

Worship transcript for March 22, 2020

Opening music

“We Shall Be Known” (by MaMuse)

Welcome (Rev. Robert Hardies)

Good morning, All Souls. I hope this message finds you healthy and well. You all have been in my prayers this week. Our team has put together another intimate worship experience that we'd like to share with you this morning. We hope that it speaks to you during these difficult times.

Before we begin worship, though, I want to once again assure you that Rev. Tony Coleman, Rev. Rob Keithan, Chaplain Christin Green, and myself are all available to you during these difficult times. Please don't hesitate to reach out if you'd like to speak with one of us.

We have also created opportunities for congregants to connect with one another and with a minister via Zoom, to simply check-in with each other about how we're feeling right now. I'm hosting the next Zoom check-in tomorrow, Monday March 23rd, from 4:00-5:00 pm. You'll find access information for this and other check-ins in the email I sent to you this morning.

We're thinking about our families with children, too. I hope you're all hanging there. Dolores Miller and James Ploeser are doing a great job updating religious education resources every week on the RE page of our website.

Rev. Rob Keithan is connecting with our social justice leaders and with our partners in the community to explore ways we can serve the larger community during this time. If you have thoughts or ideas, please reach out to Rev. Keithan directly.

Finally, many of you have asked how you can support All Souls during the pandemic. With in-person worship cancelled, a large portion of the church's income stream is at risk, and with it, our ability to pay our terrific staff, including our hourly front desk and custodial staff whom we are committed to supporting throughout the pandemic.

I invite you to please consider making a one time or recurring donation online today. Simply click the donate button at the top of our homepage, and follow the simple instructions for online giving. You may also text a gift to All Souls by texting “ascu” to 73256. Of course, you can always mail a check to the church as well. And thank you. Your generosity is greatly appreciated!

Friends, I hope you find this week's worship experience meaningful and helpful. You may want to get your home chalice ready to light now as I turn things over to

Rev. Tony Coleman to share our chalice lighting and opening prayer.

Chalice Lighting (Rev. Tony Coleman)

In this unique time, a moment in which social distancing has become a recommended norm, our rituals, those practices of body and spirit that connect us, are more important than ever. For these reasons, I invite you to pause this video now and, if you can, grab a candle or a chalice of your own, and light it with me.

We create this flame now to remember the light, warmth, the brightness and the energy of our community. We create this flame to remember the light that shines in each and everyone of us. We create this flame to remember the light of the sun, a light that shines even when we cannot see it. Even though we cannot gather in person, this flame lives and dances, still, just like the Spirit of life that connects us across all manner of distances.

As we prepare ourselves for this unique time of worship, I invite you to join me and breathe.

Feel the rhythm of your breath.

Don't try to control it or change it, just feel it, just follow it.

In and out.

Feel the air enter your body, and let it go.

If you detect a scent, breathe it in, and let it go.

If you feel the urge to cough or clear your throat, don't fight it.

Just breathe and let it go. And as you breathe, I invite you to cultivate, to make room for, a feeling of gratitude, gratitude for the plants that feed our planet oxygen, gratitude for that complicated community of organs that make up our bodies, gratitude for this moment to breathe.

And as you breathe, I also invite you to bring to your awareness, everyone who is right now struggling to breathe, all those who are afraid to breathe.

Let us bring to our attention all those who are anxious right now, all those who are isolated right now, all those who are sick, right now, and let us send out into this world, with our breath, love, let us send out compassion, let us send out a spirit of solidarity and care. For

In this time of social distancing, where so many of us may be feeling alone and anxious, let us be sure to leave room to breathe, to connect with the spirit within us, and just as we nurture gratitude for all that we have, let us also make room for compassion, not only for others, but for ourselves.

Great and gracious Spirit of Life, blow in the wind, rise in the sea, and hold us, all.

Amen

Music

“Spirit of Life” (words and music by Carolyn McDade) (sung in English and Spanish)

Spirit of life, come unto me
Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion
Blow in the wind, rise in the sea
Move in the hand, giving life the shape of justice
Roots hold me close, wings set me free
Spirit of life, come to me, come to me.

Reading (Rev. Hardies)

I'd like to begin by sharing with you a familiar poem that has taken on new layers of meaning in these changed circumstances. This is the poem “Kindness” by the Palestinian American poet Naomi Shihab Nye.

Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.
How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to mail letters and purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
It is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow

or a friend.

Message (Rev. Hardies)

I once watched a child build a sand castle by the ocean. The child was having a ball forming walls and turrets with his shovel and pail. And at least part of the fun was to try to protect the castle from the occasional encroachment of a wave. I saw the child dig a moat to protect the castle walls. And even lay his body down between the castle and the ocean to defend it. But once—when the child wasn't looking—a large wave came crashing down and within moments completely destroyed his creation. By the time the water slipped back out to sea, not a trace of the boy's castle remained. And the child began to cry. He cried not only for the loss of his castle. That was part of the game, after all. He cried because his castle had been taken from him so swiftly, so suddenly, and so completely...

And he didn't even see it coming.

Friends, a little over a week ago a big wave came crashing over us, sweeping away much of what we'd thought of as our daily lives. Our plans. Our routines. Our work and school. Our patterns of connecting with the people we love. So many of the things that give our lives structure and meaning we're taken from us. Swiftly and suddenly.

And most of us didn't even see it coming.

When the boy lost his castle he cried. Not only for his castle, but for the momentary loss of his own sense of security and well-being. I'm wondering—a week into this pandemic—if we've had a chance yet to grieve all that we've lost in just a short time. I've heard people speak about their anxiety...their fear... their sense of uncertainty...

But many times anxiety and fear are symptoms of grief. They're the result of multiple losses that need to be acknowledged and grieved.

And so my first question for you this morning, friends, is: What have you lost since this pandemic began? A job? A sense of security and well-being? Your connection to the people you love. The daily routines that once gave structure and meaning to your life?

At a time when many folks are advising us to count our blessings, I want to encourage us, first, to count our losses. Because if we can't name and acknowledge what we've lost, we can't grieve

what we've lost. And our inability to grieve can exacerbate our feelings of anxiety, fear and depression. On the other hand, when we acknowledge our grief. When you care for our tender hearts. We begin to soften.

And with the softening of our hearts, comes compassion for ourselves and empathy for others. Two qualities that are critical to getting through these difficult times. So I would invite each of us this morning to take a moment to count our losses. To acknowledge them and grieve them.

And yes, I also think we should count our blessings! I've had so many people tell me that this last week has brought new and surprising gifts to their lives. Some of us have reconnected virtually with old friends. Some of us have enjoyed more time with our families. With our children. Some of us are grateful for the opportunity to spend some quiet time with alone, with ourselves.

One friend told me he was grateful for the opportunity to finally clean out his closets! He's going all Marie Condo during the pandemic!

On Wednesday I spent the morning at the National Arboretum with my eight year old son. Riding bikes. Admiring the blooming cherry and magnolia trees. Rolling down grassy slopes. Learning the genus and species names of the trees. I didn't have to be anywhere that morning. And neither did Nico. It was a time apart. A gift we'd been given. A blessing.

So I guess what I'm saying, friends, is that maybe now is the time for us to count both our losses and our blessings.

The first, to allow us to grieve, and to open our hearts in empathy and compassion.

The second, to help us gratefully acknowledge that our lives are sustained by forces larger than ourselves. Perhaps each of us can find time today or in the coming week to count our losses and our blessings. Call up a friend and talk to them about it. Write about it in your journal. Gather your family together and let each person share. I think this practice of acknowledging both our losses and our blessings can put our lives on a more firm spiritual foundation as we move forward, together, through these unprecedented times.

Be well, Friends. Amen.

Music

“Painted Sky” (words and music by Lizz Wright)

In this old house, walls are crumbling
underneath a painted sky
When the real thing is out there waiting
Deep and wide as it is high
From this dry well, I can hear the river running by

Love is trying to make it easy,
giving it away free
and we wanna pay
Love is sitting at our fingertips,
waiting on the edge of our lips
and we don't know what to say
Don't give up on us
Don't give up on us now

From where I stand and what I know
you should be a stranger at my door
And the part I played made me weary
But I don't wanna be that, no, not anymore
And I never knew who I was playing it for

I belong to you like you belong to me
Let it be the truth
Solid as the earth anchoring our feet
My freedom is for you

Well this moment might be perfect
Coming out from under a painted sky

Benediction (Rev. Tony Coleman)

Friends, though we cannot gather together in the warmth and beauty of our sanctuary, we hope that this worship experience has felt meaningful. It can be so easy in this time to feel isolated and distanced from the spiritual connection of our community. Watching these videos and other virtual communications can help us stay connected. One other way that you can continue to stay connected with All Souls in this time is by donating and continuing to make your offerings online. This kind of giving is, in fact, a spiritual practice of generosity and love that matters just as much now as it ever has.

So, friends, as we embark on this new and complicated leg of our spiritual journey together, all of us here at All Souls, wish you love, we wish you health, and we wish you a never-ending sense that the Spirit of Life and the Heart of this Community is with you.