

Worship transcript for March 29, 2020

Opening music

“Don’t Be Discouraged/Hold On” (by Carnie Wilson, Chynna Phillips, and Glen Ballard; arr. by Trey McLaughlin)

Welcome (Rev. Robert Hardies)

Hello All Souls, and welcome to this week’s worship service. Once again, the worship team and I have gathered here at church to record this service to share with all of you.

I want you to know that we are trying to practice good social distancing as we create these services for you. We will continue to record services from the church as long as it is prudent to do so, and if the time comes, we are also prepared to record and produce them from our own homes.

I want to assure you that, whatever the next weeks or months bring, we will always be here for you, week after week, with worship from All Souls. Our clergy team is available to you during the pandemic for pastoral care by email, phone or zoom. Please don’t hesitate to reach out to Rev. Tony Coleman, Rev. Rob Keithan, Chaplain Christin Green or myself. We’re here for you. This week the clergy team began hosting Zoom check-ins for members of the congregation to connect with one another and share how we’re feeling. I hosted one of these check-ins last Monday and found that it was really wonderful to see everyone’s face and connect with others. I hope you’ll join us for an upcoming session. You can find times and log-in information in the All Souls Weekly or in the emails I’ve sent you.

Our lay caring team is now reaching out by phone tree to the elderly, sick and vulnerable in our congregation, to make sure everyone is well. Please let Rev. Tony Coleman know if you’d like to receive such a call, or if you can help make these calls.

I want to remind our families with children that Dolores Miller and James Ploeser have created some amazing resources on the RE page of our website: Lessons, videos, spiritual practices for kids, and more! Please check these out and let Dolores and James know if there are other resources that would be helpful.

And friends, just as so many of us depend on the church right now for connection, spiritual grounding and inspiration, the church is depending on us, too, for our support.

With in-person worship cancelled, a large portion of the church’s regular income stream has been disrupted.

I invite you to please consider making a one-time or recurring gift to the church 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 by texting “ascu” to 73256.

Of course, you can always mail a check to the church as well. And thank you. We really appreciate your generosity.

Friends, I hope you find this week's worship experience meaningful and helpful to you.

At this time, you may want to get your home chalice ready to light as I turn things over to Rev. Tony Coleman to share our chalice lighting and opening prayer.

Chalice Lighting (Rev. Tony Coleman)

I invite you to join me now in lighting a candle or a chalice.

With this light we make room in our lives for that which is holy. Whether we are in our living rooms gathered around the light of a family chalice or in our bedrooms quietly lighting a candle or someplace else sitting before the light of a screen—wherever you are, the Holy, the Sacred, the Universal Power and Love known by many names is with you.

Will you join me in a moment of prayer?

As each of us continues to discern how we will travel this new, challenging, and uncertain path, as we try to figure out how we will make it through, let us remember, let us hold fast to all the truths that are deeper and more resilient than the day's news. Let us remember that though we may be isolated, we are not alone. Through we may have to be distant, our community's work is not done. Though we may be separated, we will survive. No matter who we are—no matter our age, no matter whether we are healthy or hurting—as long as we are here, we have cause to have hope.

It is in that hope that we lift up Bob Bloomfield as he and his wife, Barbara McCann, await the results from some recent tests. It is in that hope that we lift up all the special and sacred celebrations that continue on, despite this pandemic, birthdays and anniversaries and life milestones.

It is in that hope that I pray for you, friends, that we continue to find ways to nurture, to discover, and to be surprised by hope.

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)

Our reading this morning is a poem by the author and journalist Laura Kelly Fanucci called, “When This is Over.”

When this is over,
may we never again take for granted
A handshake with a stranger
Full shelves at the store
Conversations with neighbors
A crowded theater Friday night out
The taste of communion
A routine checkup
The school rush each morning
Coffee with a friend
The stadium roaring
Each deep breath
A boring Tuesday
Life itself.
When this ends may we find that
we have become more like
the people we wanted to be
we were called to be
we hoped to be and may we stay that way —
better for each other because of the worst.

Sermon: I Do Choose (Rev. Hardies)

Choices.

Under ordinary circumstances, our days are filled with choices. What to do? Where to go? Who to see? Over the last several weeks, many of the choices that we once took for granted have evaporated. Decisions are being made FOR us, by public health protocols that invite us to distance and to care for one another. But it’s hard when our choices are taken away from us. Because they give us a sense of autonomy. A sense that we’re in charge of our own lives. A sense that we’re in control.

If these times have taught us anything, it is that our sense of control over our lives and our circumstances...is something of an illusion. These last couple of weeks have reminded me of the old saying, that the best way to make God laugh...is to tell her your plans. Now, I don’t believe in a God who laughs at us. But I do believe in a God who laughs with us. So many of our best-laid plans have been upended in this pandemic, that maybe the only thing left for us to do—after we throw up our hands and shed our tears—is to laugh a little. To laugh right along with God.

But friends, now that the choices that formerly structured our lives have disappeared, we have time and space to consider other choices. Important choices. For though we can't choose the times we live in. Or the challenges that life throws our way. The one thing we can always choose—the one thing that is always in our power—is how we will respond to the circumstances we face. That's the critical decision we face now: How will we respond to the circumstances that this pandemic confronts us with?

I want to mention three important spiritual and ethical choices that each of us faces as we consider how to respond to this pandemic.

First: We can choose to accept and be fully present to this crisis that we face.

Friends, I know that there is a part of me that just wants to pretend that none of this is happening. To resist this reality. To resent it. To rage against it. Or to just put my head in the sand until it goes away. But is that how we want to show up for the world right now?

Instead, we can gently acknowledge our denial, resistance and rage, and nonetheless choose to accept the situation in which we find ourselves and be fully present to it. To be present to what we and others are feeling. To be present to what we and others are doing and saying. To notice. To be alert to both the perils and the promise of this moment. To be aware of the sometimes terrifying and often beautiful reality of our interdependence.

That's one choice that is still ours to make: to accept and be present to this pandemic.

A second choice we can make is this: We can choose to learn through this moment.

You know, I don't believe that God sends challenges or suffering our way in order to teach us a lesson. That's cruel. A God like that wouldn't be worthy of our love and praise.

On the other hand, I do believe that the challenges we face in our lives offer us opportunities to learn and grow. Now is a good time to ask ourselves: What does this moment have to teach me? About my fear and vulnerability. About my strength and resilience. About what I need to make it through difficult and uncertain times. And what am I learning about my fellow human beings and the world we share? Friends, I believe this moment has so much to teach us about ourselves, about humankind, and about how, together, we can face the many global challenges that the future will bring.

We can choose to be present to this moment. We can choose to learn through this moment.

And, finally, we can choose to respond to this moment with love and compassion.

This is perhaps the most important choice that is still ours to make. A choice that this pandemic can never take away from us. We can choose to respond with love and compassion. I'm reminded of a story from the gospels about a time when Jesus and his disciples are ministering to a great crowd of people. And from this crowd emerges a sick man—a leper—who throws himself down on the ground before Jesus and says to him:

“If you choose, you can heal me.” The man presents the state of his health and well-being as a choice that is in Jesus’ hands. And in a moment of love and compassion, Jesus reaches out and touches the diseased man and says to him: “Friend, I do choose. Be healed.”

The way I read this story now, friends, is that we are both the diseased man and Jesus.

We are all, collectively, like the sick man, trying to be healed from a disease that threatens our health and well-being. And each of us is like Jesus. For we each possesses to make a choice whether or not the man will be healed. Whether or not we, collectively, will be rid of this disease. The choice is literally in each of our hands. Jesus made his choice. And now we must make ours.

Be well, my friends. Choose well, my friends. I love you.

Amen.

Music

“We Shall Be Known” (words and music by Sarah Nutting Karisha Longaker)

We shall be known by the company we keep
By the ones who circle ‘round to tend these fires
We shall be known by the ones who sow and reap
The seeds of change alive from deep within the earth

It is time now
It is time now that we thrive
It is time we lead ourselves into the well

It is time now
and what a time to be alive
In this great turning we shall learn to lead in love
In this great turning we shall learn to lead in love

Benediction (Rev. Coleman)

Friends, thank you for joining us today. It’s so important that we try, in this time, as best we can to find a rhythm, to find ways to connect with one another. So many of you have shared how these videos and other efforts the church is making to keep us connected have fed you and nurtured your sense of hope. So, it is our hope that you consider making a donation to All Souls today. Your gifts make the gift that is our community possible.

And with that I invite you to join with me in a benediction.

Let us go into our week, friends, looking for, discovering, and maybe even inventing new sources of hope in this uncertain time. We are here, and we are, even now, together.