

## Worship transcript for May 17, 2020

### *Opening music*

“Yonder Come Day”

Yonder come day! Day is a-breakin’  
Yonder come day, o my soul  
Yonder come day! Day is a-breakin’  
Sun is a-risin’ in my soul!

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

Hello All Souls, and welcome to our online worship service. I’m so glad you’ve joined us again this week.

Friends, we are now just over two months into this pandemic. Two months into our experiment with online church. I don’t know about you, but my hair is getting a little shaggy. My eyebrows are getting a little bushy. Our household’s experiment in online elementary school education is beginning to fray. As are our nerves. And still none of us knows when it’s all going to end.

So I just pray that we all hang in there friends!

In addition to our weekly worship services, the church hosts many opportunities for us to stay connected as a community during the pandemic. To learn more about our daily zoom gatherings and meditation sessions, please check our homepage, [www.all-souls.org](http://www.all-souls.org).

There, you can also learn about some of the plans we have to celebrate our nineteen years of ministry together and to say goodbye to one another as minister and congregation. Sunday June 7 will be my last sermon as your minister. And on Monday June 8 at 7 pm, we will host on Zoom a final Ritual of Gratitude and Love, celebrating our long relationship. I hope you will join us for these and other opportunities to share our love and gratitude for one another, and to say goodbye.

Friends, our worship team has put together a beautiful service for you this week. I hope it feeds your soul.

At this time, I invite you to prepare your home chalice, if you have one, as I invite young Genevieve Zitelli to share are chalice lighting, using the ritual practiced in our Sunday children’s chapel.

### *Chalice Lighting (Genevieve Andrews Zitelli and family)*

Hi All Souls! I know many of you wanted to hear the Children’s Chapel pledge, so I’m here to do it for you. [Sounds prayer bell while parents light chalice]

We light this chalice for our Unitarian Universalist spirit-growing, justice-seeking community.

I am a living member of the great family of all souls.

Bye!

*Congregational Concerns, and Pastoral Prayer (Rev. Rob Keithan)*

Many thanks to Genevieve and the Andrews-Zitelli family for that chalice lighting.

We turn now to our pastoral prayers. We continue our ongoing prayers for the world, and especially those most impacted by the virus. And we have one specific prayer to lift up this week, for Tim Harrington, uncle to Luciana Harrington and Ben Whelan-Morin. Tim was diagnosed with aggressive lymphoma last week after doctors discovered that he had a brain tumor. Let us send prayers of healing to Tim and love to his family.

In the moment of silence that follows, I invite you to speak aloud the names of those you carry on your heart.

Let us pray together.

Spirit of life and of love, God of mystery and wonder, be with us in this time of great trouble and transition.

Help us find the compassion to take care of ourselves, and each other.

Help us find the courage to demand changes to policies and systems that make and keep people poor and oppressed.

Help us find the resilience to sustain our spirits and our actions

And finally, help us find the grace to forgive ourselves, and each other. We can only be, and only do, so much.

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*

For our reading this week I want to return to a poem that has been a touchstone for me over the last year or so. One that I've shared with you before and that I know speaks to many of you, too.

It's a poem by Martha Postlewaite called "Clearing"

Do not try to save  
the whole world  
or do anything grandiose.  
Instead,  
create a clearing  
in the dense forest  
of your life  
and wait there  
patiently,  
until the song  
that is your life  
falls into your own cupped hands  
and you recognize and greet it.  
Only then will you know  
how to give yourself  
to this world  
so worthy of rescue.

*Sermon: Life "Between Acts" (Rev. Hardies)*

Last October when I announced I would be stepping down as your minister in June, many of you reached out to share with me that you, too, had recently made a major life transition. Or that you were contemplating one.

For some, the transition was related to a job or career. For others, it was prompted by changes in a significant relationship. Some transitions were triggered by loss. Others, by new opportunity. The truth is, most transitions come with a little of both: loss and opportunity.

Whatever the circumstances, everyone I spoke with testified to the value of the time they spent in that transitional space. In that in-between space. My sermon this week is called "Life Between Acts." Like any good drama, our lives play out in acts. Or chapters. A new act can begin with a new job. A move. Or a new relationship. But every once in a while we experience ourselves

“between acts.” In a kind of “intermission,” if you will. When one chapter of our lives has ended, and the next has yet to begin. Today I want to invite us to embrace these transitional times in our lives—these intermissions—and to explore the possibilities that they hold for us as individuals and as a community.

The title of my sermon—“Life Between Acts”—was inspired by some words from the late, great fantasy and science fiction author, Ursula Le Guinn. “When I was young,” Le Guinn writes, “I had to choose between the life of being and the life of doing. And I leapt at the latter like a trout to a fly. But each deed you do, each act, binds you to itself and to its consequences, and makes you act again and yet again. [Only] very seldom do you come upon a time ... between act and act, when you may stop and simply be. Or wonder who, after all, you are.”

Le Guinn speaks to the ways that the events of our lives take on a kind of momentum. One act follows another, one year follows another...and before long decades have passed. It’s hard for me to fathom, for instance, that I’ve been your minister for nearly twenty years. Where did the time go?

We know where it went. We spent those years building this dynamic, loving and prophetic community that we all know and love. We raised a generation of children together. We buried and remembered our dead. We cared for one another during difficult times. We sang, prayed and uplifted our souls on Sunday mornings. We put our shoulder to the justice plow. I cherish all that we’ve shared over these last nineteen years.

One of the important tasks of life between acts is to look back and take stock of the chapter that is ending. To celebrate what we’ve accomplished. To acknowledge what we weren’t able to accomplish. To give thanks. And to realize that just because a chapter ends, doesn’t mean that we lose all that we experienced during that time. The love, the joy, the wisdom we’ve shared: that is forever ours. We carry it forward with us, into whatever comes next.

But before we rush ahead into the next act, it can be a gift to pause. Le Guinn notes how rare it is to “come upon a time ... between act and act, when you may stop and simply be. Or wonder who, after all, you are.” Our busy lives rarely afford us the opportunity to pause and reflect. To consider where we’ve been, where we’re going, and “who, after all, we are.” When I spoke to those of you who had recently lived through one of these in-between times, you all spoke of the incredible gift of having an opportunity to reflect on your lives. To slow down and become reacquainted with yourself. Your interests, passions, desires. To re-discover what was really important to you.

Now don’t get me wrong, life between acts isn’t just about finding your bliss, or discovering the color of your parachute. Nearly everyone I spoke to about their time in between said that it was both exciting and...scary. You see, the nice thing about the acts of our lives is that they have a familiar pattern and routine that structures and gives meaning to our lives. The comparative absence of structure in between acts—the silences...the empty spaces on our calendar...the ample opportunity for self-examination—these can sometimes cause anxiety uncertainty, even fear. And so life in between acts requires that we cultivate some patience, some courage, and a good amount of trust that, in time, new beginnings will emerge.

You know, just a few weeks after I announced I would be leaving All Souls, the Washington Post reported that a local Baptist colleague informed his church that, effective immediately, he would be taking a five-month sabbatical. He admitted that he felt exhausted and overwhelmed. And confessed that he had, in his own words, “grown distant from God.”

He shared a story about an elderly woman in the congregation who had recently confronted him about his habit of overworking. She said, “Pastor, why do you work seven days a week without a rest?”

He replied: “Sister, the devil never takes a day off.”

“Since when is the devil your role model, Pastor?!” She said right back to him.

When my Baptist colleague’s sudden sabbatical fell so closely on the heels of my own decision to take a break from ministry, at first I thought it was just a coincidence.

But the more I reflected, I realized that the times we are living through—times when it feels like the devil doesn’t ever take a day off—these times have left many of us tired and worn out.

I’ve come to realize that our struggle to make the world more just and equitable—our struggle for the future of our planet—these are struggles that will occupy us for a lifetime, and beyond. They’re not going to magically end on Election Day. No matter what happens at the ballot box. We’re running a marathon, not a sprint.

And in order to stay in the struggle for the long haul, each of us must discern when and how we will step back for a moment from the struggle. To rest, reflect and renew. So that later, we can step back in again, ready and refreshed.

When we step back we can trust that others will carry the struggle forward in our absence. And when we step forward again, then we can give others the gift of some rest and renewal. Sometimes life between acts is simply this: a much-needed break. A time to recharge and refresh our spirits.

But what struck me most about the story of my Baptist colleague was his confession that he’d grown distant from God. That he felt disconnected from a relationship that means the world to him. That has blessed and sustained his life, and from which he ministers to others.

Sometimes during the busy acts of our lives we can lose sight of the things that are important to us. The things that sustain us. That’s when we need an intermission to reconnect us to the sources of our own strength and integrity.

In our poem, Martha Postlewaite advises us:

“create  
a clearing  
in the dense forest

of your life  
and wait there  
patiently,  
until the song  
that is your life  
falls into your own cupped hands  
and you recognize and greet it..."

Sometimes we need to create that clearing in our lives in order to hear our song again. The song that animates our life.

Because maybe we've been so busy we forgot the tune. Or maybe our song changed keys on us. Or maybe—maybe it's time for us to sing a new song. Psalm 96 says: "Sing unto the Lord a new song; Let the heavens be glad, let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar and the field exult. Sing a new song unto the Lord."

Each of us has a song that only we can sing. Taking time between the acts of our lives can help us find our voice.

Friends, you and I both are about to venture into life between acts. In just a few weeks, I will step away from my ministry at All Souls to take a year for reflection, renewal and discernment about what comes next.

At the same time, you are entering into a two-year period of interim ministry, before you settle a new permanent minister. The interim period is its own intermission. An opportunity for you as a congregation to hear your song. To find your strength in one another. To reflect together, to support one another, and to discern together your future. Like I said before, the nineteen years we've shared together. That will always be ours. You will always have a place in my heart. And I hope I will always have a place in yours. And we will carry that love forward into whatever lies ahead.

But for now, there is the in between time. Life between acts. A time for rest. A time for renewal. A time for discovery.

In closing, let me leave you with something my friend and colleague Justin Schroeder once shared with me. He once told me that whenever his congregation found itself in between acts. Whenever they paused to wonder what the future might hold. They had a practice of asking themselves the question: "Where is love leading us next?"

Where is love leading us next?

That's the question I want to leave you with this week, friends.

Where is love leading you next? What new chapter of your life is love helping you to write?  
What new song is love helping you sing?

As All Souls Church approaches its bicentennial and embarks on another century of ministry...where is love leading this congregation next? What exciting ministry does love have in store for you?

And in the uncertain, in-between time brought on by this pandemic, perhaps we might even dare to ask: Where is love leading us next as a nation, as a people, as a planet?

Friends, we don't know all that the future will bring, but I trust and believe that if we let love be our guide, then our future will be bright.

I love you, All Souls. Amen.

*Music (Amelia Brown, Jen Hayman, Rochelle Rice, Gordon Kent, and Dante Pope)*

“Let Praises Rise” (Neil Young)

Let praises rise from the inside  
From the inside of me  
May You delight in the inside  
In the inside of me  
Come fill my life from the inside  
From the inside of me  
Set me on fire from the inside  
From the inside of me

‘Cause all I want  
Is for You  
For You to be glorified  
For You to be lifted high  
All I want  
Is for You  
For You to be glorified  
For You to be lifted high

Be Glorified

‘Cause all I want  
Is for You  
For You to be glorified  
For You to be lifted high  
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Let praises rise from the inside  
From the inside of me  
May You delight in the inside  
In the inside of me  
Come fill my life from the inside  
From the inside of me  
Set me on fire from the inside  
From the inside of

*Testimonial (Anna Hargrave)*

I'm Anna Hargrave, a lifelong member of All Souls Church.

I'd like to talk with those of you who may be on the fence about pledging.

First of all, I get it. I've been there.

When I first got out of college I had student loan debt and an entry-level non-profit salary.

I figured out an amount that I planned to give each month, but compared to the total church budget, it felt small.

So, I figured, "why bother pledging it up front? They won't miss it. I'll just add it to the collection plate whenever the spirit moved me."

Later a friend told me, "true transformational giving has nothing to do with the number of zeros you put on a check. It's about how the experience of truly giving generously, that transforms you and your relationship to the cause."

Once I started pledging, it changed my relationship to this community we all love.

Instead of focusing on what I can't do I began to see all the good that I can do.

I saw my gift at work in the social justice ministries and the RE program. I heard it in the music and felt it every single Sunday Morning.

Most importantly, I realized that the support my family has received from the church staff and the whole community in good times and bad, that's priceless.

By pledging, I'm saying, "you can count on me to help this diverse, spirit-growing, justice-seeking community continue to thrive."

Now, I know some people are struggling right now and won't be able to give, but that's why I've decided to increase my pledge by fifteen percent for this coming year.



For those of you who are in a position to make a new pledge or increase your pledge, I encourage you to give generously.

Thank you.

*Offertory/Benediction (Rev. Keithan)*

Thanks Anna. You can make your pledge from the church homepage, or the link in the weekly newsletter. And contributions are always welcome through our website, through text to give, or by sending a check to the church.

There's still time to submit a short video to be included in the farewell tribute to Rev. Rob Hardies and All Souls expressing your love, appreciation, and/or hopes for the future. They should be 15 to 20 seconds long, with a few seconds of silence at the beginning and end for easy editing. Please send your videos by Monday, May 25, to [RevRobFarewell@gmail.com](mailto:RevRobFarewell@gmail.com).

Our benediction comes from one of the great ancestors of our faith, Margaret Fuller, a Unitarian who lived from 1810-1850. Though her life was tragically cut short at the age of 40 in a shipwreck, in the years beforehand she was an accomplished journalist, prominent advocate for human rights, and one of America's most highly paid public lecturers.

These words, an excerpt from her book "Women of the Nineteenth Century" strike me as both time-ly and time-less, so I close with them today:

I stand in the sunny noon of life. Objects no longer glitter in the dews of morning, neither are yet softened by the shadows of evening.

Every spot is seen, every chasm revealed. Climbing the dusty hill, some fair effigies that once stood for symbols of human destiny have been broken; those I still have with me show defects in this broad light.

Yet enough is left, even by experience, to point distinctly to the glories of that destiny; faint, but not to be mistaken streaks of the future day...

Always the soul says to us all, Cherish your best hopes as a faith, and abide by them in action.

May it be so, and Amen.