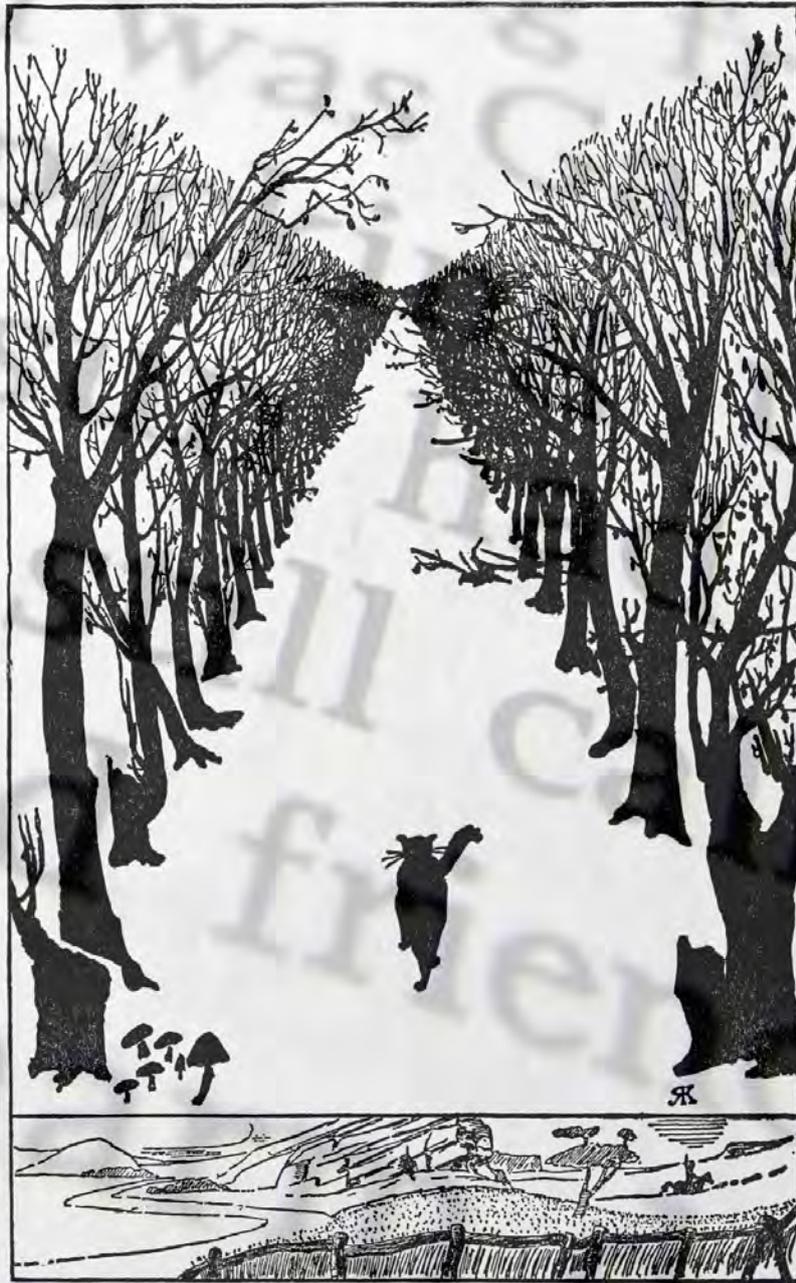


Sunday 5th February 2017

Youth Sunday



Weaving Stories into Worship

A special pack produced by the Youth Programme

WEAVING STORIES INTO WORSHIP

Youth Sunday – 5 February 2017

Dear worship leaders and Sunday school leaders

Welcome to our pack on storytelling. This pack gives you some tips on telling stories and then provides you with some stories you can use in any way you like. These have been gathered from across the Unitarian community. You may wish to choose one of the stories to form part of some worship for Youth Sunday (5th February 2017) or you can use it for another occasion. The idea of Youth Sunday is to encourage our children and young people to lead or take part in the service or for congregations to make their worship more child-friendly, interactive and intergenerational. You may wish to focus on the Youth Programme and bring attention to our forthcoming Unitarian youth events (for up-to-date information go to www.unitarian.org.uk) or contact jharley@unitarian.org.uk.

Thank you to all of you who sent me stories. Unfortunately I could not include them all. Please keep sending them as I may be able to publish a sequel!

Any feedback on this material to help us choose themes and compile packs for future Youth Sundays would be gratefully received.

Happy storytelling!

Rev John Harley – GA Youth Coordinator

Storytelling tips

Why bother with stories?

- Everyone likes a good story. Whether you have children in worship or not, a well-told story can change the dynamic and energise the atmosphere. People of all ages can access and enjoy stories.
- Stories provide contrast to other aspects of the worship. Memorable and valuable worship usually provides a range of ways of being and doing: e.g. a song, a story, a meditation, a silence, a ritual. Good worship has a variety of terrains and a story can act as a useful change of gear.
- Stories can explore a theme in an intuitive and unconscious way and can work on many levels, compared to a reading or sermon.

Suggestions for telling stories

- Ideally tell the story from memory. I would always say it is better to tell it rather than read it off a sheet or book even if you don't tell it perfectly – in fact an occasional mistake can add humour and interest! If it really is a story that relies on getting the words exactly right then read it with as much body language and eye contact as possible and use props if you can.
- One tip I have to help memorise stories is to write it out in your own handwriting first – this helps to internalise and learn it. Something I also do is to place this piece of paper in my jacket or pocket so that while I am telling it I know that I have it close

at hand. This can give me the confidence to tell the story from memory as I know that I can refer to the words if I get stuck.

- Feel free to ask questions to draw in your 'audience' especially before you tell the story in order to set the context. For example if the story is about a dream then you could ask if anyone has had a dream recently or did everyone sleep ok.
- Use props, soft toys or finger puppets as visual aids. It is incredible how a simple object can bring a story to life.
- If children are present try and involve them. In fact try and involve people of all ages. You can ask them questions, ask them to make sound effects, operate a puppet, blow up a balloon etc. This can generate a lot of fun.
- Ask some volunteers to mime the story while you narrate it. Again this can create a lot of movement and humour especially if the actions are out of sync with the words at times.
- Be flexible in whether you tell the story totally accurately or not – it all depends on the occasion. Sometimes it is appropriate to tell the story without any changes while other times you may make changes to strengthen the message. There is a Brothers Grimm story about two brothers which I have adapted because the original ending goes off on an unnecessary and violent tangent.
- Where in the worship do you want to tell the story? At the beginning to introduce the theme, or in the middle of the address to illustrate a point, or right at the end of the service to create a finale?
- Consider telling the story in parts throughout the worship. This can work well for quite a complex story like *The Nightingale* by Hans Christian Andersen or a very moving story like *The Selfish Giant* by Oscar Wilde. Divide it into three natural parts and weave the other aspects of worship between each stage.

John Harley

Some stories offered by the Unitarian community (THEMES IN CAPITALS):

The inspiration for this story came from a Facebook comment by a friend of my daughter's; she and her mother were discussing her brother's funeral, for which they wanted something special, which they couldn't afford, until a man came up to them and gave them £50 - his Random Act of Kindness for that day.

Anne Mills – Bury Unitarian Church

KINDNESS

Once upon a time, there was a little girl, called Cathy, who lived with her mother, in a small house, in the middle of a town, very like Bury. Cathy's Mum worked hard, but there wasn't usually a great deal of money to spare. After all the bills had been paid they weren't left with much. One thing that was always paid, though, was Cathy's Saturday dancing-class. For Cathy loved dancing! Wherever she was, she danced - in the house, in the street, on her way to school - always whirling and twirling around.

One day, Cathy arrived back from her class, full of excitement. "Mum, Mum," she shouted, "There's going to be a dancing-class concert, and I'm going to dance a solo!"

"That's fantastic, Cathy", her Mum said, "Well done!" There was no stopping Cathy that day; she danced around, talking non-stop about the concert and her solo, and by bedtime she was exhausted. Not long after she'd gone to bed, the phone rang. It was the dancing-class teacher, wanting to talk about the concert. She filled in all the details for Cathy's Mum, and ended by saying, "Of course, Cathy will need a new dress and matching shoes, but I'll leave that with you". Once the call ended, Cathy's Mum sat down in a chair, put her head in her hands, and cried. She knew she couldn't afford the dress and shoes that Cathy needed, but she didn't know how she was going to tell the teacher that and she had no idea what she was going to say to Cathy.

The next day was Sunday, and Cathy's Mum set off for work, leaving Cathy at the next door neighbour's, as usual. It was a beautiful day - the sky was blue, and the sun was shining. Cathy's Mum worked hard all morning, and, at lunchtime, she decided to take her sandwiches outside. She found a bench in the nearby gardens and had only just settled herself on it, when a young man rushed up to her, pushed an envelope into her hands, and said, "This is for you!". Then he looked at her and added, "Oh, it's the lady from the supermarket, isn't it, the one with the lovely smile." And with that, he dashed off. Cathy's Mum was very surprised; she sat for a while, turning the envelope over and over in her hands. When she finally opened it, she found £50 in notes, inside it. I'm sure I don't have to tell you what she used the money for! Suffice it to say that, a few weeks later, Cathy was the star of the show, at the dancing-class concert, in her new matching dress and shoes. And I wonder what colour you think Cathy's dress was?

(This can be expanded by anyone who wishes to use it. The dress and shoes could be changed to something different – sports gear, for example. This story could be followed by some time for people to share any random acts of kindness they have experienced).

A story offered by Mike Cuerden (a member at Dean Row Chapel, Wilmslow):

ACCEPTANCE

Roses and Dandelions

Have you heard of the Mullah Nasruddin? He was a Sufi Muslim who lived in the Middle Ages and lots of stories have been told about him. Mullah means teacher and religious leader and Nasruddin had unusual ways of looking at life. Some people called him the wise fool – but many consulted him for advice.

It got so bad that they even disturbed him at rest. One night, when he was sleeping on the roof to keep cool, he felt a pebble land on his head and heard a voice calling: "Mullah, I have a big question." "*But it's the middle of the night,*" he called back.

"No, you must listen, this is really important. Should I tell the man who wants to buy my donkey that it's sick?" "*Yes, of course. You know it is right to be honest. Now let me get some sleep.*"

Next day Nasruddin put up a sign: Two questions for 100 toman, which was the currency in those times. Peace at last. Days went by without him being bothered.

But then a man knocked on the door holding a bag of money. "I have two questions," he said, "and I have enough money – but don't you think 100 toman is rather expensive?"

"*Yes,*" replied Nasruddin. "*What's your second question?*"

The man looked cross, but went on: "For years I've been trying to grow roses; I plant them all round my house, waiting for them to grow and bloom so I can see their beauty and experience their perfume. But all I get is dandelions."

"Ah," said Nasruddin, "there is an ancient remedy for this that involves three hot chilli peppers and the dung of a camel." "I've already tried that," said the man. "It doesn't work." "You could try moving house to live near the fertile banks of the river Tigris." "I can't move – my family and friends and my business are here."

Nasruddin thought for a bit, held out his hand for the 100 toman, and said: "Well," he said, "there is another solution, but you might not like it."

"Tell me," said the man, "tell me."

"All right," said Nasruddin. "You must just learn to love dandelions."



This picture shows Nasruddin famously riding his donkey backwards. One day some students asked him why he rode in this way. He replied "what usually happens is that I want to go in one direction, and this stubborn beast wants to go in the exact opposite way. So this is our compromise."

Supplied by Claire Wilton, York: 'Here is a traditional story with notes on how I used it in a small children's session. It might work with multiple "skies" for a bigger group. It has a simple structure so it is easy to tell without a script. I used sticks to tell it and all was going well until one over-enthusiastic person broke the sticks when he wasn't meant to!': (Source: worldstories.org.uk)

WONDER

The First Sunrise: An Aboriginal Story from Australia

This works for a small group. You will need a stick for each person and a large blanket, throw or parachute. Start with everyone huddling underneath the blanket. Gradually lift up the blanket using the sticks and throw it off at the appropriate place in the story.

Long, long ago in the Dreamtime the earth was dark. There was no light. It was very cold and very black. Huge grey clouds kept the light and the warmth out and were so low that the animals had to crawl around. The Emu's hobbled neck bent almost to the ground; the Kangaroo couldn't hop, and none of the birds could fly higher than several feet in the air. Only the Snakes were happy because they lived close to the ground. The animals lived by crawling around the damp dark earth, feeling for fruits and berries. Often it was so hard to find food that several days would pass between meals. The Wombat became so tired of people bumping into him that he dug himself a burrow, and learned to sleep for long periods. Eventually, the birds decided they'd had enough. They called a meeting of all the animals. The Magpies decided that they would raise the sky by gathering sticks and pushing the sky up. All the animals agreed it was a good idea, and they set about gathering sticks. The Magpies took a big stick each, and began to push at the sky.

The Emus, the Kangaroos and the Wombats watched as the Magpies pushed the sky slowly upwards. They used the sticks as levers, first resting the sky on low boulders, then on small hills. As the animals watched, the Magpies, pushing and straining, reached the top of a small mountain.

It was still very dark, but at least the Emu could straighten up, and the Kangaroo was able to move in long proud hops. The Magpies kept pushing the sky higher and higher, until they reached the highest mountain in the whole land. Then with a mighty heave, they gave the sky one last push! The sky shot up into the air, and as it rose it split open and a huge flood of warmth and light poured through on to the land below. The whole sky was filled with beautiful reds and yellows. It was the first sunrise.

Overjoyed with the beauty, the light and the warmth, the Magpies burst into song. As their loud warbling carried across the land, the Sun-Woman rose slowly, and began her journey towards the west.

Now, each morning when the Sun-Woman wakes in the east she lights a fire to prepare the torch that she will carry across the sky each day. It is this fire that provides the first light of dawn. Then she takes up her torch and begins her daily journey across the sky. When she reaches the western edge of the world, she extinguishes her flaming bark torch. Then she sits down, and repaints herself in brilliant reds and yellows, ready for her journey through a long underground passage back to her camp in the east.

So that is why, to this day, every morning when the Sun-Woman wakes and lights her early morning fire, all the Magpies greet her with their beautiful song.

Offered by Dr Jane Russell, Hinckley Unitarians:

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

The Ant and the Grasshopper

Once upon a time there was a grasshopper which was hopping, chirping and singing to its heart's content, in a field in hot summer's day. There was an ant staying nearby the grasshopper's nest. They were good friends. It was springtime and the grasshopper was having a lot of fun playing, singing, and dancing in the sun. But the ant was hard working. It was collecting food grains and storing them in its house for the winter.

The grasshopper did not understand why the ant was doing so much hard work and keeping food for winter. He asked, "Hey, Ant! Why don't you come outside and play with me?" The ant replied, "I can't. I am storing food for the winter when there won't be anything to eat!" The grasshopper only laughed at the ant and said, "Why are you worrying now? There is plenty of food!" and continued to play, while the ant worked hard.

When winter came, the grasshopper did not find a single grain of food to eat. It began to starve and feel very weak. The grasshopper saw how the hardworking ant had plenty of food to eat and realized its foolishness.

Offered by John Harley. One morning I had some time to entertain my God daughter and her sister so I made up a story. I then worked on it over the weeks. Hedgehogs are one of my favourite animals and we rarely seem to see them these days in the UK:

DETERMINATION

Scruffles the Hedgehog

Scruffles was an unlucky hedgehog. He seemed to spend his whole life being ordered around and treated badly by other animals. Recently things had got worse. A rather bossy and mean owl found him one day and decided to use his rounded prickly back as a desk tidier. The owl, who looked after the money of all the rich animals in the area, would push down important sheets of paper, all covered in big numbers and sums, on Scruffles' spikes. After a long day of counting money, poor Scruffles' back would be covered in so many bills that you would hardly know at all that there was a hedgehog under the layer of paper. One night the owl had handled so much money and paperwork that Scruffles could not move. It looked like he was wearing a patchwork coat of mathematics. Passing spiders and moths laughed at the mere sight of him. Scruffles was so bored by the owl's endless sums that he fell asleep. As you may know when hedgehogs go to sleep they curl up in a tight ball. Well, this is exactly what happened and he rolled off the desk into the wastepaper bin. The owl was furious that his spiky servant had fallen asleep while there was a lot more work to be done and was sure that he jumped off his desk just to be naughty. He hooted with rage, picked the animal out of his bin and hurled him out of the window.

Scruffles rolled down the garden into a badger's sett. As it happened the badger was delighted. She spent all her time practicing very difficult yoga positions. Although she was a bit annoyed that Scruffles had disturbed her right in the middle of a very tough pose called 'Human' she took one sight of the hedgehog and had a great idea. The badger had just

bought a new bed of nails because she had read in her Yoga magazine that really peaceful animals often lie on a platform of nails in order to feel calm and relaxed. She had heard that the sharp metal points keep can keep your fur soft and give you a good night's sleep. That night she used Scruffles as a perfect pillow. Scruffles was so frightened that he curled up into a round cushion shape. The badger was content for the first ten minutes of night time and felt nice and sleepy. Then things went wrong. Scruffles' fleas came out to play and decided to treat the badger's fur as a playground. Soon the badger felt more and more itchy instead of all peaceful and content. After a terrible, sleepless night the badger threw poor Scruffles out of the window.

Scruffles hurtled across a field and fell into a fox's den. The fox was at first alarmed because he remembered one painful surprise when he was a cub and he had cut his nose on the spikes of a hedgehog after making the mistake that this strange animal was a furry football. Soon though the fox realised this hedgehog could be useful to him. He liked to keep his den very clean and tidy but all his brooms were quite worn out and broken after years of housework. He found a straight long stick and attached Scruffles to one end with some ivy yarn. The fox used his new, if slightly weird, broom with great gusto and Scruffles' spikes were very good at sweeping up all the dust and litter. The trouble was that Scruffles' tiny wet nose got irritated and after a while he couldn't help letting out an almighty sneeze. The tidy pile of sweepings was blown in every direction. Even the fox's special drawer of silk bow ties got covered in cobwebs and fluff. The fox ripped the twine from the stick and angrily tossed Scruffles out of the roof of his den.

Scruffles rolled down an avenue of trees and as he went faster and faster his spikes picked up more and more leaves. He finally came to a standstill on the overgrown lawn at the back of a thatched cottage. An old woman was out gardening, trying to keep her flowerbeds free of weeds. Her back was getting very stiff and she was finding it quite a challenge to keep her garden tidy. She had watched Scruffles' speedy arrival and noticed how easily this funny looking hedgehog had picked up so many leaves. The old woman asked Scruffles if he would mind rolling around the lawn more and gather up the rest of the leaves. The woman had such a kind face, covered in friendly wrinkles, that Scruffles was happy to finish the job. In fact Scruffles did so amazingly well that the old woman could see the fresh green grass of her lawn for the first time that autumn. She was delighted and promptly offered him a new home, a nice two-bedroomed hole underneath a mound of grass cuttings. The old woman said that if Scruffles would help rake up the leaves every autumn then he would be free to play, eat and sleep for the rest of the year. The old woman was deeply contented because from that day on she received some help in the garden and she had a new friend and companion. Scruffles was happy at last as he had found a safe home away from all those animals who wanted to do nasty things to him. The two unlikely friends lived happily ever after.

Shared by Sheila Seal, a member of Ipswich and Norwich congregations: 'Inspired by the wonderful 'Frog and Toad' stories by Arnold Lobel I have written one of my own':

FRIENDSHIP

A Toad and Frog story - Water Bill

Toad went to Frog's house. The sun was shining. It was a very hot day.

Toad knocked on Frog's door.

"You look hot" said Frog.

"I am so hot that I am beginning to dry out" said Toad.

"We can have a drink of water" said Frog.

Frog poured two glasses of water. Frog and Toad drank the water.

"I am still hot" said Toad.

"We can go and swim in the river?" said Frog.

Frog and Toad swam in the river. They stood under a waterfall to keep cool. Then they sat in Frog's garden to dry off.

"Your plants are beginning to wilt" said Toad.

"I will fill up the watering can and water them" said Frog.

Frog filled his watering can and watered his plants.

Suddenly, there was a loud knocking sound.

"What is that noise?" said Toad.

"Someone is knocking on my door" said Frog,
"Let's go and see who it is".

Frog and Toad walked round the house.

A water-rat was knocking on Frog's door.

"This letter is for you" said the water-rat.
He gave the letter to Frog.

Frog looked at the envelope. There was a French stamp on it.

“This letter is from France” said Frog. “It must be from my French cousin”.

Frog opened the letter.

“What does it say?” said Toad.

“Oh...” said Frog.

“What is the matter?” said Toad.

“It is his water bill” said Frog.

“We don’t have water bills” said Toad.

“No, we don’t” said Frog, “but my French cousin does and it makes him feel worried.”

“Why does it make him feel worried?” said Toad.

“Because he hasn’t got the money to pay it” said Frog.

Frog and Toad sat together in Frog’s kitchen, thinking.

“I know,” said Frog, “we can sell things and earn some money for him”.

“What can we sell?” said Toad.

“We can sell biscuits” said Frog.

Frog and Toad made lots of biscuits. They cooked the biscuits in Frog’s oven. It was very hot in the kitchen. Frog opened the window. The smell of biscuits went out of the window. Many animals came to see what was cooking.

“Those biscuits smell good” they said.

“They are for sale” said Frog.

Frog and Toad sold all the biscuits. They made lots of money.

“Now we have the money to send to my cousin” said Frog.

“Yes,” said Toad “but we have no biscuits left.”

“We can make some more” said Frog.

Frog and Toad spent a happy afternoon making more biscuits, together.