

## Worship transcript for May 24, 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. Tony Coleman)*

Hi, friends, and welcome to this week’s long-distance worship service. I want to thank you so much for joining us as we continue to come together, each week, to take part in one of the practices that anchors us as a spiritual community—worship.

If you’re like me, you’d rather be in our sanctuary right now. You’d rather be soaking up the warm light that pours in through our windows. You’d rather be surrounded by the faces of friends, families, and kind strangers. You’d rather hear the words and music of our service charging the air around you with energy and passion. But, friends, even though we can’t sit in our sanctuary together, that doesn’t not mean we can’t be together.

So, I invite you now to grab a candle or a chalice, so that you can join Rev. Rob Hardies in just a moment for our opening words. I invite you to look up the lyrics of the songs you hear so that you can sing along. I invite you to write down thoughts or questions that this week’s sermon inspires. I invite you to not simply watch this video, but to find ways to participate in this experience. Though there are so many things we can’t do right now, there’s still so much that we can do—to grow, to connect, to worship.

Enjoy this time, friends, and let it nurture you.

Rev. Hardies will now open our service with a chalice lighting.

### *Chalice Lighting (Rev. Robert Hardies)*

Good Morning All Souls.

As we prepare to light our chalice, I invite you to make yourself comfortable and perhaps to take a couple of deep breaths, so that we can all arrive and be present for this worship service.

As you breathe in, breathe in peace.

As you breathe out, let go of all that might prevent you from being present to this worship experience...

And as I kindle our chalice,

May its light remind us of the light of truth.

May its fire remind us of the restless spirit within us, the spirit that makes all things new.

And may its warmth remind us of the warmth of this community,

a warmth we can feel even when we are apart.

Amen.

*Congregational Concerns, and Pastoral Prayer (Rev. Hardies)*

Friends, this is the time in our service when we lift up the prayers of our community...

We offer prayers healing prayers for David Thurston, the son of Delabian Rice Thurston and Robert Thurston, as David recovers from a broken arm suffered during a bike accident.

We offer prayers of comfort and consolation to Luciana Harrington and Ben Whelan Morin. Luciana recently suffered a miscarriage. We lift them in our hearts during this time of loss, as well as all those who have experienced reproductive loss.

And finally, we offer prayers of condolence to Tom Baker whose dear friend Beverly Johnson died of Covid this week. Her immediate family were able to be with her on Zoom at the end. Tom writes of his friend, "There are angels that walk among us and Beverly was one of them."

Each and every week we bring our own prayers to this sacred time and space. People whom we are holding in our hearts. At this time I invite you to speak their names aloud, or hold them silently in your hearts, so that we might draw them into the loving embrace of our community.

Will you pray with me...

Holy One, Spirit of Life, God of Many Names...

In the silence of this hour we lift up to you our lives...our joy, our struggle, our loss, our hope, our fear.

In this hour we hold in our hearts both the violence and suffering of our world, and the beauty of your blossoming earth.

God, sometimes it feels as though this world is just too much... and we wonder how we'll carry on.

Yet time and again our spirits are made new. Refreshed by the beauty of the Earth, warmed by the love of friends, graced by the kindness of strangers.

Help us in this hour to count the many blessings of our lives. Help us in this hour to find the love we seek. The solace we deserve. And the strength that we will need for the living of our days.

So that when this hour is over we might go out into the world shining, knowing that we are indeed surrounded by your love and your light.

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 (Rev. Coleman)*

Our reading is a series of excerpts from the Song of Songs, from the Hebrew Bible

The First Lover says,

2 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—  
for your love is more delightful than wine.

3 Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes;  
your name is like perfume poured out.  
No wonder the young women love you!

4 Take me away with you—let us hurry!  
Let the king bring me into his chambers.

Later on the Second lover replies,

How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride!  
How much more pleasing is your love than wine,

and the fragrance of your perfume  
more than any spice!

11 Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, my bride;  
milk and honey are under your tongue.  
The fragrance of your garments  
is like the fragrance of Lebanon.

12 You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride;  
you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain.

And then, their chorus of friends say:

Eat, friends, and drink;  
drink your fill of love.

*Sermon: Erotic Yes: Life and Living It Out Loud (Rev. Coleman)*

The Song of Songs, also known as the Song of Solomon or the Canticles, is one of the most puzzling books in the Hebrew Bible. Scholars haven't reached any real consensus around its origin story: they aren't sure who wrote it, nor can they estimate with any real specificity even when it's mysterious author or authors wrote it. In fact, it almost didn't make it into the canon of biblical literature, not only due to the mystery that surrounds its origin, but also because of its content. In the course of eight chapters, not once does it mention God, make any explicit reference to religious law, or make any even implicit gesture toward sharing what we might consider "spiritual wisdom." Instead, it recounts a dialogue between two lovers who use line after line of Hebrew poetry to celebrate each others bodies and the deep feelings they contain.

"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth," reads its very first line. And on it goes with verse after verse, as these two lovers and their chorus of friends, sing of each other tasting like milk and honeycomb, having skin that smells of myrrh and incense, arms embracing one another, extoling the power of a love that is [quote] as strong as death."

Over the many centuries that the Song of Songs has been part of the biblical canon, rabbis, priests, and religious folks of various offices have given their interpretations of all this sensual language. Some have read the song as a celebration of God's relationship with the individual believer, a colorful and poetic description of a holy and mystical love. Some have interpreted the song as naming Christ's relationship with the church or, again, the individual Christian. Religious interpretations, all, that transform lips and scents and senses into metaphor, disembodied description for a purely mystical experience.

Ya know, when these various interpretations were presented to me, I thought they were all beautiful. What an incredibly intense and powerful way to describe human beings' relationship with the divine. But, then, I began to think a little more: do these interpretations leave any room for just reading the song as what it more plainly seems to be: a celebration of passionate, erotic, human feeling?

Audre Lorde, the celebrated author and activist who described herself as a “black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet,” had a lot to say about the way our society has treated the category of the “erotic.” In one of her most well-known essays, “The Erotic as Power,” she writes, “The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling.” In other words, for Audre Lorde, the erotic isn’t just a synonym for the sexual. It’s that and something much more. Lorde goes on to write that, “the erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings.”

It is the chaos that Lorde is pointing to, the irrationality of passion, the unpredictability of emotion, the surprise of power that comes from within those strongest feelings, that has led to concerted efforts to suppress the erotic. Think about it, friends, what’s the surest way to discount someone’s opinion, someone’s presence, someone’s person—describe them or what they’re saying as “emotional.” Whether too angry or too sensitive, those people that we deem as too in touch with their feelings are immediately considered irrational and unreasonable, chaotic even. Again, Audre Lorde writes, “[The erotic] has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation. For this reason, we have often turned away from the exploration and consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information...” Thinking about the Song of Song, I can’t help but wonder, is this the reason why so many have interpreted its sensuality as metaphor, for fear of the deeply female and spiritual and emotional dimensions of the human experience that it seems to amplify? This fear of the chaos of passion and feeling, what Audre Lorde calls “anti-eroticism” pervades our interaction with our spiritual lives, doesn’t it? So many of us feel safer talking about our spirituality in terms of analyzing texts or drawing on reason to articulate our values, but what of our feelings? What of our sorrow? What of our joy? What of our pleasure and pain?

Think even about this time: how many of us have actively resisted the grief, the fear, the heartbreak that has crept up into our hearts, asking to be named and seen as we struggle to live life in the age of this pandemic? How many of us have done everything we can to push those powerful feelings down, to push them away, with some kind of distraction – work, family, a cocktail, some cerebral analysis of our present political situation? To be clear, I don’t mean to suggest that we shouldn’t make time for any or all of these things. Our lives have to churn on and move. However, when we use these obligations and activities as distractions from the truth of our experience, the depth of our feeling, the chaos of our emotional selves, well, we deny ourselves the power of the erotic which is ultimately rooted in the essence of life.

It’s that understanding of the erotic that led psychotherapist, Esther Perel, to write her internationally best-selling book, *Mating in Captivity: Unlocking Erotic Intelligence*. In the introduction she shares a reflection about her parents, two survivors of Nazi concentration camps. She writes, “For a number of years, they stood face-to-face with death every day. My mother and father were the sole survivors of their respective families. They came out of this experience wanting to charge at life with a vengeance and to make the most of each day... They didn’t just want to survive; they wanted to revive... They cultivated pleasure. I know absolutely nothing about their sexual life,” Perel writes in no uncertain terms. “But,” she goes on to say, “by the way they lived, I sensed that they had a deep understanding of eroticism. Though I doubt that

they ever used this word, they embodied its mystical meaning as a quality of aliveness, a pathway to freedom—not just the narrow definition of sex that modernity has assigned to it.”

In this way, Esther Perel, a white Belgian relationship counselor, and Audre Lord, a African-American feminist poet, come to the exact same place—the power of erotic living is ultimately about the power of living outloud. It is about saying “yes” to life, everyday. It is about sinking deep into the chaos and the mystery that lies at the foundation of our being. It is...a mustard seed that while tiny has the potential to grow into an overwhelming bush. It is a teaspoon of yeast that while granular can transform dough into a bounty of bread. It is enlightenment; it is salvation; it is, as Audre Lorde describes it, that [quote] deep and irreplaceable knowledge of my capacity for joy [that] comes to demand from all of my life that it be lived within the knowledge that such satisfaction is possible, and does not have to be called marriage, nor god, nor an afterlife.”[end quote] It is recognizing that the quality of your living does not have to be conditioned according to the confines of your circumstances. It is that quality of being that leads one person to say outloud, into the great unknown, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—for love is more delightful than wine.”

This, friends, this is what lies waiting for us in the chaos of deep feeling: the power of “self-connection. And this, friends, I want to suggest to you, is what being part of a spiritual community is all about. This thing we are doing together, this movement of which we are a part, is dedicated to being a place where we explore and experience our deepest feeling. It is the place where we go to share and hold our grief upon the passing of a loved one or during the unfolding of a global tragedy that has us feeling broken and weak. It is the place where we go to share and hold the heights of our happiness at the birth of a new child or in marrying our beloved. It is the place where we go to share and hold our most searing anger at the injustices and broken systems that make up our society. And, it is the place where we go to not just reflect on but to actually encounter the greatest mysteries of our existence.

Friends, I know you’re tired. I know that you’re hurting. And I know that you want it to stop. My prayer, though, is that in the days and weeks and months to come, you will not try to ignore or push away those deep feelings, but, instead, join with the rest of us to hold them, to feel them, to find in them that resource, that power, that electric charge that invigorates our lives. I pray that you draw on the energy to be found in truly connecting with yourself and the truth of your feelings, as chaotic as they may seem. I pray that you, like Audre Lorde, like Esther Perel, like so many of the survivors who have come before us, I pray that you, too, strive to embody the power of eroticism, that quality of aliveness, that path to freedom.

Amen.

*Music (Julie James, Loyce Pace, Norah Quinn, A. Tianna Scozarro, Melinda St. Louis, Jennie Wasserman, vocals; Jen Hayman, piano and vocals)*

“Trouble Me” (Dennis Drew and Natalie Merchant)

Trouble me, disturb me with all your cares and you worries.  
Trouble me on the days when you feel spent.

Why let your shoulders bend underneath this burden when my back is sturdy and strong?  
Trouble me.  
Speak to me, don't mislead me, the calm I feel means a storm is swelling;  
there's no telling where it starts or how it ends.  
Speak to me, why are you building this thick brick wall to defend me when your silence is my  
greatest fear?  
Why let your shoulders bend underneath this burden when my back is sturdy and strong?  
Speak to me.  
Let me have a look inside these eyes while I'm learning.  
Please don't hide them just because of tears.  
Let me send you off to sleep with a "There, there, now stop your turning and tossing."  
Let me know where the hurt is and how to heal.  
Spare me? Don't spare me anything troubling.  
Trouble me, disturb me with all your cares and you worries.  
Speak to me and let our words build a shelter from the storm.  
Lastly, let me know what I can mend.  
There's more, honestly, than my sweet friend, you can see.  
Trust is what I'm offering if you trouble

*Offertory/Benediction (Rev. Hardies)*

Friends, it has been good to share this time with you. I hope that our service has deepened your spirit and given you strength and inspiration for the week ahead.

During this pandemic, the All Souls community is pulling together to help us and our neighbors by sharing inspiring worship, connecting with one another over Zoom, reaching out by phone to those in need, and opening the church's doors to support our local Mutual Aid Network's food delivery effort.

If you are able, please consider supporting All Souls' ministry during these difficult times by making a one-time or recurring donation online from our homepage; or by texting a gift.

Of course, you can always just mail your check to the church, too.

Thank you, friends, for your generosity.

If you are watching us on Sunday morning, I hope that you will join us at 11 am on Zoom for a very special Child Dedication Service, my last as your minister. Let's all gather live online to see one another and to welcome twelve young souls into our community. You'll find the log in information in the e-mail I sent to you this morning. And the staff and I invite you to linger with us on Zoom after the service for a virtual coffee hour.

For now, though, I offer you these words of benediction from the nineteenth century abolitionist and unitarian minister Theodore Parker:

“Be ours a religion which like sunshine goes everywhere.  
Its temple, all space;  
Its shrine, the good heart;  
Its creed, all truth;  
Its ritual, works of love;  
Its profession of faith, divine living.”

Go in peace. Amen.