



“Poetry is a search for syllables to shoot at the barriers of the unknown and the unknowable.”

Carl Sandburg

Next Meeting at Barrow Castle

Sunday 17 September

10.45 Coffee, 11.15 Worship

Theme: Poetry and Prophecy

Led by Kay

Reflection

As the public row over suspect building materials goes on, I have coincidentally been looking at a number of pictures of Unitarian Chapels up and down the land but most specifically in the six counties of the Western Unitarian Union. It is doubtful that any of them have the same problem as our schools and hospitals because most of them were built before concrete became the coverall cheap material of choice for the UK.* And what is obvious about our chapel buildings is that every one of them is unique.

There has never been a template for Unitarian churches. Even in the same city they stand alone. Our neighbouring city of Bristol is a good example: Frenchay looks nothing like UMB, and the former chapels that have now been put to other uses are different again. On a wider scale, Sidmouth's chapel is an old Dissenters' Meeting House while Plymouth Church was rebuilt after WW2. One of the few things the old chapel in Bath has in common with any of the other redundant churches is that George's Meeting in Exeter was also turned into a restaurant.

What else should we expect? The dates of chapel foundation vary widely. They were constructed in different cultural eras, lovingly, by local groups of people who wanted to create a meeting place that not only served their needs but also reflected their vision. Often members of the congregation would be directly involved. Go to Cullompton in Devon and see beautifully crafted woodwork done by a local tradesman who also worshipped there. Our forebears were creating their own Unitarian space. Of course it was unique!

We still create Unitarian space, whenever we come together as people of faith, whether it is in a chapel, a home, or an online meeting. We may not build new structures (with or without concrete) but we do build community. Just as there is no template for our buildings there is no template for our ways of being Unitarian together. Praise be!

Kay

We meet together not for schismatical or heretical separation, not as a source of bigotry and superstition, but for principles quite the reverse:

For promoting pure religion, the glory of God, and the happiness of humankind.

Words inscribed on the foundation stone of Marshfield Unitarian Chapel

*Even old chapels could have an asbestos problem. Many have been repaired and restored over the years, and from my time with the John Gregson Trust, which gives grants to Unitarian chapels, I know that asbestos is sometimes found during, say, an investigation into the roof. It was used for a long time before its dangers became apparent.

Memories of Sarah

We were all saddened to hear that Sarah Lewis had passed away after a long struggle with a painful and debilitating illness. We remember her with love. May she rest in peace.

Lindy:

I first met Sarah and her husband Jim about 8 years ago in her beautiful home in Marshfield. It was beautiful and interesting due in part to Sarah's studio which was full of her own art works as well as many books reflecting her interests. Because of her own difficulties, she was also keen to understand the causes of mental health issues for others. Over the next few years we met regularly for tea and biscuits together with Jim, a ritual we all enjoyed. Our last meeting was at a Care home in Chippenham where she was gently and lovingly cared for and appeared relaxed and content.

Thank you, Sarah, for our friendship.

Judy:

Sarah was a very well-respected art therapist – insightful and intuitive – as she was in life more generally. She was also a very good friend. Her suffering with bipolar disorder was very hard for her and her family, but didn't define her. Many years ago I wrote this poem for her.

Mad Women

We mad women meet beyond the deep well of our eyes.
We plunge into their depths in ancient recognition of their mystery,
We mad women meet under the ancient apple tree,
And bite, fearlessly, the bitter and the sweet apples that it bears.
May our brave souls be nourished by these mysteries ever,
Though the work-a-day world holds us now on its tether.

Written for Sarah after visiting her in August 1988

Tim:

Sarah was a lovely person and made a huge contribution to the Fellowship meeting in Marshfield. One anecdote I can offer - after the monthly meetings at the Meeting House ended, a few of us would meet from time to time at Sarah and Jim's house nearby in the High Street. It was a marvellous home, filled with beautiful art, with a wonderful garden: a testimony to the powers of creativity and love. We would have coffee and biscuits before holding a very informal service of worship. On one occasion we tried to light the candle in the chalice, but it just wouldn't catch. A tiny flame would appear briefly but then vanish. I gouged out some wax to expose more of the wick and tried again; this too proved unsuccessful - or so it seemed. We gave up and the service began. About 10 minutes in we were astonished when a flame suddenly appeared on the candle. Sarah declared that it must be a sign! I think it was the service after that, possibly the last time I saw her, that I gave her the Unitarian chalice badge I was wearing as she wanted to identify with our movement.

Bath Interfaith Event

Monday 18th September 2023, 7pm, in the Mayor's Parlour, Guildhall Bath.

Bath IFG annual Discussion Group Meeting with our Patron The Mayor of Bath. For the first time since 2019 this can be held in-person. Hosted by Mayor Councillor Dine Romero, representatives of several different faiths will address the Mayor's theme: **'The People of Bath: The Beating Heart of the City.'** *Please arrange to arrive at the Guildhall foyer shortly before 7pm so we can be taken all together to meet the Mayor.*

Can any of our Bath Residents attend this?

A Last Word

We gather the golden threads of life and weave from them a rich tapestry:

The golden thread of common, everyday human life, speckled with small, unidentifiable little decencies;

The golden thread of human pain, and human pleasure, from which together each human biography is writ;

The golden thread of vision, and example set by known and unknown prophets, saviours and good Samaritans;

The golden thread of broken promises mended, held slaves freed, captive people liberated, exiled friends returned;

The golden thread of hope, and life, which shines despite social cold, political darkness and autocratic power;

The golden thread of human families when the generations sensitively appreciate their roles and times;

The golden thread of literature, art and music;

The golden thread of wonder, increased human understanding, walking hand in hand with a greater sense of mystery;

The golden thread of human communities, loyal to commanding and transforming visions of how things may be.

O God, we thank you that there shines forever this golden thread.

Rev Andrew Hill



BUF NEWS ©2023

is published by the Bath Unitarian Fellowship, c/o 26 Fountain Court, Westbury BA13 3JY.
Contributions to kay.millard@btinternet.com by the first Sunday of each month, please.