

Fellow Seekers

November 2024

Monthly News and Views from the Bath Unitarian Fellowship for its Members and Friends



“Sweet is the memory of distant friends! Like the mellow rays of the departing sun, it falls tenderly, yet sadly, on the heart.”

Washington Irving

Next Meeting at Barrow Castle

**Sunday 17 November
10.45 Coffee, 11.15 Worship**

Theme: Absence

Led by Tim

Reflection: Remember, Remember, the 5th of November

I have to ask – *why*?

We are all familiar with the story of the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, and there can be no doubt that had the barrels of gunpowder beneath the Palace of Westminster exploded while the state opening of Parliament was taking place it would have been devastating. That attempt at regime change by a group of extremist Catholics failed because a Catholic member of the House of Lords loyal to the King revealed it in time.

For over three centuries it was required by law that all towns over a certain size should publicly commemorate the Plot, so no one was *allowed* to forget it. While wondering idly if this is one of the classic examples of the British tendency to celebrate a failure, I accept that fear of invasion by a Catholic country lasted a long time. Perhaps it's not surprising that the Protestant English became a little paranoid when surrounded by threats from or via France, Spain, Ireland, and Scotland where Catholicism remained powerful.

In the 21st century, however, things are more than a little different. First, the Christian division between Protestants and Catholics has long given way to a division between traditionalists and modernisers in both denominations. Second, we have lived through more than half a century of ecumenicalism, so that most Christians understand each other better. Third, secularisation has proceeded apace, so that many English people are not closely affiliated to Christianity in any form. Fourth, the centre of gravity in Christianity has shifted from the Northern to the Southern hemisphere, so that Latin American and African Christians are increasingly influential while Europe has lost its primacy. For all these reasons a division on the lines of that in 1605 is long over.

The idea of Catholics being a threat to English security nowadays would be laughable if it had not resulted in unnecessary suspicion for so long. I am proud that Unitarians were instrumental in bringing about the Catholic Relief Act of 1829, restoring nearly all civil rights to them. In many ways political differences have replaced religious differences in our governmental institutions.

Yet our society still presents deep divisions, and one of them is religious. There is growing paranoia about Islamic newcomers, and the war in Gaza has resulted in a rise in antisemitism. We live in a multicultural society, but culture includes religion – although any religion is also affected by culture. Islam is not a uniform faith, any more than Christianity is – it is affected by the customs of its area of origin, so Moslems from Pakistan follow different cultural traditions to those from, say, Morocco. A lack of understanding of these differences contributes to Islamophobia, where all Moslems are considered potential Islamists who would commit acts of terrorism. This is not so, but we do need to be vigilant for the threat from extremists.

Which brings us back to the Gunpowder Plot. I suggest that it *should* be remembered, but only as a warning that religious divisions can be very dangerous, and that striving to understand each other in religious terms is essential to a secure society. Otherwise there may well be far more serious consequences than firework displays.

Kay

Poem of the Month

I have not come across this poem before, but it speaks to me of survival against the odds, which is perhaps an aspect of war – and peace – that should be emphasised a little more. Kay

Convalescence

From out the dragging vastness of the sea,
Wave-fettered, bound in sinuous seaweed strands,
He toils toward the rounding beach, and stands
One moment, white and dripping, silently,
Cut like a cameo in lazuli,
Then falls, betrayed by shifting shells, and lands
Prone in the jeering water, and his hands
Clutch for support where no support can be.
So up, and down, and forward, inch by inch,
He gains upon the shore, where poppies glow
And sandflies dance their little lives away.
The sucking waves retard, and tighter clinch
The weeds about him, but the land-winds blow,
And in the sky there blooms the sun of May.

Amy Lowell (1874 –1925)

We are all sorry to hear that Lindy has been unwell and has once again been in hospital. We send our love to her, with hope for healing.

10 to 17 November is Interfaith Week 2024

From many lips, in every age,
The truth eternal is proclaimed,
By Western Saint, and Eastern Sage,
And all the good, however named.

*Rev John Andrew Storey
Unitarian Minister*

Words to Ponder

There is hardly a time like the ebb tide for the questioning of life. Yet the truth is, we all must experience ebb tides if we are to know the flow. This is certainly a time that will put our faith to the test, whatever we have built it on. But it is also a time of new opportunities, for it is a time of change. We need to make ourselves aware of what is being revealed on the shore. Our way of life may of necessity change, but we carry within us many riches. Just as the ebb tide deposits the seaweed on the beaches which it has brought up from the depths, even so out of our depths new things can be revealed.

From *Tides and Seasons* by David Adam

Finally

May the Love which overcomes all differences,
Which heals all wounds,
Which puts to flight all fears,
Which reconciles all who are separated,
Be in us and among us
Now and always.



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