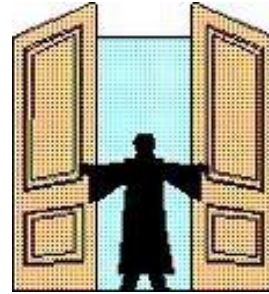


THE OPEN DOOR



NEWS AND VIEWS OF CROYDON UNITARIANS

NOVEMBER 2018

***Our minister Rev Art Lester is pleased to
welcome you to worship every Sunday from
11.00 am and afterwards for fellowship and
refreshments***



Littering the Sky

On a sweltering summer morning, I'm riding with a taxi driver I don't know. An older, English driver, that rarest of things. His car is clean and well kept. As we start off, I see why. He picks up an empty fruit juice carton from the seat next to him, rolls down the window and, with no attempt at subterfuge, lets it drop onto the street.

I'm surprised by how shocked I feel. Somebody must be throwing litter out of cars, or the streets would be clean. My middle-class prissiness rises. Thinking about it later, I realised that if the driver had told me he was a tax evader, a member of UKIP, or basically anything short of pedophilia, I wouldn't have been so judgmental. Somewhere along the line I have come to see littering as a kind of sin.

Littering is easy to dislike, because it's obvious. But if you're like me, you don't dare to think a lot about carbon emissions and global warming. If you look up at the sky on one of our rare cloudless days, it looks just fine. But we can't see carbon atoms; we can't see the microbes that wipe out whole populations, either, so we just have to take the scientists' word for it. And that would be fine, except nobody—absolutely nobody—knows what to do about it.

So, we turn down our thermostats a few dutiful notches, replace old light bulbs with those things you can't really see anything by for at least five minutes, and wait. Polar bears appear on our TV screens like sweet fairy tale beings instead of the most feared land predator on earth, and we watch the breaking ice floes and feel terrible. Maps of the vanishing Amazon rain forest haunt us, and the doomster film makers have used computer generated images to stop our hearts with fear.

This is our condition now, after a century or two of dazzling scientific advance. Pretty soon we'll be able to order a baby with features we pick from an online catalogue. They'll be able to clone us at birth and leave spare body parts floating in a tank until we need them. We'll be able to put our eyeballs against a screen and have our goods charged to some central computer bank. If we are still able to die, we can have our ashes dispersed in space, as if there weren't already enough stuff floating around up there. We'll have all this, that is, unless we've overlooked something vital. Unless we've concentrated so long on *how* to do things that we neglected to ask the most basic question of all: *what for?*

As that new UN report says, we'd better work that out, quickish.

--Art Lester

Diary

Sunday Services		
Date	Service Leader	Musician
Nov 4th	Our Minister	Freda Lodge
Nov 11th	Our Minister	Bill Higgins
Nov 18th	Our Minister	Freda Lodge
Nov 25th	Our Minister	Gill Stone
Events		
Nov 4th	Our Harvest and Anniversary Services will be combined this year and once again we will be supporting Night Watch in Croydon, by donations of nonperishable goods, blankets clothing etc. The service will be followed by a light buffet lunch provided by our usual caterers--JACE	

Homecoming: the tale of a dog

Schipperkes are not very popular these days; perhaps they never were; but my grandparents had a succession of them and one kept me company on long walks on the moors above their home. (I had gone to see them during the summer holidays and just stayed there for the first year of the war, Marsden being considered safer than Derby). Tim was a bit of a yapper, but none the worse for that- after all the house was isolated and my grandparents didn't want intruders. When they died, Tim was sold to a home some miles down the Colne valley, towards Huddersfield. Greatly to the amazement of the new owners of the old house Tim turned up there on his own one day - as I said, he always was a good walker.

Last Summer, much to our surprise, when Huifen and I were followed on the last part of a walk round Crystal Palace Park, by a solitary schipperke whom I recognised through once having met her owners on a walk round the Park along with their other schipperke. They were called Cracker and Rocket, mother and daughter.

We looked in vain for the owner or Rocket.

Cracker followed us to the crossing of Anerley Hill and then- panic! - went half way across, causing a minor traffic jam and much alarm to everyone at the bus stop. We couldn't lay a hand on her to see what the collar could tell us, when up the hill on the other side of the road a man carrying a guitar on his back came over, grabbed her and let us read her tag. He had a way with dogs, obviously, and she didn't object when he carried her with the guitar and we all 3 went to Cracker's home address. A helpful bystander had tried phoning her home address but as the owners were probably looking for their dog in the Park there was no reply.

I rang the next-door bell when no one answered at Cracker's home, and to our relief the owner kindly let the little dog stay in her back garden to await her neighbours' return.

An hour or two later I phoned to tell Cracker's owners what had happened. They were extremely relieved; apparently Cracker had been showing signs of old age - but like Tim of those many years ago, she had used her homing instinct and independent nature and decided to go home regardless.

We never did find out who the mysterious guitar player was – though he was a true godsend! Gratitude all round!

--John Bower

Making a You-Turn

[Art preached to the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Paris on Sunday, October 21st. This is what he said:]

When I first moved to Spain, I spoke a fairly good version of Spanish. Or, at least, I thought I did. I could buy things in the shop and greet my neighbours. I could even avoid a mistake I had made earlier, in the Dominican Republic, when I told a roomful of stoical farmers that I was pregnant, when I meant to say was “embarrassed.” But I was still baffled by Iberian road signs.

For months I had seen signs to someplace called Cambio de Sentido. It sat near signs to villages like Loja, and cities like Granada. But the signs

came up so frequently that I seemed to me that you could get to Cambio de Sentido from almost anywhere, no matter the distance or direction. It took me months until the eureka moment hit me. The sign meant “change your mind.” In other words, a place to make a U-turn and head back the other way.

Picture yourself in this familiar situation. You are driving along, looking for a certain turning that will take you where you want to go. But the landscape just keeps on seeming less and less familiar and you are beginning to think you have gone too far: you must have missed the signpost. You feel uneasy, and it’s getting worse. How are you going to get back to where you planned to go? That’s when the sign appears.

I don’t want to stretch the metaphor too far, but I will say this: I think those signs are back, and, if you look, you can see them everywhere.

The crowds have been out in the streets again. I guess you’d have to have been on Mars not to have noticed. Something has gone wrong near the heart of our shared culture, and even the timid seem to know this. It’s as if the code that has always underlain our politics, our way of treating each other, has become scrambled. Now, as the American protest song said in the thirties, “Everybody’s shouting, ‘Which side are you on?’”

And sides are being taken. All the issues which normally obsess us: unemployment, immigration, the environment, wages, prices, war and peace, have been solidified into the slogans of two competing—you might even say ‘warring’ tribes. What that means is that the energy needed for tackling problems like, say, global warming, is consumed by the fight with opponents.

As a young man I was involved in all sorts of issues. There was the big one where I lived—the civil rights movement, which I guess radicalised a lot of my generation. Following on the heels of that was the Vietnam War, and so, without really noticing it, I became what was then called a peacenik. That position led me into a relationship with both Unitarians and Quakers, and not so many years later, I was working for Quakers in Africa.

This was where I learned something that has never left me. I had been sent from a rich white country to help people in a poor black country. We were supposed to help poor people improve their nutrition and hygiene,

teach them skills that could aid in the continual struggle to survive, and to do all this without spending very much of our money in the process. We were working under a flag of virtue, and it used to hurt when I was accused of being just another white do-gooder, having a kind of extended gap year experience, relying on the patience of my hungry hosts.

After three assignments in Africa and Latin America, the penny finally dropped for me. It was best described in the words of the American comic strip possum, Pogo: “We have met the enemy and he is us.” Another way of saying that is that I was enmeshed in a hopelessly unfair system that-- not just as a by-product, but *by design*-- kept poor people poor and rich people rich. And it seemed to me that my very presence reinforced that problem.

I had been through demonstration as a tool and graduated to volunteer work. My volunteer work had then changed to a more radical position of trying to help people organise to confront the system. In my last job, in North Kenya, I was arrested at gunpoint and threatened by the Moi government and finally expelled from the district I had been working in. When I came back to the UK, I was at a loss for ideas. I naturally avoid cynicism; I don't like the way it feels. I went back to college.

The issues I confronted in foreign climes had followed me home. The unfairness, the cynical use of other people, the indifference to consequences of selfish actions, the reduction of life to getting and spending, were alive and well in Liverpool and LA. They have never been absent from our shared life, but now they have begun to manifest in a new and threatening way. But I began to realise that there is still one thing to hope for: one get- out- of- jail -free card for the human race.

Its name? The Greek word is *metanoia*. It means “change of mind— what we would call “change of heart.” Or we can just say, “Cambio de Sentido.”

We are all responsible for where we are right now. Not just in the sense of being guilty of short-sighted behaviour, but in the other sense of the word *responsible*: We are all in charge. Yes, it may take the appearance of a trumped-up sociopath to make us aware of it, but we were busily doing a fine job of keeping things moving in the wrong direction

before that. This sudden burst of retrograde thinking in the body politic is a wake-up call. It says that it is up to us—just us—to make things better.

We know that we are poisoning the rivers, blackening the air and the lungs of creatures, ripping up the precious rain forests for coffee tables and tossing onto the waste heap of history two hundred species of living things every day. We know that we are even changing the temperature of this big, blue world of ours beyond remedy. We know that we are creating mountains of hazardous waste as a legacy to our descendants. We put our bottles in recycle bins and stop using plastic straws but do not manage to stop the suppliers from churning out absurd and unnecessary junk. [We confuse programming with education and information storage with wisdom]

We know that we are consigning millions to a life of mere poverty when we buy our coffee and tea and bananas, that we are enforcing unfair trade practices even as we extol the virtues of competition, that we are stunting the potential of adults and killing children with our financial institutions, and consigning them to misery at our borders. We are worried about this, and in our own ways avoid certain products, certain banks, and certain journeys. We examine our packaged vegetables and pay attention to the gas station we stop at. We are worried, sometimes guilty, sometimes defiant; sometimes we remember all this in the polling stations and sometimes the fear of a tax increase overwhelms us, and we forget.

We are caught in an apparently inescapable net of circumstance. We seem individually powerless, collectively ambivalent. We go on anyway, and at the back of our minds there is a terrible intuition that we have got it all wrong somehow, that we have missed our turn. We are as helpless, it seems, as dinosaurs under the comet's smoke.

We could start with Genesis, in the Garden of Eden. We were playing around, happy as a clam, without a care in the world, and all of a sudden got this appetite for a bite of forbidden fruit from the tree of—note well: the “knowledge of good and evil.” From that point on we were in exile. We left behind all our animal chums, who could just go on hunting and grazing, and we became—for want of a better word, *conscious*.

The more up-to-date theorists would say it differently. We developed something that had never existed before in all the long story of

groping, evolving life forms: a large and complex brain that accommodated the power of reason. When we developed this grey matter or ate the apple—take your pick—we were lost as plain old animals, whose instinct would guide them. We had a new problem, and inasmuch as we couldn't go back to relying on our simple desires as guides for behaviour, we were stuck. The God of the Old Testament put an angel with a flaming sword between the happy past and us.

But our new gift seemed like a good thing. We could identify with the family and the tribe, take care of feeding and clothing ourselves more efficiently. We went from strength to strength, winning some, losing some, but always relentlessly overcoming everything in our way.

Until that same awareness brought us to our present predicament. Until we realised that there are others just like us over that hill, that we couldn't just go on fighting for limited resources forever, that what goes around, so to speak, comes around. The ability, which we have uniquely in creation, began to perform its true function, and we began to have this realisation: we are also responsible for the earth.

The Jesuit theologian and scientist Teilhard de Chardin, tracing the evolution of life from the beginning, calls this moment of realisation the *Omega point*. That is, we ceased being merely animals, though we are still that, and linked up with the element that caused the world to be born. We became conscious, and in that instant, *co-creators* of the world. According to Teilhard, this is a new twist in evolution, in which merely automatic processes (instincts) become deliberate (conscious) ones. This is the point when evolution gives over to growth by design, and as the mystics tell us, God begins to know himself in us.

This doesn't mean we can just relax and let the Omega point operate on its own. The growth point is within consciousness, and so it is in each of us individually as well as collectively. It is understandable that we might give in to impotent guilt or take refuge in denial: we are uncomfortable; but when was this not always true of growth, from your first set of teeth to the signing of your last will and testament? It is precisely our discomfort that will make us act. With it we can't just roll the covers back over our heads and sleep. We must act because we feel it.

So the time has come to integrate this change of heart, this *metanoia*, into the daily functioning of our lives. Because the challenge lies within consciousness, it is precisely there that we have to find our own *Cambio de Sentido*. That is the front line.

So, yes, recycle. Yes, vote and give money to help our sisters and brothers in Yemen and Gaza. Yes, get out onto the streets—that’s how we encourage each other. Yes, make do with less energy, less money, less security. Shop intentionally, invest consciously. Yes, feel concerned and interested—after all, you’re a big player in the universe now. Help shape our world from your awareness, not from your drives. And let yourself feel it, not just think it. Stay uncomfortable; most real work is.

We are all linked. You can take Jung’s collective unconscious as a guide. But it is even simpler than that. When you change your own mind, you change the collective mind of the world. That’s why the nursery of real change is not located in political parties or in the dreams of Elon Musk. It is in you.

So that’s your mission, if you choose to accept it. Hard, yes, but not at all impossible.

--Art Lester

Our Garden



Un-chopping a Walnut Tree (A parable about change)

[From Art's latest book: "The Truth in 60 Seconds"]

A man was clearing brambles from his big garden. The day was hot and sweat got into his eyes so that he couldn't see well. He swung his chainsaw and accidentally sawed through the trunk of a lovely walnut tree.

As you know, walnut trees take a long time to grow. It takes at least ten years to get the first few little walnuts and then many more to have a large shady tree. This tree had just given its first crop of nuts. The man felt so bad about having cut down the tree that he determined to un-chop it. From that time, he devoted all his spare time to the project.

First, he collected all the branches that had broken when the tree hit the ground. There were many of these, and he spent hours matching the splintered pieces and then carefully gluing them back into place. Then something awful happened: the leaves all began to turn brown and fall off. He carefully glued each one back in place and spent hours mixing paints to get the exactly right colour of green, then re-painted them. This part of the project took a long time.

He worked constantly. Sometimes he worked so hard that he forgot to go to work, and the bills began to pile up. Sometimes he worked so hard that he forgot to eat, and he grew thin. Sometimes he forgot to sleep, and he went around with both eyes half closed.

Re-attaching the trunk was very tricky. He had to pull the roots completely out of the ground to do this. He spent a very long time getting the rings to match exactly before he glued it in place. The next problem was the roots that had been torn out of the ground. He had to re-dig holes in the exact shape that would fit the roots. As the roots began to dry out, he rubbed expensive oils into the wood. Finally, he stopped going to his job altogether and just devoted himself to un-chopping the tree.

At last the tree was ready to be hoisted back into place. It was far too heavy for the man, who had grown weak through not eating and not sleeping. With the last of his savings he hired a crane and some men to help him.

Over several days he rigged a harness that wouldn't hurt the tender bark of the tree and attached a strong chain to it.

The crane arrived, and the man had to knock down a section of his fence so that the machine could get into his garden. He held the chain carefully up toward the arm of the crane, but one of the men said, "Sorry, Guv—I can't get close enough." He pointed to where a young walnut tree had grown up during all the years of the man's labours. It was just at the point of bearing fruit.

"Don't worry," said the man. "I'll go get my chainsaw."

--Art Lester

The Bourne

Out there was a river, flowing sweet and strong with fishes, flowers and birds singing sweet, sweet songs. People lived along the banks, fished and laughed and drew the waters for the washing and the plants that they grew in round houses with their cattle standing by. And fought and argued with their neighbours and still we cry.

Now the river is of people carried by a train. No trouble from the weather, safe from rain.

Up to London Town or Croydon is their stop. Some to work or play or some just to stop. At night the river changes and carries each to their source.

The laughter lines or tears of the day now rest in its cause.

The river flowed through Putney, now hidden underground. But sometimes weather changes and the river comes around.

--Robin Kennedy

Rainbows Across Borders sing to CVA and the Mayor

On Thursday the 11th October 25 singers from Rainbows Across Borders sang to the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor and a very packed hall at the AGM meeting of Croydon Voluntary Action (CVA).



Here is some praise:

***From: Sara Milocco 15 October 2018 Head of Communities
(Communication and Partnership), Croydon Voluntary Action
To: Ray Harvey-Amer***

Hello Ray,

It was an immense pleasure to have you on the day and everyone truly enjoyed the performance!

From: Steve Phaure Chief Executive, Croydon Voluntary Action

Hi Ray

You did a fantastic job yesterday – and the Choir was (to quote the word used by most people last night) awesome!

Many thanks for your efforts and please pass on to all the Choir that they did us proud – for which we're very grateful.

Getting to Know You

Pauline Peet is interviewed by Peter Taylor

You have been a member of the church for many years what changes have you seen?

I think the changes have been in me. Over the years I have attend meetings, joined groups and run groups, but for the last few years I seem to have withdrawn from these; but I have learned much and met many lovely people, some who have become good friends. The church has thrived over the years which is good to see.

Where would you be, if not in church on Sunday?

Maybe walking around Morden Park and having a coffee in the garden centre café with friends, or out with family.

Do you have a favourite hymn?

I have few, Flying Free, A New Community, A Melody of Love, Jerusalem (being in the W I) and Song of Peace, which sometimes brings a tear.

Has there been anyone one in your life who has inspired you or do you have any inspirational words?

A couple of people have inspired me over the years (But they are not for sharing) And my children inspire me by what they have achieved from their humble beginnings, and encouraging me to get out 'there' and live. I love the readings of Rumi and the late Rev Elizabeth Tarbox

Do you have a favourite type of food?

I like all food if cooked well, but my favourite is Thai, Indian if not too hot and my own home-made shepherd's pie with baked beans, comfort food.

How do you like to relax?

Being in a Book Group I read quite a lot (mainly before sleep). I do a bit of crafting cards etc, I have made yards of bunting for various family weddings these past few years. I can 'loose' myself crafting, the cup of tea I usually sit alongside with has usually gone cold before I remember it's there!!

Do you have any pet hates or dislikes?

Yes, rudeness in people, it cost nothing to be polite. And I Also dislike the way retired people are referred to in the media as pensioners; we are senior citizens with still much to contribute.

I hate tomato ketchup, though I love tomatoes. I think it's because of the mess the ketchup leaves around the plate. The same with brown sauce!!!!

We all had hopes and dreams of what we wanted to be when we grew up, what was your yours?

Do you know, I don't think I had any, after leaving college? I worked in a ladies-wear shop, married too young, had my first baby, while still living with my parents, as my Husband was in the forces traveling around. We eventually lived in married quarters at various camps around the country and Germany. By this time my family had grown. So, life revolved around them. - it is my time now ...

Are there any special times in your life, if you could, would like to live again?

Well there have been many special times such as births, weddings, lovely holidays etc., but there are also times that I regret, so maybe revisit those regrets and do things differently.

What. Is your favourite holiday destination?

Well it is no secret that most years I visit family in Canada and America. I love Canada and this year I visited Nova Scotia and fell 'in love'. I would love to cruise to Alaska or anywhere for that matter if funds allow!!!! Next spring, I am already booked to go to Spain so a little closer to home.

Finally, if you were to be stranded on a desert island what three things would be important to you (excluding a mobile phone)

A box of matches to light a fire to keep animals away and to send a signal to passing ships, a mosquito net, a book, and could I just have deodorant and my lipstick in case I meet up with another castaway. Pref Male!!!

This is a regular feature (but with custom -tailored questions) for anyone willing to participate. Please let us know.

Happy Birthday!

*We wish
Shirley Wright and Stephen Dick
a very happy birthday:*

From May this year a new law requires us to ask you if you would like us to continue sending you emails. If you do not wish us to continue sending you emails, could you please let us know? -- ed.

The Croydon Unitarian and Free Christian Church

1 The Croydon Flyover, Croydon, Surrey CR0 1ER,
Email croydonunitarian@hotmail.com,
www.croydonunitarians.org.uk
Tel 020 8667 1681

Contact Information

Minister	Rev. Art Lester	<i>Manse:</i> 020 8656 3996 <i>Email:</i> artlester@hotmail.com
Chairman & President	John Craske	<i>Tel:</i> 01342 604770 <i>Mobile :</i> 0798 2743333 <i>Email:</i> rjohncraske@gmail.com
Secretary	Martin White	<i>Tel:</i> 020 8715 6859 <i>Email:</i> deadlymittens@gmail.com
Treasurer	David Williams	<i>Tel:</i> 020 8661 2489 <i>Email:</i> davidmwilliams@hotmail.co.uk
Webmaster	Ross Burgess	<i>Tel:</i> 020 8645 0943 <i>Email:</i> ross@foxearth.net www.foxearth.net

General information from

Warden	Lol Benbow	<i>Tel:</i> 01689 841592 <i>Mobile :</i> 07932 154408 <i>E - mail</i> lolbow@googlemail.com
--------	-------------------	--

For Church bookings, contact Lol Benbow.

The Open-Door Newsletter

Editors **Peter & Jim**
Email: peter.taylor1123@gmail.com
Tel: 020 8681 6675, Mobile: 07758 943517

***COULD YOU PLEASE SEND US ANY CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THE
DECEMBER & JANUARY NEWSLETTER BY MONDAY 19TH
NOVEMBER 2018***