also. I lived to tell the tale.

This is the place where I said no, more loudly than I’d thought I ever could, and everybody stared, but I said no loudly anyway, because I knew it must be said, and those staring settled down into harmless, ineffective grumbling, and over me they had no power anymore.

Here’s a time, and here’s another, when I laid down my fear and walked right on into it, right up to my neck in that roiling water.

Here’s where cruelty taught me something. And here’s where I was first astonished by gratuitous compassion and knew it for the miracle it was, the requirement it is. It was a trembling time.

And here, much later, is where I returned the blessing, clumsily. It wasn’t hard, but I was unaccustomed. It cycled round, and as best I could I sent it back on out, passed the gift along. This circular motion, around and around, has no apparent end.

Here’s a place, a murky puddle, where I have stumbled more than once and fallen. I don’t know yet what to learn there.

On this site I was outraged and the rage sustains me still; it clarifies my seeing.

And here’s where something caught me a warm breeze in late winter, birdsong in late summer.

Here’s where I was told that something was wrong with my eyes, that I see the world strangely, and here’s what I said, “Yes, I know, I walk in beauty.”

Here is where I began to look with my own eyes and listen with my ears and sing my own song, shaky as it is.

Here is where, if by surgeon’s knife, my heart was opened up and here, and here, and here, and here. These are the landmarks of conversion.

“To Have the Good and Grace of Trees” by Parker J. Palmer

When I feel disheartened, one of the most reliable resources of renewal I know is the work of my friend and colleague, [Carrie Newcomer](https://onbeing.org/programs/carrie-newcomer-a-conversation-with-music/).

Carrie’s music, her words, and the spirit that shines through them are full of insight, warmth, and light — and a deep understanding of the challenges we all face in [trying to be human and humane](https://onbeing.org/blog/parker-palmer-owning-up-to-my-toxic-biases/) in a world of too much frenzy, anger, and violence.

Here’s a Carrie Newcomer poem I discovered last year. As I read it, I found myself breathing again. This weekend, I plan to spend time in the woods, learning how to be more like trees.

**“To Be Like A Tree”**by Carrie Newcomer

See how the trees
Reach up and outward
As if their entire existence
Were an elegant gesture of prayer.
See how they welcome the breath of spirit,
In all its visible and invisible forms.
See how the roots reach downward and out,
Embracing the physical,
The body and bones
Of its soul of earth and stone,
Allowing half its life to be sheltered
in the most quiet and secret places.

Oh, if I could be more like a tree on this Sunday morning,
To feel the breath of invisible spirit
Touch me as tenderly as a kiss on the forehead.
If I could courageously and confidently
Dig down into the dark
Where the ground water runs deep,
Where shelter and sanctuary
Can be had and held.

Ah, to be like a tree
With all its bent and unbent places,
A whole and holy thing
From its topmost twigs
To the deepest taproot
To all the good and graceful
Spaces between.

From “Heart Sense: Unlocking Your Highest Purpose and Deepest Desires” by Paula M. Reeves

*Paula M. Reeves on the wisdom of the heart.*

• "Your heart 'knows' that every living thing on this planet is connected, and when we grieve we are grieving not only for others but for our own loss.

• "Your heart knows how often you visit its sanctuary and what you have found there. You cannot fool your heart into a pretense of not needing God or love or compassion. Your heart knows better and will intensify its aching to wake you to the reality of your unexplored spirituality.

• "Your heart senses your profound need for contact, for reassurance that you are not alone, that there is meaning and purpose in your loss, and it will compel you to reach out even as you are wishing to run, to escape, to wake up and find that the sorrow has all gone away.

• "And, your heart senses the embodied resources you have not yet called upon. It breaks open to make room for the depth of your sorrow and the ever-present energy of healing to enter your heart at this time.

• "A heart broken open is not a shattered heart. It is a heart unafraid to shed tears, unafraid to be vulnerable, unafraid to weep, unafraid to name its own demons and to refuse to project them on others.

• "A heart broken open is a heart full of receptivity to the healing love of strangers, of animals, of prayer, of compassion, and of memory.

• "A heart broken open offers you a sanctuary in which you can find God so that you are never alone.

• "A heart broken open links you forever to the family of humanity.

• "A heart broken open is an invitation to become real — to stand before the altar of your soul and pledge that you will no longer waste this precious life on unconsciousness."

“REFUGE” by David Whyte

Sometimes a nook, a wall half down,
a swerve in the path where the breeze
can’t catch you; other times a made shelter,
a shepherd’s build up of flat stones curved
to keep the wind off. Once, at the top of the pass,
it was a cave in the mountain rock taking you in
from the swirl and eddy of snow and the killing cold
so you could live to the grey blank dawn.

Then in Galicia, it was a breath of warmth
from a kitchen door, palatial with light
and a daughter’s smile, the family behind,
asking you in, as if to say, of all shelter,
traveler, you’ll ever find on the road,
even with those you know,
the stranger’s love is best of all.

“In the Present” by Robert Walsh taken from “Stone Blessings”

On a sunny day, I walked alone in a broad valley in Nepal, through an old forest with vines and flowering trees and intermittent vistas of the snow-covered Himalayas. I came upon a clearing in the woods, and saw there a holy man – a monk in an orange robe, head shaved, back bent with age – chopping wood.

I had conflicting impulses. I wanted to ask him questions. What was his name? Where did he live? What was his life like? I wanted his blessing, and I wanted to give mine. And I wanted to pass by invisibly, noiselessly, doing nothing that would disturb him.

Instead, I took out my camera and took a picture of him. I tried to be discreet as possible about it; I waited until he was not looking in my direction. I don’t know whether he heard the sound. Then I put the camera away and moved on down the trail.

I took the picture because I wanted to tell you the story. Now I have a small, still, two-dimensional memento of that moment. We can look at it. It will last for a while. The actual moment completely surrounded me. It had sounds and smells and movement, and it was only real for a moment. Now it’s gone, and it will never happen again.

I moved through the experience with my attention alternating between the present moment and a future time, when I would be back home, telling the story. It’s what preachers call *homiletic consciousness,* which means going through life thinking, *Can I use this in a sermon?* But it’s not just preachers who do it. I imagine a painter would do the same. Or a poet. Or a novelist, teacher, composer, or a storyteller – anyone who uses the experiences of life in order to give something to someone else.

But the more we stay in the future, thinking about telling the story, the less we are open to the power of the experience itself. The more we put a frame around the picture, the more it becomes only a picture and not a real event. Instead of living life each day, we are busy getting ready for life.

Yet if were not for story tellers and photographers, I would never have gone to Nepal.

So I will try to find a balance between being fully in the moment and being present to the whole of life – past, present, and future, here and there. That I may live this day today, and also tell the story tomorrow.