

## Worship transcript for April 5, 2020

*Welcome (Rev. Robert Hardies)*

Hello All Souls, and welcome to this week's online worship. It's good to be with you again.

You'll notice some changes to worship this week. Due to stay at home orders in the DC metropolitan region, my fellow worship leaders and I are each recording from our own homes, instead of at church. One exception to this is the music. Over the last month our music team had the foresight to record some songs in our sanctuary that we could share with you in upcoming services. This week and going forward you'll see our musicians singing together in the sanctuary. Please know that this music was recorded earlier in March.

Even though this service will have a slightly different feel from the last several, and though we're still a long way from worshipping together again in our beautiful sanctuary, please know that whatever this pandemic brings, your church community will continue to be here for you. With worship, pastoral care, resources for families with children, and opportunities to serve one another and the larger community. And just as we will continue to be here for you, we hope that you will continue to be here for the church. With in-person worship cancelled, a large portion of the church's regular income stream has been disrupted.

We understand that many of your lives have been financially disrupted, too. And that not everyone can make a financial gift to the church, right now. That's ok. And all the more reason for those of who are able, to please support our church and its ministry.

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. And you can always mail a check to the church as well. I want to thank everyone from the bottom of my heart for your generosity to the church in this time of need. Friends, I really hope you find this week's worship 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. Rob Keithan to share our chalice lighting and opening prayer...

*Chalice Lighting (Rev. Rob Keithan)*

Hello All Souls. Now is the time for our chalice lighting. If you have a home chalice, I invite you to get it out.

On one of my last walks with my daughters before the shelter in place order, we were at the marina just south of National Airport. We were walking through a row of boats laying on the ground, and under one of them was a man who looked like he might not be OK. So I walked over and said "Hi." He looked over, smiled a big smile, and said "I'm just watching some paint dry."

I know many of us are feeling restless, anxious, or powerless in this challenging time. I invite us also—and light our chalice in the spirit of—acceptance.

*Pastoral Concerns (Rev. Keithan)*

I want to share our pastoral prayers this morning. First, a prayer for all who are quarantined today and who have been for a long time. We're with you, we love you, and we care for you.

We have several specific prayers to lift up as well.

I'm very sorry to bear the news that Herb Lowrey died in Atlanta earlier this week. Our prayers are with Janet and their extended family as they mourn Herb's loss.

Prayers also for Delabian Rice-Thurston, who found out this week that her younger sister Debra tested positive for Covid 19.

Our prayers are also with Mark Hicks, whose brother Michael died of the Covid-19. Delabian and Mark, and your families and friends: our love and prayers are with you all.

Finally, some good news from our community. We are grateful to rejoice with Erika and Tom Loke on the birth of their son Dominic earlier this week. Prayers of health and strength and life for little Dominic, and for Tom and Erika as they embark on parenthood.

I invite you, in the moment that follows, to speak aloud the names of those you carry on your heart this morning.

*Prayer*

Spirit of life and of love, Dear God we know by so many names,  
Be with us in this time.

Be with us in this time of uncertainty, and remind us that we are not the first,  
and nor will we be the last, to face the unknown.

Remind us, O God of love and resilience,  
that we will find a way through  
that we have strength beyond knowing  
that we have love beyond knowing, and  
that we have each other  
today

and in the weeks and months to come.

Whatever happens, however long it happens—we have each other.

And that will be enough. 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.

*Story for All Ages: The Bell of Atri, a tale from Italy (told by Dolores Miller & Nathan, the puppet)*

Dolores: There was once a wise King who ruled the town of Atri.

Nathan: Where's Atri?

Dolores: It's in Italy. There was nothing this King wanted more than for his Kingdom to be known for its justice.

Nathan: Wow! That sounds like a great place to live.

Dolores: That's what the King thought too. So he built a large Bell tower in the center of town, with a huge bell and long cord.

Nathan: Like the one we have at church

Dolores: Yep. He gathered the townspeople together and announced,

Nathan: Ooh, ooh. Let me do it. I think I know what he said. Hear ye! Hear ye! People of Atri, here in Italy, I put this bell here for you. Anyone may ring it, but only if they feel they've been treated unfairly.

Dolores: Very good. He said he would appoint a team of judges. When the judges heard the bell ring they'd come running and gather all involved. Perhaps they can right the wrong or show a way to keep the wrong from happening again. He wanted all to feel that they were being treated justly. He said we shall call this bell

Nathan: I know. The Bell of Justice.

Dolores: Exactly. At first the bell rang loudly and often. When someone was greedy, or a dispute couldn't be settled, or there was inequality.

Nathan: Did children ring the bell?

Dolores: Yes, they did.

Nathan: Maybe they objected to chores and bedtime.

Dolores: Maybe.

Nathan: I mean I wouldn't.

Dolores: Oh, I know. Anyway, meeting with the judges took much time and wasn't always fun. So as time went by many solved their own problems, and sometimes quarrels didn't even start. People began treating each other with more kindness.

Nathan: So it worked!

Dolores: Yes. And after a while the bell was never used. The rope that hung from the end became frayed and vines grew tangled in it.

Nathan: Oh that's too bad.

Dolores: But wait, there's more. Now, about the same time that the bell was erected, a knight returned home from years of battles. He and his trusty horse were considered heroes. But as the knight settled into his new life in the countryside, he soon forgot about the horse who had served him so faithfully. (Nathan makes sad face). The horse became neglected and weak, and hungry. (Nathan puts hand to head) One day the old knight told the horse, "You're taking up too much space and you're not useful anymore". And he threw the horse out of the barn.

Nathan: Oh that's so mean.

Dolores: Yes it is. The hungry animal roamed the countryside looking for food. Eventually it wandered into town where it saw some tasty looking vines growing up on a rope. Right away the horse started to chew on the vines.

Nathan. I bet I know what happened.

Dolores: What happened? (The All Souls bell rings in background)

Nathan: The bell started ringing.

Dolores: That's right. Everyone was so surprised they all came running to the Bell Tower. They recognized the horse who at one time was so loved by the knight and was now neglected. The judges ordered the knight to the town square. The Knight who had no explanation for his cruel behavior was ordered to give the horse good food, a clean stall, and grassy fields. The knight was truly sorry for what he had done. He kept his word and treated his old friend kindly for the rest of its days.

Nathan: May the Bell of Justice ring on!

(All Souls bell rings in background)

*Sermon: Notes on Our Collective Liberation (Rev. Hardies)*

Fifty-six years ago, on Good Friday, 1964, the people of Alaska suffered a terrible earthquake. The 9.2 magnitude quake shook the state for four-and-half minutes, and triggered tsunamis with waves 200 feet tall. Countless homes and buildings were destroyed, infrastructure crumbled, an

entire seaside neighborhood plunged into the water. All told, the quake killed more than 100 people and injured hundreds more.

Now here's a curious thing. A day after the quake, the Department of Defense sent a team of sociologists to study how Alaskans were responding to the disaster. Why?

Well, it was the height of the Cold War and the DOD was trying to understand how people reacted to disasters, so they could model human behavior in the event of a nuclear Armageddon. Their premise was that, in the face of disaster, human behavior would descend into chaos, selfishness and desperation. But when the sociologists showed up in Alaska the day after the quake, they discovered something quite different. People had already organized themselves into search and rescue teams. Volunteers were tending to the injured, and sheltering and feeding the displaced.

The sociologists returned to Alaska several times over the next year, interviewing more than 500 people. They concluded that, in a disaster, human beings have a tendency to respond with mutual aid, compassion and perseverance rather than selfishness and desperation. Studies of disaster responses since then have borne out these conclusions. Maybe we are better than we sometimes give ourselves credit for.

Now, as the Defense Department speculated on how folks might respond to great challenges, I wonder if they ever consulted the Book of Exodus. I doubt it. But maybe they should've.

The Exodus story, which will be re-told in Jewish homes all over the world this week during Passover, is one of the greatest stories ever told about a people collectively overcoming the obstacles they face. It's the story of how the Israelite people, enslaved under Pharaoh, won their freedom and eventually made their way to a place they could call home. A fabled land of milk and honey. A promised land where they would be enslaved no more.

During this pandemic, I'm finding deep resonance with the Exodus story, because I think it offers us some lessons in how, together, we can overcome the great challenges we face as a people. Whether it's this pandemic or the even greater threat of global climate change.

So how did the Israelite people make it through?

Well, it wasn't easy. And many of us know only the very beginning of the story. The dramatic part where Pharaoh's army traps the escaping Israelites against the shores of the Red Sea. And just when it seems all hope is lost, God intervenes by parting the sea's waters and letting His people pass through.

Little did the Israelites know that the hardest part was still to come. What followed was a forty-year journey through a desert wilderness before they would reach their Promised Land. And over the course of those forty years, sometimes facing drought and famine, the people did some of things you might expect them to do. They quarreled and fought with one another. They complained, and second-guessed their leaders. Some of them even went so far as to say: "You

know what. Let's go back to Egypt. We weren't free, but at least we knew what life was like back there." But eventually the people did arrive in their Promised Land. And here's how:

The Israelites made it through because they understood themselves to be a people bound in covenant with one another. Their religious heritage had equipped them with a covenantal understanding of being human. An understanding that their lives were deeply interconnected and interdependent. And that they were responsible for one another.

God had been trying to teach this lesson to the Israelites for generations. But it really didn't sink in until they faced the crisis of their wilderness journey. And it was impossible to ignore anymore that their lives were inextricably bound. Bound in covenant.

I'm pretty sure the people of Alaska didn't go to bed on the night before that earthquake thinking about how interconnected their lives were. But when they walked out into a world transformed by that disaster, then they knew. And they behaved accordingly. They didn't need to be told what to do. They didn't need to have the covenant spelled out for them in writing. It was something they knew intuitively. Something they felt deep in their bones. Find and tend to the wounded. Bury the dead. Shelter and feed the homeless. They knew that they were one people, bound in covenant. Responsible for one another.

Friends, I feel that same spirit dawning in us now. For better or worse, this pandemic is helping us discover—not just intellectually, but in our bodies—that our lives are interconnected. That we are responsible for one another. That our lives are literally in one another's hands. And while we need the help of experts to teach and remind us how exactly to care for one another, the understanding that we must, is something we grasp deep down.

This pandemic has helped me realize that "covenant"—at its deepest level—isn't just some set of rules about how we treat each other. It's a reality into which we are born. An ontological truth about the interconnectedness of our lives. For us, the task isn't to create the covenant. It's to discover the reality of the covenant. To feel it deeply in our hearts, in our bodies. And then to behave accordingly.

One other lesson for these times that I'm taking from Exodus story is this: The Israelite people never once harbored the illusion that they would be delivered—that they would be saved from their predicament—as individuals.

From the very beginning they were clear-headed about the fact that you don't survive a forty-year journey through the wilderness on your own. They knew that the only way to get to the Promised Land, is hand-in-hand.

This idea that our fate—our salvation—is collective rather than individual runs against so much thinking in the West. Both Christianity and Capitalism, as practiced today, teach that our salvation—our well-being—is a private affair. Even a self-interested affair. But that kind of thinking is not going to solve the enormous problems that we face as a global community. That's not gonna get us to our Promised Land.

When we survive this pandemic, it'll be because we survived it together. If we're going to escape the worst outcomes of climate change, it'll be because we do it together. Our fates—our salvation—is all bound up together. They say, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." We have a long way to go, friends. We better go together.

Finally, I want to return to something I spoke about from the pulpit a few weeks ago on the first Sunday in March. Feels like a lifetime ago.

That morning I set before you an affirmation. An affirmation spoken many years ago by the Unitarian leader William Ellery Channing, who said that, despite our failings and shortcomings as human beings, despite the low expectations that so many—including the Defense Department—hold for the human race. He said, "I thank God that my lot is bound up with that of the human race."

And a month ago I asked you if you could make that same affirmation. Can you say, "I thank God that my lot is bound up with that of the human race."? And then this pandemic hit. And we discovered that whether we're thankful for it or not, our lots are bound together.

But it makes a difference whether we embrace this truth or not. It made a difference to those Alaskans recovering from the earthquake. It made it a difference to the Israelites on their long wilderness journey.

So this morning I'm going say it again. I'm going to say one more time that I do thank God that my lot is bound up with that of the human race. And I hope you do, too. And I pray that we find the wisdom and courage to act from that affirmation.

And friends, I thank god, especially, that my lot is bound up with all of you. Be well, dear ones.

Amen.

*Music*

**"Hold On/Don't Be Discouraged" (Glen Ballard, Carnie Wilson and Chynna Phillips; arr by Trey McLaughlin)**

Don't be discouraged  
Don't give up now...

Someday somebody's gonna make you wanna  
turn around and say 'goodbye'  
Till then, baby, are you gonna let 'em  
hold you down and may you cry?  
Don't you know

Don't you know things will change  
Things will go your way

If you hold on for one more day  
Hold on for one more day

Don't be discouraged  
Don't give up now...

*Benediction (Rev. Keithan)*

As we close our service today, I want to invite everyone to contribute an offering to continue the ongoing work and ministry of All Souls Church. We're committed to paying all of our staff, including our hourly building staff, throughout the shelter-in-place orders however long they hold. And the loss of revenue from not holding worship in person is significant, so if you're able to give online or via text your generosity is appreciated.

Now it's time to extinguish our chalice. [Turns to child] Eleanor will you blow out our chalice?

I close with these words from Rev. Sara Morris York.

“We receive fragments of holiness, glimpses of eternity, brief moments of insight. Let us gather them up for the precious gifts that they are and, renewed by their grace, move boldly into the unknown.”