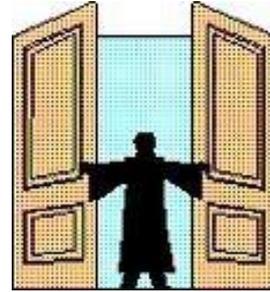


# ***THE OPEN DOOR***



## ***NEWS AND VIEWS OF CROYDON UNITARIANS***

***JUNE 2019***

***Our minister Rev. Art Lester is pleased to  
welcome you to worship every Sunday from  
10:30am for the Service at 11:00am and  
afterwards for fellowship and refreshments***



# Job Opportunity

Does anybody want a job? I've got a great career idea for you. Why not become a minister? Think about it: everybody knows a minister works just an hour a week, and if you can get a half - time ministry like some of us, why then, you'll only have to work 30 minutes.

There are perks too. You'll get free coffee and biscuits. If you have a dog collar somewhere - I still have one I bought for a formal wedding in Dublin - chances are you'll get an upgrade on rental cars. When I went to America once, a lady at the Alamo desk told me, "Father, I think you'd be more comfortable in a Pontiac." God bless Catholic schools.

Of course, you'll have to learn how to keep people awake for an hour a week. Not just that, you'll have to be a DJ, a stand -up comedian, a producer and director, an archivist of spiritual literature, a donations collector and one of those memory experts that notice everyone in the room. I didn't mention writing 2000- word sermons on purpose.

You get to meet all sorts of people. Of course, some will avoid you like the flu, but others will find an opportunity to try out a few weird theological ideas or to try and find out if they're destined for a good place when they die. Altogether, I think it's better to travel incognito. You have to change barbers a lot less often.

There are some downsides, too. If you have fifty members, 25 of them will think you're doing a great job, 15 will be not too sure, and the other 10 won't have an opinion. You see, there will always be something you're not doing enough of. Pastoral visiting is one. Organising groups is another. Belonging to national committees - there's always that. And never forget: you're only as good as your last sermon.

There's just one thing I left out. That is that no one can survive as a minister, or pastor, or priest if they're not motivated by a vision of the divine. You can joke all you want, criticise guys who turn up late for a funeral, say someone else treats their members like children and knock someone else for preaching "Readers' Digest sermons". But all of these will have at their core some need to work with a vision that transcends the ordinary. It's usually called one's vocation. So, if you don't have one, you'd be better off becoming something else.

Did I say that out loud?

--*Art Lester*

## Service - Leaders

Our Minister, Rev John Carter or Rev Steve Dick.

## June Musicians

2 <sup>nd</sup>	<i>Freda Lodge</i>
9 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Gill Stone</i>
16 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Freda Lodge</i>
23 <sup>rd</sup>	<i>Bill Higgins</i>
30 <sup>h</sup>	<i>Gill Stone</i>

## Annual Flower Communion

The Annual Flower Communion Service was held on Sunday May 12th.

The collection from the Service will go to the Marie Curie registered Charity.



## Place in the Arc

*(A sermon given by Art Lester n to the Paris Fellowship on 19 May)*

*It is* the best of times; *it is* the worst of times.

When Dickens penned those words, he was describing the desperate days of the French Revolution, but he could have been zeroing in on what's happening now: in Europe, America and just about everywhere.

Things are worse; things are better. Depending on whom you ask, it could be either. If you happen to read a British tabloid newspaper, you'll be treated to a lot of information. Too much information, probably. Not only will it tell you whom to vote for and whom to hate, it will tell you all the ways you will die whilst doing your customary things, like eating bacon or sleeping only six hours instead of seven. It may also tell you how good we have it, with our competent neo-liberal government. Dig far enough in the pages, and you'll find the same paradox: employment at an all- time high, but homelessness at a higher rate than during the Great Depression. Food banks multiplying like mushrooms. Private companies aiming

rockets at the Moon, but microplastic particles from pollution everywhere and in everything, including our bodies.

In the political arena, things are even worse. Steve Bannon, the far-right vandal of all things democratic, has recently said that people like you and me are, quote, “on the wrong side of history.” He means that we snowflake liberals, with our quaint insistence upon “fairness” and the “rule of law” just aren’t paying attention to the realities of history. On all sides can be seen the emergence of the same “strongmen” we fought wars to get rid of. We seem to be caught in a time warp, doomed to repeat past errors. Groundhog Day.

Way back in the days when everyone in America - on both sides - knew the lyrics to “We Shall Overcome,” there was a kind of background music to life. The times they were a-hanging. It seemed that humanity was waking up from a trance; things like war and discrimination as normal parts of life were finally wearing out. It’s true that turmoil was at a high point: Vietnam, race riots and a strange new phenomenon - women’s liberation - were rocking the boat. The old ways were being pushed toward the edge, and the fallout from that disturbed the unsteady peace that comes with ignorance.

Through the turmoil, though, an alert observer could see signs of a new way of thinking. Casual racism in the South, like the use of the N-word as an actual noun referring to African Americans, leaving the language of “nice” Americans, and retreating into the category of swear words. You had to learn to say, “he OR she” instead of just “he.” Young people like me thought things were bound to get better, and do so in a hurry.

Then they killed Martin Luther King. They killed Bobby Kennedy. The usually staid process of the Democratic National Convention disintegrated into a riot in Chicago. Students shut down Paris, brandishing the same slogans, and were violently suppressed. The Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia, in an attempt to re-establish the same old hegemony. Vietnam wore on. And on. Even the starry-eyed, like me, could see that things might be getting better, but if so, they were taking their damn sweet time.

I believe that if you look at world history from a distance, you will find that change - let’s say improvement - happens in predictable stages. There

is a surge, brought on by a new consciousness, maybe born of technology, like the invention of the printing press. Gains are made in literacy and other forms of awareness. Jet travel makes it easy to meet other people in distant places. The Internet makes us all members of world tribes. The surge moves things around. Gays and lesbians become, not perverts, but people. Skin colour loses a bit of relevance. Empire begins to be seen in retrospect as colonial oppression instead of proof of superiority. Women become people to those men who are paying attention, instead of objects of veneration or contempt. Sexuality leaves the dark alleyways and pops up on the front of women's magazines. There is an air of new freedom.

Then the reaction sets in. The comfortable ways that sustained granddad are under threat. Everyone is required to learn new words, new ideas. The pace accelerates until nearly everybody is a little uncomfortable. Some people are even more unsettled. They dig in. They resist change, and follow figures who come along and promise a magical return to old ways. We call them populists now, but they have had many names. A kind of chilly conservatism bites, and with it, a new burst of anger. People are saying, "I don't feel safe anymore." So, when someone says they can make America great again, or "take back control" of our borders, money and laws, who doesn't fall prey to that notion?

The image I use is that of the earthworm, crawling toward the surface, rising two feet, tiring, then falling back a foot and a half as he rests. The pace of change - of improvement - is not steady.

I believe that's where we are at the moment. For some of us, the changes have been easier. If they have resulted in improvements in our condition - if we are happy with the changes - then perhaps we become members of that tribe called the "metropolitan elite." If the changes have not been so kind, and we resist them, we are thought of as "stupid" and "uneducated." We have our own tribe, which we defend loudly. What is now called a "culture war" has begun, with wholly negative consequences. We get to a place where we can hardly speak to each other. We are Democrats and Republicans, leavers and 'remainers'. What seems like chaos breaks out. If you don't believe me, just switch on the radio for five minutes, if you can bear to.

I think I would be even more disturbed by all this if I hadn't lived through a similar time. At the age of twenty, when the issue of civil rights was beginning to heat up, I somehow landed a job as a reporter on a big Florida daily newspaper. I was exposed to a great deal of information - some of it new and challenging - about the growing demand for justice from African Americans.

My best friend, the scion of a wealthy Southern family, began to resent the things I was saying about the emergence of civil rights. His loyalty was to his upbringing in the Deep South tradition, and he saw me as becoming a dangerous radical. It was just when the Civil Rights Act was passing through Congress. I remember him saying one night, "Do you really expect my mother to sit next to her housemaid on a bus?" The fact that his mother never rode buses didn't faze him. But, when I said (unnecessarily harshly), "Yes. She's no better than her maid," he threw me out of his house.

It was a culture war. It turns out that I happened to be on the side of history, and he did not. But in case I'm leaving you with a false impression, Michael went on to law school and became an attorney for the ACLU, defending people's civil rights for a living. We resumed our friendship easily, and never referred to the split. The worm crawled up another inch. Martin Luther King once said, "Let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." In reality, that phrase was first used by the Unitarian preacher, Theodore Parker, who published it in a collection of his sermons in 1853. It has since been used by both Abraham Lincoln and Barack Obama. I see it as a comfort for those of us - and who isn't? - who feel caught in history. I can pull it out of memory when it seems that humanity is hell bent on rolling over and going back to sleep. If the arc of the moral universe is bending, then voices like that of Steve Bannon are just background noise. Our problem, stuck as we are in our tiny slice of history, is that we can't see the bend. It's like trying to see the curvature of the earth while standing on flat ground. It's all too easy to lose faith, to yield to impotent despair or, worse, to join the braying hordes in their delusion.

Do you remember those old sci-fi films about approaching global disaster? Mostly it involved invasion of aliens with blood in their eye stalks, though the occasional asteroid strike made an appearance, too. What happened

then was that, suddenly, all the warring nations of the earth stopped their quarrelling and got together to confront the threat. Rather like the animals in the Bambi film, who fled together from forest fire, leaving the fox to peacefully share a floating log with the bunny. In the films, people of all races sat together in a large room, getting on fine. There was usually a head scientist, who happened to have a beautiful daughter, with whom the hero fell in love. The sheer size of the emergency wiped clean the competing demands of the separate populations, a *deus ex machina*, something arriving unexpectedly, to heal divisions, at least for a while.

Sadly, I'm not savvy enough about current French life to know how much the climate emergency is affecting things here. All we get in the way of news is pictures of a burning cathedral and people in yellow vests on the streets. But I can say that, in the UK at least, the arc of the universe is just a shade more visible now, because of the Extinction Rebellion activists. Could it be that we don't need Martians or a random asteroid to focus our minds?

One thing is clear: we're all heading for trouble. Trouble that will make a paralyzed Parliament, yellow vests in the streets or a rogue American president seem like mere details.

When news of the conflagration in Notre Dame was being digested in the UK, quite a few media figures began to talk about the good news that was hidden in the bad. The heroism of the firefighters, the generosity of donors, the resolve of many to rebuild and make things right, were all tonics for a cynical news industry. I don't know how things have since worked out, now that the cynics have had a go at it, but there was a lot of cheerful talk about the disaster bringing the people of France - even the people of Europe - closer together.

If that is so - and even if it isn't, except in the popular imagination - it gives us a clue about seeing the arc of the moral universe. Foxes can co-exist with bunny rabbits, given the right situation. It gives us the hope that beneath the cynical rhetoric of the warring tribes, there is something that can unite us.

That tells me that enough fearsome prophecy may have already been produced. The tragic pictures of polar bears stranded on ice floes, the fires and droughts that are already here, the direst possible prognostication

about whole nations migrating into other peoples' space, have either done their job by now, or not. But there is one thing that is not being said often enough.

What is begging to be said is what benefits will accrue to every living being if we get this right. To make a vision of a world that by its very nature is fairer, cleaner and safer. The unexpected payoff in the catastrophe, the good news in the bad.

That's just a hint, a clue, a foretaste of what might happen as we ride the arc of history into the uncertain future. So, climb aboard, all you bunny rabbits and foxes; your place has always been reserved -- *Art Lester*

## **Expect Life!** *By Elizabeth Tarbox*

*Introduction by Pauline Peet*

I love the meditations and readings of the late UUA minister Elizabeth Tarbox. And after reading 'Expect Life' in church recently, it struck a chord. How often do we look far ahead like booking holidays and organizing special occasions? I know I do; I believe it's good to have something to look forward to, but there is a lot of living to do before these events.

I loved the silly games with grandchildren (still do) who have never ceased to amaze me and bring joy into my life.

Nature brings its own rewards with different seasons from barren landscapes in Winter to a cacophony of colour through Spring, Summer and Autumn.

Our loved ones who are no longer with us are often thought of in quiet moments too.

I'm sure most of us have been hurt by love, the joy it brings and then the hurt and tears when it falls apart, all apart of life's journey and shapes who we are.

So, I am going to carry these words. I'm not ready to die but live and expect LIFE.

### **Expect Life!** *By Elizabeth Tarbox*

Do not live too far in the past or in the future. Live now. In each moment expect a miracle: ten kinds of birds at the feeder, and the tracks of a fox in the snow.

Pick up a magnifying glass and scrutinise the crocus. See the pollen at the centre of the daffodil, life's dust, death-defying life. Be astonished at the flower, arrested by its beauty.

Run naked through the garden early in the morning and hope the wild geese fly by. Get silly and laugh loudly with your grandchildren or your grandparents. Refuse to leave the dead behind, but bring their memory to all your chores and games and corners of quiet, warm tears.

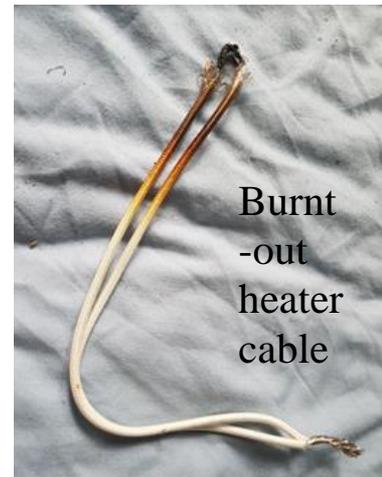
Know always that joy and sorrow are woven together; one cannot be without the other. If you love, know that sometimes your love will bring your tears; if you grieve, know it is because at some time you were willing to love.

Do not be afraid to die today. But expect life!

## THE SAGA OF THE WALL HEATER

Here is the sad story of the wall heater in the church near to the organ. It is very near to where Audrey sits. She told me that there was no heat coming out of it. So, I investigated.

A little explaining is required here. The wall heaters, as I call them, are electric fires similar to domestic electric fires very popular some 50 years ago. Many of the same type were updated and in use until technology improved the design of the heating elements which now are enclosed in a heat-resistant-glass tube. There are ten of these heaters in the church.



Burnt  
-out  
heater  
cable

The first problem was the bulbs which glow red or orange when the fire is running, they turned out to be in short supply. I tried several wholesale outlets who all said they were waiting for stock to come in. There are no substitutes as the glass in the bulbs is made of special heat resistant quality as they are plugged in right next to the heating elements which run at hundreds of degrees. So, delay there.

I had replaced several bulbs and discovered that the panels could be very tricky to remove as the screw heads were often badly chewed. I thought I would replace them as I went along. It took weeks of trying and trying to find the correct screws, but after a long search, which took me all over South London, I discovered a supply by accident at a shop in Purley.

For the technical minded the screw thread is  $\frac{3}{4}$  Whitworth. Now obsolete. Everyone now uses metric and they don't match.

I also had quite a detective job to obtain the cable to repair the fire and again called on many electrical wholesale companies before finding an oven repair supplier near Liverpool. They were very helpful on the phone but sent the wrong thickness of cable the first time and when the 'correct' one turned up it burned out in two weeks. So, I thought I would try a bodge and fitted a double strand - two cables instead of one. It lasted a month or so and Audrey complained again. The first time I opened it up I discovered that the fire was running! Then it stopped the following Sunday.

Intermittent faults are the worst to track down but I could see that the cable was badly burned at the connection point, which you can see in the photo taken by Peter. However, as the fire was still working (sometimes) I decided to replace these two heat resistant cables with a thicker one again. The company sent me the wrong cable again so there was another delay.

Finally, two weeks ago I arrived to fix the dreaded wall heater *for good*. Armed with new connectors, new thicker cable and replacement screws I dismantled the panels and disconnected the cables in the fire unit. On powering up after fitting new connections and cable, to my horror I discovered that the cable tested OK but the fire did not run. Same old, same old - the bulb lit and the fire didn't. I took it all to pieces again, thankful that I had not put back the outer panel at that stage. After removing a further panel, I discovered there was a *second* fault this time with the heater element itself. Henry had told me that he had reconnected the element in some of these units in the past by simply stretching the element wire and screwing it down again so I did that. It was very fiddly and took ages to get it fastened well enough to take the current. And then I replaced the new cable as before.

I am so glad I did not give up and say it was broken beyond repair, because at the time of writing it is working perfectly and I have both the materials and the 'know how' to fix the next one to fail in the same way. I bet one of them will.

*--Lol Benbow*

## Getting to Know You

*This is a regular feature (but with custom -tailored questions) for anyone willing to participate. Please let us know. Unfortunately, we have no participant this month.*

### *Happy Birthday!*

*We wish  
Martin White, Mabel Kibisha, Joe Adams,  
Elena and Peter Taylor  
a very happy birthday.*

*The law now 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.*

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*For Church bookings, contact Lol Benbow.*

## The Open - Door Newsletter

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**COULD YOU PLEASE SEND US ANY CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THE  
JULY NEWSLETTER BY FRIDAY 21<sup>ST</sup> JUNE 2019**