

## Reflection for March – Celebrating Age – Joan Wilkinson

Whilst reading 'The Unitarian Life – Voices Past and Present', edited by Stephen Lingwood, I came across the following quotation from James Luther Adams, who lived from 1901 – 1994. James Luther Adams was perhaps the most influential theological thinker of Unitarian Universalism in twentieth century America. In the 1930s he studied in Germany, working with the underground church, which resisted Nazism.

In his 1986 book: *The Prophethood of All Believers* he wrote the following on growing old:

*Each stage of individual development offers unique experience and opportunity. Certain experiences are possible only in youth – for example, the sense of the wide-openness of the future.*

*There comes a time, however, when the individual may say, "Nevermore." Certain options – for example, career options – may no longer be open. Simone de Beauvoir at the age of fifty catalogues the things she will never do again: lie in the hay, slide on morning snow, win a first lover. But other experiences are possible only in fruited old age: the contemplation of satisfactions and beauties of long ago, the cherishing of old friendships, the exploration of opportunities previously unheeded (partly because of other importunate obligations), and also the meeting of the adversity of ill health (or of waning powers) with serenity and dignity.*

*In conjugal relationships, the love of the couple for each in middle life or in old age can possess unique qualities. To appreciate this uniqueness is something that requires thought and new sensitivity. A theology of ageing asserts, then, that each age group (and each person) has its own inimitable rendezvous with the coy mistress, the meaning of life.*

These words written by James Luther Adams resonate deeply with me as I suspect they will with those who read or hear them. Whilst it is good to watch and celebrate all that is good in many of the youngsters we know, how sad to watch those who struggle through their childhood, adolescence and young adult life, where life's meaning is in gang culture, rebellion and violence, or where life-chances have been lacking throughout their lives. May we support in prayer and action all that which goes some way to showing a better way, a way of more possibilities. Supporting the Send a Child to Hucklow is just one way we can help youngsters have sight of that which is positive and gives meaning to life, as well as supporting that which is being done locally.

Throughout my life, I hear the words echoing – ‘why don’t you learn to act your age’. Whilst acknowledging the limitations and opportunities of older age, as expressed in the words of James Luther Adams, each individual is encouraged to celebrate age in their own unique way. We are called to celebrate this great gift of life by living it right through the years, sharing both joys, insights, hopes and concerns. It is through caring and sharing that individuals of all ages can explore and discover the meaning of their lives.

‘The Unitarian Life’, edited by Stephen Lingwood at £9.99 can be obtained from Essex Hall by telephoning your order with card payment to 020 7240 2384.