

Service 20130127 Adrian Worsfold

Chalice

Come we now out of the darkness of our unknowing and the dusk of our dreaming; Come we now from far places. Come we now into the twilight of our awakening and the reflection of our gathering. Come we now all together.

We bring, unilluminated, our dark caves of doubting; We seek, unbedazzled, the clear light of understanding. May the sparks of our joining kindle our resolve, brighten our spirits, reflect our love, and unshadow our days.

Come we now; enter the dawning.

[Annie Foerster] [*Light the Chalice*]

As frozen earth holds the determined seed, this sacred space holds our weariness, our worry, our laughter and our celebration. Let us bring seed and soul into the light of thought, the warmth of community, and the hope of love.

Let us see together, hear together, love together. Let us worship.

[Laura Wallace]

The service theme today is Imbolc, that time of year when life is stirring but often yet to be noticed. The specific day is 2nd February. Fire is important for this festival as 2nd February is also the holy day of Brigid, the Goddess of fire, healing and fertility. The lighting of fires celebrate the increasing power of the Sun over the coming months and yet it is still a time to state that there is strength in cold as well as heat, in death as well as in life.

Hymn SF 027 *Winter Meditation* write choir

Prayers

The presence of divinity (however we perceive this to be) extends everywhere, in every time; throughout all strange and magical worlds, and into the mundane. Come to us and be with us; inhabit our thought-world, be with us in body, come and move us: come from the wilderness and arrive to enchant ourselves in this our beautiful world.

The divine is a Lady of joy; the divine is a Lady of love. The sun brings forth life anew and the winds are her servants; the deep waters contain the mysteries yet to surface and the earth has the deposit of all that has been.

As above, so below, as in the universe, so in the soul. As without, so within, and on this day we consecrate our bodies, souls, minds and spirits to the task of being alive.

[Resusing Slater, H. (1978), *A Book of Pagan Rituals*, London: Robert Hale, 8-10.]

Holy Lady, these are disturbing days as, across the world, we still live in economic darkness, prices for fundamental necessities rise, debts increase, markets remain in turmoil, well-paying jobs are taken away, and fragile security is under threat. Let us seek, amidst the shifting sands, for signs that will renew, and for an increasing light in the darkness; let us hold fast to the gift of peace, and fix our hearts where true joys are to be found.

In the middle of the sadness, the anger, the uncertainty, the pain, let us look to the future, for fresh opportunities, and new directions. Let us in truth find a new way and strengthen life. What seemed so secure shows itself to be so very fragile. There is fear of the future: who will be next to feel the real crisis of inadequate income, inadequate activity? In the midst of this uncertainty, we can draw on the spirit of life to help produce a way forward, taking each day at a time: to function to the best of our abilities and taking time each day to walk in integrity.

We pray for the institutions of faith, that they may provide compassionate communities, able to stand alongside and give emotional and practical support to those who suffer economic uncertainty and debt.

We pray for the world and those in government, finance and the law, that they may work towards practical solutions for the problems caused by debt, and that they facilitate sustainable economic growth. We hope that those countries affected by the enormous burden of international debt can find, with others, just and lasting solutions.

We pray for those individuals who, in debt, and facing uncertainty in the future, feel they have nowhere to turn: we wish them to find internal peace that can itself become a form of guidance. We pray for those who are ill, that they remain looked after according to need.

We pray also for ourselves, that through our choices, actions and words we may daily live out our faith, and bear witness to the sources of all that is good.

Connected Reading: Verses from Psalm 107 in the Hebrew Bible:

Let us give thanks to the Lord for his goodness and the wonders he does for his children.

Some sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, bound fast in misery and iron.

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

He brought them out of darkness and out of the shadow of death, and broke their bonds asunder.

Let us give thanks to the Lord for his goodness and the wonders he does for his children.

For he has broken the doors of bronze and breaks the bars of iron in pieces.

[Adaptations (including Psalm) from <http://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/topical-prayers.aspx#debt>]

Hymn SF 028 Lobt Gott Ihr Christen

Collect for Imbolc

Spirit of the Goddess throughout life, we are thankful and give praise for the push of life that continues year round, and takes its opportunity now to stir. Between the solstice and the equinox, life starts to quicken, often unseen, but on which we can rely. This is the time of the first signs of realised hope, for a knowledge that, at the end of this, will come the harvest, and it tells us too to now come out of our seasonal rest and start to build productively in whatever way we can for a more fruitful future. Amen.

Reading

When the might of winter loosens its grip upon the land and the first white

flowers of the snowdrops nod their pale heads above the melting snow and the first royal purple crocuses thrust their elegant cups into the winter air, many pagans celebrate the Festival of the White Goddess as Brigid, Bride or even Lucy, the Light Bringer. The Church has adopted this feast as Candlemas, when Mary was returned to her people, cleansed after the ritual period after the birth of Jesus. The Celtic name for this celebration is Oimelc, literally 'ewes' milk'; for now, in the warmer parts of the land, the first lambs are born, and a new harvest of ewes' milk is available for them and the people, to whom this was a valuable foodstuff. To celebrate this feast there is a traditional drink called 'lambswool', made from hot wine or cider and water in which the flesh of several roasted or baked apples are heartily mixed. The resulting frothy white drink resembles lambs' wool. Shakespeare writes of 'the roasted crabs hiss in the bowl' and it is the pink-fleshed crab apples rather than the crustacean he is talking about, 'As nightly sings the staring owl, toowhit toowhoo'. Another good old Goddess symbol, sacred from Britain to Athens.

In the villages this Candlemas feast has two aspects. One is the secret womens' Mystery of how the Goddess renews her youth, and all the women deck with their brightest scarves, their most precious ribbons, a chair beside the hearth to welcome the return of the Goddess. Then in darkness, when the men have been allowed to creep into the room, a small figure in a dark cloak arrives. Wreathed in ivy and warmly wrapped, a young maid from the community brings in the first flowers and the new flame. Under her cloak, which one of the older ladies removes, she is dressed in white and green, and carries a dish of early flowers, snowdrops, violets, jasmine or the earliest daffodils. Among the blossoms is a small candle, and from that a candle for every member of the community is lit, set out on the floor. The Goddess, in the guise of this little girl, is welcomed in a blaze of light and grants her blessing on all. Each of the men and women kneel before her, silently asking a gift or practical help in the coming year, and each pledges the work of their hands to the benefit of the people.

[Green, Marion (1995), *A Witch Alone: Thirteen Months to Master Natural Magic*, London: Thorsons, 38-39.]

Liturgy to Past, Present and Future

Over huge lengths of time, that have now completely vanished, and through the slightest of chances, that have ever been passed, the universe has evolved into meaning and gives its potential for the fullness of Being.

What does chance imply? It offers a condition of freedom, where something might not, but does. Why might there be life on other worlds, in other galaxies? Because, in this universe, life pushes into action wherever it can. Life is free and evolves to who knows where, but it did, and it does, and we have become a part of the very life of life.

Thanks to the moment chemicals clashed in the far gone chaotic soup, to our parents' recent moment when a single capable sperm met one surviving egg, each of us is able to come about at all. Now we are here, each one of us, and here together, grouped as a people, we have we the potential to be, in the fullest, in the moment. Yet the moment is soon gone. Thanks to culture, that manages time, we can make a collective deposit of meaning, project all that matters from the now into the recorded past, and use this to build the future.

Originating in such slight chances, and yet so participating in being, we are surely motivated to pause and celebrate.

Let us celebrate the past, the formation of nature and the ability to live and grow within it. Let us celebrate the formation of ideas and technology by which we became capable and have gained the potential to be humane. Specifically, in our family trees, in our friendship routes, and in our meaning groups like this one, let us consider our forebears, who have brought us to where we can be. They achieved most when they were free, so let us celebrate the freedom they extracted to build in the past.

[Light the candle]

Here we are. We live in a specific place and have our relatives, loves and friends. We are in the now, in the moment: but we either have position or we are moving. For to have being is to move, and so, there can never be a pure now of action: we must draw from the library of where we are from, and to dream dreams and build new plans for what will become. But what we do have, in the moment, is our freedom, that, even when oppressed, we can be free in the mind, and now is indeed the time to express our freedom. We achieve most when we are free, so let us celebrate the freedom we can all acquire.

[Light the candle]

There is no shortage of human children on this our lonely planet. There are creatures that struggle, but they have adapted and will adapt. If we become so stupid to have a human war to end all wars, there will still be life afterwards. Yet people who share freedom do not wish to fight. To this day, no

democracy has ever fought a democracy. Free peoples recognise other free peoples. Our task is, in freedom, to dream, build, make, provide and distribute. Our task is to say, what was bad can be closed, and what was good can be good again, and make more of it. We will be, perhaps in families, but in our friends and meaning groups, the forebears of others, so let us pass on to them the potential to be: to be the basis of how they, build, make, provide and distribute, to give to them the basis of what they will do and produce even what our greatest imaginers can never fortell.

[\[Light the candle\]](#)

Musical Interlude: [Jon And Vangelis Find My Way Home](#)

Four elements Liturgy at Imbolc

At this time of Imbolc [pron. Imolc] we are aware of the life within that we do not always see, bubbling up from below, keen to force its way through.

We praise and bless this universe our home, and its spirit of life.

And in this our island setting are the mythical four winds: with the blessing of Uriel of the dark and fertile earth, blowing over Saint Columba of Scotland, we have the cold wind from the north; With the blessing of Raphael in his golden cloak, blowing over Saint George of England, we have the dry wind from the east; with the blessing of Michael of the red flame, blowing over Saint David of Wales, we have the hot wind from the south; and with the blessing of Gabriel of the blue water, blowing over Saint Patrick of Ireland, we have the wet wind from the west. And east is for air, South is for fire, West is for water, And north is for earth.

In winter comes the north air, in spring comes the east air, in summer comes the south air and in winter autumn the west air. So Imbolc [Imolc] is that movement between the north to the east, from where on the clockface the second hour meets the third, for in the fourth hour we enter the bursting out of spring.

In the north, we have the top of the earth itself and the earth nestles all of life potential. Plato said earth is dark, thick and quiet. For Aristotle the earth is cold, female and dry. The north person, the earth person, is practical and material, productive and rooted and builds her nest as a place to return.

[Gesture with hands over the bowl with a stone or representative object]

In the east we have the air that blows, the very air we breathe and the wind-spirit that gives life. Plato said that air is dark, thin and of motion. For Aristotle the air is cold, male and moist. The air person thinks, is rational, uses intelligence and sees the big picture. His thought precedes feeling and experience, and so can be radical.

[Light the incense in the holed goblet]

In the south we have the fire, the very means to regenerate. It is both heat and light and energy expressed. Plato said fire is bright, thick and of motion. For Aristotle the fire is warm, male and dry. The fire person is expressive, energetic, a leader, a person of gut instincts who puts plans into action. So we light a candle for action in time, for whatever happens.

[Light the candle]

In the west we have the water and water is the very support of life, without which life shrivels and dies. All must drink and all must refresh. But what power there is in water, when it flows, for it also can destroy as well as give life. Plato said water is dark, thick and of motion. For Aristotle the water is cold, female and moist. The water person is the feeling individual, and is compassionate, caring, and a listener. This soul can be open, even dreamy, and quite ideally artistic. And so we dip into the water.

[Dip fingers into the water bowl]

We are always moving: symbolically clockwise; in moving we have our being; together the practical person needs the rational philosophical person who needs the expressive energetic leader and who needs the compassionate listener. Indeed, we all need each other, and all points of the compass relate to each other. Plato and Aristotle divided the characteristics of the elements, yet to be sharing these when seen as a whole. We make our divisions as aids to understanding, but in the end we all need each other, in balance, and we are become one amongst the many. For life to be new, we need it to die, but for it to die again it must come back to life, and it slowly dies and slowly arises, in variety and along a path, and does so with regularity in this our ordered world. And the real, actual, scientific elements, are but numbers of protons in a nucleus, for out of that mathematics of form and space comes all material diversity, and all irregularity and regularity, and all the molecules and all compounds.

So let us be thankful and full of praise for a world that is and moves and has its being, where what goes around comes around, for which we as a people in the web of life simply live, move and have our being.

Hymn SF 147 *Leaving of Lismore alt*

Sermon

If you are accused of something you can plead not guilty, enter a defence, and see if you are found guilty or not guilty. If you say you are guilty, that is more or less it, other than for any mitigating circumstances. Or you might come clean and even ask for other related crimes to be taken into consideration.

Very recently I was accused and have been forced to make a plea. I decided to plead guilty as charged and although I can therefore make no defence I can provide an explanation by the way of, well, admitting that I have done it before.

I have been accused of being a Pretend Pagan. I plead guilty, because it is true, but if I have an explanation it is that I have done this crime at least twice if not more often.

A pretend Pagan doesn't really believe it. Doesn't really believe in the gods and goddesses or the magical powers that derive out of the cycles of nature. There is no real immersion into the Pagan world, but basically it is being used as a vehicle of expression by someone who believes in, well, frankly, something else.

Now the accusation is all the more targeted because even the real, immersed Pagan is aware that the religion is full of one's imagination and creativity, and that the gods and goddesses can be imagined representatives of magical forces. But magical forces there are, says the real Pagan, and one of the oldest transmitters of magical information is, of course, astrology. Astrology is virtually a science to some Pagans, because it deals in cause and effect: that who we are is linked to the motions of planetary bodies.

As someone who takes the view that a midwife exerts more gravitational force than even the nearest planet, and that there is no causality in Astrology, I have to plead guilty. And, as some of you know, my answer to Bill Darlison's questions about pure probability in our life narratives is to come back to him

to discuss the whole point about probability and the moral consequences of magical causality.

The Postmodern Pagan Miriam Simos or Starhawk is a true believer, but she also pushes the Pagan cause into the academic world, and in so doing has had a great deal to offer about the Pagan as liturgy and about using it as a means to understand your life-narrative. She understands the connection between play and playfulness, liturgy, drama and re-enactment. For people like her, the Pagan view is the best way to connect self and all that is around us. She has been able to meet up and match with the likes of Matthew Fox, the ex-Roman Catholic and now Episcopalian, with his view of Original Blessing over Original Sin. Again, it is about having a positive life story.

So I want to plead guilty and I have done it before. See, I was once a Pretend Christian, but they were called Postmodern or Postliberal Christians.

One route to postmodern Christianity was via our own James Martineau. James Martineau was a reviser of liturgies, a liturgical poet who took a generalised Christianity as a collective liturgy but said everyone must be their own religious conscience - not the Bible, not the liturgy, but their own stance. Such extreme subjectivity collapses a collective and one time objective liturgy into something that is postmodern. The language is like a set of guideposts for the group, but no more than that, as each person has their own selections of beliefs. That is an open, liberal, postmodernity, and the whole reason for its existence is the dissonance between received religious tradition and modern understandings of what causes things to happen.

Set against this is a more conservative approach to being postmodern. As with the Calvinists, our very own forebears in the 17th century, if you believe in revelation then religious truth is all one way. If you regard the world, its culture, and its human-made institutions as corrupt, then you might have the view that there is no truth to be deposited in the world as we know it. Rather the truth is in not the science in the Bible, not the history that might be in the Bible, but in the biblical encounter itself. It is your faith and its faith in its text, and the same encounter is true in the language of doing worship. Put that into today's terms, and it means that such religious encounter is rootless. It is Plato and perfection, and indeed the more Catholic Church-version of this emphasises Plato. It is definitely not of Aristotle, who wanted truth grounded in the very stuff we live amongst. Whether it is George Lindbeck's Protestant postliberalism, or John Milbank and company's Anglo-Catholic Radical Orthodoxy, the whole tradition becomes a matter of performance, and of identity, not of external proof. There is no proof to be had in following Christianity, according to that line of postmodern thinking.

So over the river some years ago I was a communicant Anglican on a liberal postmodern basis, but realised that I was sending out all the wrong signals. I wasn't a very good postmodern Christian, because my liberalism was so selective, and wasn't very good at doing the narrative thing. The priest-in-charge, as was, now with the freehold, was very much better at 'doing the whole tradition'. He was not a liberal, but he was postmodern in many respects. A number of professional Christians and theologians are like this: they live in the real world when it comes to explanations, such as say the biology of Richard Dawkins and the astronomy of Brian Cox, but they live in a kind of museum world when it comes to doing religion, because the museum artifacts still deliver a spirituality. The reason one chooses one spiritual package over another then becomes, again, that connection between liturgy, play, playfulness and re-enactment - which is the best playtime or drama for you?

The problem of liberals, well understood by James Martineau, is that we too raid the museum for our religious language, from within our inherited culture, but liberals are more selective than taking whole packages. I still do shop and select my religious artefacts. And I can do it with Paganism. After all, Paganism is our culture too. Quite a few Pagans in the Unitarian and Unitarian Universalist camp are postmodern Pagans, otherwise they would be in the Pagan groups proper. Some of them, though, are also in the Pagan groups proper either as postmoderns or as inhabitants of a magical world. They do the Unitarian thing as well because Paganism is expansive and they also like the contact with the humanists and the Buddhists and the Christians.

Whereas, someone like myself is much more part of a raiding party, even a fraud. In fact, I have dropped a lot of the postmodern fluff because I believe in research. Research is a good way to find out what is true and what isn't, and language is not the be all and end all of expressing working truths. But language still functions when considering religion as art, and when I consider religion as art I am going to paint on the broadest canvas possible and find as many styles as I can. So watch out Pagans because I am on a raiding party, to nick some of your stuff and make it liturgical.

I'm guilty as charged and I've done it before.

Collection [Anderson Wakeman Truly extract](#)
Notices

Benediction

Last time I took a service I introduced a new hymn. It was Slade's *My Oh My* and I said to myself, "That's a hymn." Now I am going to introduce a benediction hymn. Earlier you heard Jon Anderson, the falsetto lead-singer of Yes with Rick Wakeman playing. Listening a few weeks back to *The Ladder* by Yes and the first track *Homeworld*, it ended with music and lyrics to which I said, "That's a hymn." So I found a music file of it and ran it through my composer software. The words, adapted from the original, are printed out. We listen to it once with its full verse introduction and then sing along the two verses as best we can.

Hymn NB 007 *Homeworld End* write piano

Truth is a vital need,
Here for us to receive,
Reach as it comes to you,
As it comes to me,
As we will always need this inside our hearts.

Peace is a state we preach,
A space for us all to reach,
Peace and truth sing to you,
As they sing to me,
And we will always take these inside our hearts.