

## Worship transcript for May 10, 2020

### *Opening music*

“We Shall Be Known” (MaMuse)

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

### *Welcome (Rev. Robert Hardies)*

Hello All Souls. And welcome.

We're so glad that you've joined us for our weekly gathering for worship.

I want to say a special word of welcome to those of you who have connected with All Souls for the very first time during this pandemic. I'm so glad you've found our community during this difficult time, and if you haven't done so already, I invite you to visit our homepage and click on the button to receive our e-bulletin, so you can stay connected with us.

I also want to welcome the members of our community who no longer live in DC but who've been able to stay connected with All Souls since we've migrated our services online.

One silver lining of this pandemic is that we are learning to reach out and stay connected to one another in new ways. I'm grateful for that and for all of you.

And I want to remind each and every one of you that All Souls Church is here for you during these difficult times.

I also want to give a shout out to all the mom's out there on Mother's Day. Hi Mom, I love you.

You know I preached my very first sermon at All Souls on Mother's Day, 2001. It was the first sermon of my candidating, or interview, week. We were just getting to know one another.

Now, after nineteen wonderful years together, we are saying goodbye. Sunday June 7 will be my last sermon as your minister. On Monday June 8, we will host on zoom a final Ritual of Gratitude and Love, celebrating our long ministry together.

Please check out our webpage for more opportunities to connect with me and with your fellow congregants during this season of gratitude and transition.

And finally, I want to thank you for your expressions of love and support after my bike accident last week. The warmth of this congregation is a powerful thing and I thank you for sharing it with me.

At this time, friends, I invite you to make yourself comfortable, and to prepare your home chalice, if you have one. As I invite Rev. Tony Coleman to share our chalice lighting and opening prayer.

*Chalice Lighting, Congregational Concerns, and Pastoral Prayer (Rev. Tony Coleman)*

Friends, in lighting our chalice, in creating this flame, in participating in this ritual, either physically, at home or virtually with me, we enter into a practice that connects us across time and space with each other, with the countless other UU communities lighting chalices this morning, too, and we connect with the holy—in us and among us. May this sacred time of connection feed us, like the air that feeds our flame.

God of many names, presence in which we find the holy, love that pervades the universe — we come to you in this time, seeking to connect with hope, with healing, with the here and now. We live in a world that heaves and convulses with so much suffering right now, a suffering that feels larger than we can actually comprehend, larger than we can fix on our own, larger than we can handle by ourselves.

Help us to remember, when we start to feel heavy and fearful, when we start to feel isolated and uncertain, help us to remember that we are not actually alone. Help us to remember that there is a whole community of love, a whole tradition of faith, a holy universe of things to which we belong.

We ask for the blessing of that reminder now. We ask for the blessing of that community, that tradition, this holy universe, as we lift up prayers of condolence for Ebonie Bazemore as she and her family grapple with the loss of Ebonie's uncle after health complications resulting from COVID-19 took his life.

We ask for that blessing as we send peace, comfort and love toward Dana Martin, her daughter, Josie, and their family as they mourn the loss of Dana's father.

We ask that that blessing fall upon Jan and Jack Powers as they mourn the death of Anne Beatty, Jack's 90 year-old cousin, who passed away after a fall resulted in a severe brain bleed.

Let that blessing fall upon Bev Johnson, dear friend and colleague of Tom Baker, who contracted COVID-19 last week and is, thankfully, stable and recovering well now.

May Robert, Carol Wilken's husband of 59 years, be blessed as he seeks comfort and healing now in Sibley Hospital after doctors discovered that his prostate cancer has returned.

Let that blessing fall upon Brian Barger and his wife Tia as Brian starts a long course of intensive chemotherapy after learning that he has a rather advanced stage of pancreatic cancer.

And, finally, as the Trump Admin tries to disestablish Native lands amid the COVID-19 Crisis, we join with UU congregations around the country to lift up and bless the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe and all other tribes fighting to maintain their homelands.

God of many names, presence in which we find the holy, love that pervades the universe—be with us now and be with us always.

Amen.

*Music (All Souls Virtual Choir)*

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

Fuente de amor, ven hacia mi  
Y al corazon cantale tu compassion  
Sopla al volar, sube en la mar  
Hasta moldear la justicia de la vida  
Arraigame, liberame  
Fuente de amor, ven a mi, ven a mi

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*

Our reading this morning is a poem called “Shoulders” by the Palestinian American poet, Naomi Shihab Nye.

“Shoulders”

A man crosses the street in rain,  
stepping gently, looking two times north and south,  
because his son is asleep on his shoulder.  
No car must splash him.  
No car drive too near to his shadow.  
This man carries the world’s most sensitive cargo  
but he’s not marked.  
Nowhere does his jacket say FRAGILE,  
HANDLE WITH CARE.  
His ear fills up with breathing.  
He hears the hum of a boys’ dream  
deep inside him.  
We’re not going to be able  
to live in this world  
if we’re not willing to do what he’s doing  
with one another.

The road will only be wide.  
The rain will never stop falling.

*Sermon (Rev. Hardies)*

This bone—I've been told—is probably the femur—or thigh bone—of a mid-sized mammal. Maybe a small deer. My son Nico found it last year washed up on the shore of the Chesapeake Bay during our annual church retreat there. Against my better judgment, he picked up the bone, started playing with it, and insisted on bringing it home to keep in his bedroom.

Last week when I fractured both of my forearms in a bike accident, I went looking for this bone, to help explain to Nico what had happened to my arms. To my untrained eye, at least, the bones in my forearms don't look so different from this one. When my orthopedist went over my x-rays with me, he showed me the place—right about here, just below the elbow joint—where the breaks had occurred. Thankfully, the fractures weren't severe. And with diligent physical therapy, I should be fully healed by the end of June.

It could have been worse, of course. And in the moment when my body was soaring over the handlebars of my bike, I feared the worst. In the days since the accident, this bone has served as a kind of reminder, for me, of my—our—fragility. Our vulnerability. Our mortality. In the Middle Ages, when plagues and pandemics ravaged the world with some frequency, philosophers and mystics often kept human bones in their studies and prayer closets as a reminder of our mortality.

The 19th century Unitarian minister James Freeman Clarke once defined a sermon this way. He said, "A sermon is an address from a dying man to dying men and women." After my accident, and in the midst of this pandemic, I'm more aware than ever that coming to terms with our vulnerability is a critical element of our spiritual lives.

So, friends, this is all a way of saying: I am really grateful to be here with you all today. And I want to thank you for the many kind expressions of care and encouragement you've shared with me over the last week. I'm grateful for my husband, Chris, who's been caring for me during what was already a stressful time for our—and for every—family. And for Nico, who's been really patient and kind with his hurt papa.

And I am forever indebted to all the brave and compassionate people working on the front lines of our health care system right now. I never wanted to have to go to the hospital during this pandemic. But I'll always remember the kindness of the physician's assistant who buttoned up my shirt for me when both my arms were in casts. For the security guard who opened the door for me. And the receptionist who helped me fill out all the forms, when I couldn't use a pen.

So, if this bone has served as a memento of fragility and vulnerability, it's also come to represent, for me, all the care and compassion that make possible our healing. Whether it's our broken bones or our broken hearts.

Even before my bike accident, I'd been reflecting on the many acts of care and solidarity that I've witnessed during the pandemic, and that have helped me remain strong and hopeful during this time of uncertainty, grief and isolation.

For instance, the community at our son's public school has rallied to support some of the most vulnerable families at the school. The local sanctuary and immigrant justice movement has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to support undocumented immigrants, by asking folks who can afford it to contribute a portion of their stimulus check. And I'm happy to report to you that just last week the church opened its doors to our neighborhood Mutual Aid Network. Now, three days a week people are dropping off and sorting food in Pierce Hall, and then delivering it to folks in need.

Within the church, congregants are calling those who are isolated, and bringing meals to families with newborns, or pastors with broken arms. We're staying connected and supporting one another during weekly zoom gatherings.

I host one of those zoom gatherings on Monday afternoons. Each week, a dozen or more of us gather to check in about how our spirits are doing during this hard time. We don't try to fix each other's problems. We simply listen to one another with intention and compassion. And when we do, I think we all feel a little less alone in our frustration, grief and anxiety.

Participating in these and other acts of care and solidarity has sustained me during this pandemic. And helped me keep the faith.

The late Rev. Ernest Gordon was the long-time Chaplain at Princeton University. Before his call to the ministry, Gordon served in the army during World War II. He was captured by the Japanese and spent three years in a prisoner of war camp.

In his account of his imprisonment, Gordon describes the anxiety, uncertainty, and fear that he and his fellow prisoners faced. They didn't know if or when they'd be released. They didn't not whether or not they'd survive.

Early on in their confinement, the prisoners tried to maintain their hope by praying together and reading scripture. They hoped that these practices would give them the strength to go on.

But as time wore on, they found that prayer and scripture alone did not sustain them. Instead, the prisoners turned to caring for one another. Tending one another's wounds. Accompanying each other through night terrors and panic attacks. Caring for the dying.

And in the end, says Gordon, it was these acts of compassion and tenderness for one another that gave them the strength to go on. It was their care for one another that kept them not only physically alive and well, but that cultivated in them the hope and faith that helped them endure their long and brutal confinement.

I don't mean to draw any equivalency between Rev. Gordon's POW experience and our current experience of isolation, fear and uncertainty. But the lesson that he drew from his experience—

the lesson that care and compassion are a path through times of fear, anxiety and uncertainty—that lesson speaks to us powerfully in our current predicament.

Yes, I'm trying to pray, and meditate and practice good self-care during this pandemic. And I hope you are too. But even more important to me are the acts of care, compassion and solidarity that I have extended to others, and others to me. These are what keep me keeping on.

Friends, we are now being asked—and often required—to wear face masks to help prevent the spread of this disease. From what I hear, it sounds like we'll be wearing these masks for a while. I pray that our masks don't prevent us from seeing the faces of our fellow human beings. I pray that our physical distancing doesn't prevent us from offering to others and receiving from others: care, compassion and solidarity.

I have just one more thought I'd like to share with you about this bone, here. I'm reminded that a reporter once asked Margaret Mead, the pioneering anthropologist, what did she consider to be the very first evidence of human civilization.

Mead considered the question for a moment and then responded that, to her, the first archaeological evidence of human civilization was a 15,000-year-old human femur—a thigh bone—discovered at an archaeological dig.

The reason that femur was so significant, Mead explained, was that it had been broken and healed. In order for that to happen, others would have had to care for the individual long enough for their bone to heal. Providing them with food, shelter and protection over an extended period of time.

It was the human capacity for mutual care, said Mead, evidenced by that 15,000-year-old bone—broken and healed—that was, for her, the first evidence of human civilization.

Friends, sometimes it feels as though our society is fraying. Sometimes we look to the future of human civilization with a mixture of fear, anxiety and despair. At times like these, it's good to be reminded of the foundations upon which civilizations are built. And rebuilt. The things that make them strong. At times like this it's good to be reminded of our human capacity for care and compassion.

And it is cause for rejoicing that we are part of a community where we can share that care and compassion with one another, and with the world.

May it be so. Amen.

*Music (Rochelle Rice, Jen Hayman, John Lee, and Matt McCleskey)*

“Helpless” (Neil Young)

There is a town in North Ontario  
Dream comfort memory to spare

And in my mind I still need a place to go  
All my changes were there

Blue, blue windows behind the stars  
Yellow moon on the rise  
Big birds flying across the sky  
Throwing shadows on our eyes

Leave us helpless

Babe, can you hear me now?  
The chains are locked and tied across the door  
Baby, sing with me somehow

Blue, blue windows behind the stars  
Yellow moon on the rise  
Big birds flying across the sky  
Throwing shadows on our eyes

Leave us helpless

*Offertory/Benediction (Rev. Coleman)*

We hope that you have enjoyed this long distance worship service, friends.

As we continue to grapple with the disorientation and the disruption this pandemic has created in our lives, it's so important that we seek out the practices that can lend our lives structure and continuity.

This is why we will continue to create these videos so that we can experience worship together on Sundays; we will continue to host Zoom gatherings so that we can share our lives with one another; and, friends, we will continue to invite you to give, to continue practicing that ritual of generosity that has kept our community vital and strong for almost 200 years.

Your gifts continue to make the gift of our community possible.

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

Let us step into this week, seeking new ways to experience healing for ourselves while we simultaneously seek new ways to heal our world.