

Banbury Unitarians News



*A spiritual and religious fellowship, encouraging
tolerance and independent thought*

Issue 4, October - December 2012

Contents

Letter from the Minister	page 2
Calendar for this Quarter	page 3
<i>Reasons to be Cheerful</i> by Malcolm Sadler	page 4
<i>Lincolnshire Sunrise</i> by Pamela Parrish	page 5
<i>Autumn Glory</i> by Sue Woolley	page 6
<i>Thoughts</i> by Rosemary Booth	page 8
<i>The Power to Choose</i> by Sue Woolley	page 9
Regional Events	page 11
Who we are and how to contact us	page 12

Letter from the Minister

Dear Friends,

I hope that you have all had a wonderful Summer. I don't know whether it is hot-wired into my DNA, or whether it is the fruit of having spent so many years in or around education, but for me, the new year begins in the Autumn. So for me this is the time of year when I can stop frantically planning for the future, sit still for a while, and take stock of what I have achieved during the past twelve months.

It is also, very importantly, an opportunity to be grateful and to give thanks for the good things that have happened in the past year. I think we don't do this enough.

And I am so very grateful. This has been an amazing year for me - I've done a fascinating Counselling Skills course, have been added to the Roll of Unitarian Ministers, had a wonderful holiday in Poland with Maz, recharged my spiritual batteries at Summer School, and last, but very far from least, I have had the privilege of serving as your Minister.

In the Fellowship, there has been some sadness - we have lost Rita - and some illness - Jack and Don are in our thoughts and prayers. But there have been some great things going on too. Our programme of regular worship has continued month by month, and the Building Beloved Community engagement group is still going strong - I can't believe we will be finishing it in December. We must think of something else to do in the New Year - all ideas welcomed!

In fellowship,

Sue

Calendar for October - December 2012

October

- Wednesday 10th Building Beloved Community (7)
Sharing the Message
- Sunday 28th Anniversary service, led by Sue Woolley

November

- Wednesday 14th Building Beloved Community (8)
Living our Faith
- Sunday 18th* Worship service, led by Sue Woolley

December

- Wednesday 12th Building Beloved Community (9)
Writing a Covenant Together
- Sunday 16th* Congregational Carol Service

** both these services are on 3rd Sunday due to Town Hall commitments.*

All worship services are held at

Banbury Town Hall and start at 11.00 am

All Building Beloved Community sessions are held at

Banbury Town Hall and start at 10.30 am

Further ahead ...

Our Minister's Induction Service has now been fixed for **Saturday 2nd March 2013**, at 2.00 pm, at the Town Hall. The Service will be led by Rev. Alex Bradley; Rev. Peter Hewis will be giving the charge to the Minister, and Rev. Ant Howe will be giving the Charge to the Congregation. Mr. Sandy Ellis will be bringing greetings from the Midland Unitarian Association; Mrs. Alison Thursfield from the National Executive Committee and Rev. Gillian Peel from the Unitarian Ministerial Fellowship. All are invited! **Please put the date in your diaries now!**

Reasons to be Cheerful by Malcolm Sadler

Forgetting for a few moments, if we can, the really awful weather of the past 'Summer', the past few months have given us all something to celebrate. Starting with the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, then the Olympics, and to crown it all, the Paralympics, there has been a veritable feast of images to lift the most jaded spirits.

We all 'oohed' and 'aahed' at the spectacle of the opening ceremony of the Olympics proper, which banished from our minds the pouring rain of the Queen's parade up the Thames, and marvelled at the following fortnight of incredible sport and a veritable plethora of Gold Medals; even I, not particularly renowned for my sporting abilities, was at times riveted to the spot by some individual performance.



And not to forget Bradley Wiggins winning the Tour de France - it made us all so very proud to be British. And such pride has not been so much in evidence of recent years, but we've had an absolute "tour-de-force" of flag-waving and nationalistic fervour, which should keep us all satisfied for the next few years! And then there was the wonderfully inspiring spectacle of the Paralympics; our admiration knew no bounds.

And Downton Abbey returned to our TV screens to make our joy complete - what more can a grateful nation want?

Let us spare a thought, too, for all the 'backroom' boys and girls who worked their socks off in organising all the various events, and all those many, many people who attended; many unpaid volunteers, they too, deserve our heartfelt thanks for their dedication and devotion.

Well done Britain - you did us all proud!

Lincolnshire Sunrise by Pamela Parrish

Dawn breaks across the furrowed fields,
Penetrating shafts of light illuminate
The level landscape;
The rising sun slowly turns darkness
Into rosy day.

Statue-like, distant trees stand,
Silent and still,
Giving sanctuary as yet, to slowly
Awakening birds.
Dew upon the grassy meadows
Gleams in a bejewelled riot of
Rainbow colours and the first
Birds begin to sing.

Across the river, mist still hangs
In a curtain of moist translucent
Silver light.
Two swans drift eerily past,
A majesty of elegance
In their snow white shrouds.



By now the chorus of singing birds
Challenges the increasing light,
Then scintillating sunlight salutes
Another glorious summer day.

Autumn Glory by Sue Woolley

The Autumn colours have been glorious this year - the leaves have been every possible shade of red-russet-copper-brown-gold-yellow-green that the eye could see or the heart could imagine. The sheer beauty of it all has taken my breath away, especially when the multifarious colours have been backlit by sunshine against a vivid blue sky. Which is why I count myself so blessed to live within walking distance of it all, on the outskirts of Salcey Forest, although the wonderful displays of colour have been everywhere this year, not least in the trees lining the roads that I drive along every day.

In his wonderfully funny book *Notes from a Big Country*, Bill Bryson muses about this wonderful annual display of vivid colour. "What is all the more remarkable about this is that no one knows quite why it happens. In Autumn ... trees prepare for their

long winter's slumber by ceasing to manufacture chlorophyll, the chemical that makes their leaves green.



Autumn in Salcey Forest by Marlene Snee

The absence of chlorophyll allows other pigments, called carotenoids, which have been present in the leaves all along, to show off a bit. The carotenoids are what account for the yellow and gold of birches, beeches and some oaks, among others. Now here is where it gets interesting. To allow these golden colours to thrive, the trees must continue to feed the leaves even though the leaves are not actually doing anything useful except hanging there looking pretty. Just at a time when a tree ought to be storing up all its energy for use the following spring, it is instead expending a great deal of effort feeding a pigment that brings joy to the hearts of simple folk like me but doesn't do anything for the tree."

It is a mystery, but a beautiful one, and I just wanted to record my thanks to God for it.

Thoughts by Rosemary Booth

I walked alone in the park today
Finding no one I knew along the way
A spirit invisible, only my eye
Was real and alive, as the world passed me by.

Children ran past me, their eyes looked ahead.
Intent to go faster as onward they sped.
Lovers who loitered, had eyes for each other
As they whispered sweet nothings, lover to lover.

A very old man with his head bent low,
Shuffled his feet, his best effort was slow.
I walked on the grass, so soft to my tread,
Enjoying the crunch on the leaves that were dead.

The polished brown conker peeped out of its shell
For a squirrel to gather as fast as it fell.
The wind in the trees sang softly a tune,
Serenading the roses that still were in bloom.



I felt light and so carefree on that Autumn day,
One with creation, I wished I could stay.
With my walk nearly over, I turned into the street.
My body and mind content and complete.

The Power to Choose: blogpost by Sue Woolley

Our visit to Auschwitz and Birkenau in August reminded me forcibly of the power of evil. The sheer scale of the suffering undergone by the Jews, Poles, gypsies, Communists and other prisoners was horrendous. And it was part of a deliberate and evil (that word again) plan to "free the German nation of Poles, Russians, Jews and Gypsies", in the words of Otto Thierach, Hitler's so-called Minister of Justice. Jews in particular were to be totally exterminated, being seen as sub-human vermin.

It was a task undertaken with meticulous and horrifying efficiency, carefully documented every step of the way.



Auschwitz-Birkenau

But I don't believe in evil as an independent power in the world. No-one is born evil - there is no such thing as original sin. I believe that every human being has the power to choose between good and evil. However, the choices that each person makes will set them on a path towards a life filled with good deeds or evil ones, and the farther one walks along the chosen path, the harder

it is to turn aside. As the Native Americans believe, "it depends which wolf you feed."

I have to believe that there is a divine spark "that of God" in everyone, but perhaps those people we call evil choose to ignore its promptings. And there are many degrees of evil; for example, I do not believe that the majority of German people during Hitler's Reich chose evil consciously, although the dyed in the wool Nazis certainly seem to have done. But the Nazi propaganda machine awakened the latent anti-Semitism in many German hearts, giving them someone to blame for their hard lives, and enabling them to believe its lies, and close their eyes to what was going on.

Yet there were some who turned their backs on the temptation to evil, and chose good. For example, Fr. Maximilian Kolbe, the Catholic priest who took someone else's place in a starvation cell in Auschwitz - we saw the actual cell yesterday. Or the brave Poles who risked their lives to help the Auschwitz inmates by providing them with food and medicine, and organised escapes. Or the Dutch people who hid Anne Frank and her family for so long. And of course, Oskar Schindler, who saved the lives of over 1,000 Jews, as famously portrayed in the Spielberg film *Schindler's List*.

We all have the power to choose, every day, between acts that will make the world a better or a worse place for its inhabitants, not only our fellow human beings, but all living things.

I pray that when I am put to the test, that I will have the courage to stand up for the good, and deny the evil. Amen

Regional Events

**Midland Unitarian Association of Lay Preachers
And Service Leaders: Autumn Training
Paths to Inner Peace: Taster Workshop**

Led by: Revs. Gillian Peel and Sue Woolley

When: Saturday 20th October 2012

Where: Kingswood Meeting House, Packhorse Lane,
Hollywood Worcs. B47 5DQ

Time: 10.00 am – 4.15 pm (coffee/tea available from 9.30 am)

Cost: Free to MUA delegates



Midland Unitarian Association Annual Lunch

When: Saturday 3rd November 2012

Where: Kingswood Meeting House, Packhorse Lane,
Hollywood Worcs. B47 5DQ

Time: 10.30 am for 11.00 am

Guest Speaker: Rev. Martin Whitell, Convenor of the National
Executive Committee

Cost: £9.00 a head

More details about these events from Sue Woolley (see p.12)

**Banbury Unitarian Fellowship,
At the Town Hall, Bridge St, Banbury OX16 5PX
Website: www.banbury-unitarians.org.uk**

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Treasurer: Don Booth

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A Harvest of Gratitude by Percival Chubb

Once more the fields have ripened to harvest, and the fruitful earth has fulfilled the promise of spring.

The work of those who labour has been rewarded: they have sown and reaped, planted and gathered.

How rich and beautiful is the bounty gathered: the golden grain and clustered corn, the grapes of purple and green.

The crimson apples and yellow pears, and all the colours of orchard and garden, vineyard and field.

Season follows after season, after winter the spring, after summer the harvest-laden autumn.

From bud to blossom, from flower to fruit, from seed to bud again, the beauty of earth unfolds.

From the harvest of the soil we are given occasion to garner a harvest of the heart and mind:

A harvest of resolve to be careful stewards of all life's gifts and opportunities.

A harvest of reverence for the wondrous power and life at work in the things that grow, and in the soul.

A harvest of gratitude for every good which we enjoy, and of fellowship for all who are sustained by earth's beauty.