

Worship transcript for June 21, 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. Rob Keithan)

Hello, and thank you for joining us for worship with All Souls. It’s been quite a week. Also, quite a month, and quite a year, but let’s just take this week.

The Supreme Court issued two landmark decisions on the side of justice and liberation this week. One, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. The other, finding that the President’s attempt to end the DACA program was arbitrary and capricious, and thus unallowable, meaning that people in that program can remain here, in their home, the United States. The Supreme Court also allowed to stand a provision that allows police officers to be shielded from accountability for their actions. As is so often the case, it’s two steps forward, but one step back.

We also just celebrated Juneteenth, the historic anniversary of slaves in Texas hearing—long after the emancipation proclamation—that they, too, were free. This year’s celebration is more important than ever, as we consider both the work done and the work left to be done.

And today, this Sunday, is Father’s Day, so we offer our gratitude and appreciation for all the fathers and all the fathering that happens in our congregation and community.

If you have a home chalice, I invite you to get it out now. Come, let us worship together.

Chalice Lighting and Pastoral Prayer (Rev. Norman Allen)

Hello. If you have a chalice or a candle ready, I invite you to light it with me now.

For our Chalice Lighting today, I lift up the words of poet and Reverend Theresa Soto, from their book of prayers and meditations, titled “Spilling the Light.”

“In this community, we hold hope close. We don’t always know what comes next, but that cannot dissuade us. We don’t always know just what to do, but that will not mean that we are lost in the wilderness. We rely on the certainty beneath, the foundation of our values and ethics. We are the people who return to love like a North Star and to the truth that we are greater together than we are alone. Our hope does not live in some glimmer of an indistinct future. Rather, we know the way to the world of which we dream, and by covenant and the movement forward of one right action and the next, we know that one day we will arrive at home.” Amen.

Each week we embrace a time when we can share our joys and our sorrows. I invite you now to join me in that quiet moment, a moment in which we become newly mindful of the ebb and flow of the lives of this community. In this quiet moment...

We send prayers of support, strength, and caring to Shari Gilbert and her extended family as they grieve losses and rally together to face some significant health challenges. Our hearts go out to the care-givers.

We say a prayer of mourning and condolence at the news that Dorothy Bledsoe's friend Russell Nauta recently died. Our prayers are with Dorothy, with Russell, and with his family.

And we send prayers of deep gratitude and loving hopes for the future as we bid a fond farewell to Carrie Davidson, who is moving to Cleveland, Ohio and who will be greatly missed.

In the silence that follows, I invite you to speak aloud the names of those whose joys and sorrows are on your hearts today. [Silence]

With those names, those joys and sorrows still resonant in your heart, please join me in the spirit of prayer and contemplation.

Spirit of life and of love, spirit that moves through and within and among us and makes us One. We pray for the caregivers, for those caring for family and friends, for those who care for the grieving even as they grieve themselves. We pray for those who care for strangers, putting their own health at risk. We pray for those working to keep us healthy, and to keep us informed in these complicated days of change and uncertainty. We pray that all be granted strength and resilience – and respite from their work . We pray that they know how grateful we are.

Spirit of life and of love, we pray that we might have the courage to be the caregivers when called, that we might recognize the unexpected need in others, and the unexpected gifts that lie dormant but stirring within ourselves. We pray that our presence here be one of purpose, that we might daily nudge the arc of the moral universe toward justice, that we might participate, each day, in building the Beloved Community. May it be so. 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.

Message (Rev. Keithan)

So I've been thinking a great deal lately about the topic of imagination—why we have it, why we don't, in what situations we seem to have more of it than others. I've been thinking about it on multiple levels as well: on the grand scale, in terms of how we have imagination to change systems of racism and systems of white supremacy, but also at the personal level for how we change our relationships and in particular how we can learn to do things differently during quarantine. And to do some things differently that we want to keep doing, as we ease back in, slowly, to life.

I want to start with a story. It's a story about my friend Elliot and my friend Lindsay. They know each other, we all know each other, but live apart. Different places in the DC region. And they got into a conversation on Facebook about Covid and reentry where they had a disagreement. And they did it respectfully—there was enough relationship there and commitment to relationship that it was a respectful disagreement—but it was a disagreement nonetheless. And, it left Elliot feeling like there was a little rupture in their relationship. And he was thinking about what he could do to repair it. And then he remembered that Lyndsey had posted recently that she had been really struggling with parenting, and the challenge of parenting during quarantine.

Any thought about it a little more, and then he remembered another conversation that they had about stopping by unannounced. Now, for Lindsay, having people stop by unannounced is one of her favorite things in the world. She loves it. Elliot, on the other hand, doesn't like it at all. He doesn't want to do it to other people, he doesn't want it done to him. He's much more of a planner. But he thought, you know, I want to reach out to Lindsay, so I'm gonna do it in the way that she likes.

He and his partner had some extra cinnamon rolls lying around, so they gathered a cinnamon roll tray, and drove out, and stopped by unannounced to visit Lyndsay. Now Lindsay, as you can imagine, was floored. She said she appreciated the cinnamon rolls, but as soon as she saw him standing there she knew what it meant for him to do that. Because she knew that he doesn't like stopping by unannounced. That he had done that solely to reach out an olive branch and show his commitment to the relationship.

Now, Elliot's actions weren't heroic. He didn't put his life at risk. He did act outside of his comfort zone and it made a huge difference in the relationship they had. He might have done so outside of quarantine. He is a phenomenal human being! But I like to think that quarantine is allowing us to focus on some things that we wouldn't otherwise focus on. And I can't think of a better one than relationship, and what it looks like to do that differently and to have an imagination that extends beyond what we normally think is possible. Because there's so many situations in which, a little rupture in a relationship like that, we were just move on and think that we didn't have any power to do anything differently. Elliot's story reminds us that we actually

do have the power to do things differently. And in fact, what does it say about us, that we don't have that kind of imagination?

Now, this is a personal story, but this question of imagination is extremely relevant on a large scale as well. And in the first transformation Sunday at All Souls, Derek Robinson, who is now a co-chair of the transformation team, talked about our lack of ability, and his lack of ability, to even imagine what it would look like to have an anti-racist, multicultural congregation and country.

It would seem like a simple thing to do, to imagine such a thing. But it turns out to be really hard to risk even believing, even dreaming, that another kind of world is possible. But what we've seen in the last few weeks is that another world really is possible.

Now the echo of this lack of imagination that happened in my own life is around a call to defund the police. When I first heard that call, the place it looked me to was one of denial, and practical defensiveness. Oh, I don't think that's realistic, it might not be possible, yada yada yada. There's all these things we still need police for. And some of that may be true, but beneath it was simply, but profoundly, a lack of my willingness to imagine something different.

We're so conditioned by our culture, by white supremacy, to think that the way things are had to be the way they are. And in the week since, I've learned so much about what defunding the police could mean, what it could do to transform our relationship with safety and with other communities all across this country. Now thanks to the efforts that have been led by people of color for so long, people of color who claimed the power of imagination, we are actually seeing policy changes in cities all across this nation that move money away from police and policing and enforcement into mental health services, community health services, other places where resources can be used, people can be harnessed more effectively. It takes care of our communities with a better use of our resources.

And in fact, just hours ago, I was in a meeting with the Ward 1 council member, Brianne Nadeau, the Ward where All Souls is located. And I was there as part of a Washington Interfaith Network meeting of religious leaders that were asking the Councilmember for certain policy changes related to racial equity, to combating gentrification, and my task was to ask if she would support taking \$100 million from the police budget and re-investing that money in community services that prevent violence or respond to violence in ways that don't involve the police.

And much to my surprise, she thought that was a great idea. She said "the council has been moving in this direction for some time", that they are excited about the possibilities. She listed off several programs that she would like to receive more funding, and she said it's really helpful to have a number to work with. And, she said, it's helpful for you to push me, so keep pushing.

And to that end, the Washington Interfaith Network has launched a reimagine DC campaign to harness our power of imagination to rebuild a city that is better and more equal than the one we had before quarantine. WIN is having a virtual gathering on July 2 that they would like 1000 people from our member congregations to attend. I would love to have many of you, members of

All Souls, show up at that gathering with your imagination and with your commitment to working with other people of faith across the city to make it a reality. [\[RSVP Here\]](#)

There's a couple other really positive signs that I want I lift up in terms of imagination. Just a few weeks ago, I saw a thing on Facebook, and checked it out to make sure it was true, that 9 of the 10 best-selling non-fiction books on the New York Times list were books about racism. Specifically, about understanding and ending racism. And number one at the time was [White Fragility](#), a book by Robin D'Angelo published by our own Unitarian Universalist Association's Beacon Press. Another book that Beacon Press just published is called [We Keep Us Safe](#), by Zach Norris. And the security committee that the board has recently chartered to—review All Souls understanding of safety, to lead community conversations, to recommend policies— we're reading that book to ground ourselves in what's possible. Not just what were used to.

And, I think it's notable that even President Trump, who I have never known him to change his mind about anything that he did wrong, canceled his planned rally in Tulsa on Juneteenth. He is still going to have a rally in Tulsa, but at least the awareness and the call had grown enough that he changed something. And that's because there are so many people, led by people of color, but with tons of support from white allies, who are not just thinking outside the box and caring outside the box, but acting outside the box to create something that hasn't existed before.

And I know that several friends in my community have heard that story about Elliot and Lindsay, and have copied it. Have found ways to challenge themselves, to challenge their comfort zones, to deepen and restore relationships. I'd like to invite us to do that as well. Alongside our prophetic imagination—thinking about what a different city could look like, a different culture—let's use this time of quarantine to prioritize relationships and doing things a little bit differently. To restore, to deepen. To stop business as usual and build a different kind of community.

And, it's not strictly necessary to have cinnamon rolls, but it probably helps.

This is my prayer for us today. Amen.

Music (All Souls Bluegrass Band: Matt McCleskey, guitar and lead vocals; Jen Hayman, Dawn McCleskey, and Norah Quinn McCormick, backing vocals; Dana Connors, fiddle; Lou Thomas, guitar; Corey Null, bass; Fred Katz, drums)

“Jesus, etc.” (Wilco)

Jesus, don't cry
You can rely on me, honey
You can combine anything you want
I'll be around
You were right about the stars
Each one is a setting sun

Tall buildings shake,
voices escape singing sad, sad songs (tuned to chords)

Strung down your cheeks,
Bitter melodies,
Turning your orbit around

Don't cry,
You can rely on me, honey
You can come by anytime you want
I'll be around
You were right about the stars
Each one is a setting sun

Tall buildings shake, voices escape singing sad, sad songs (tuned to chords)
Strung down your cheeks, bitter melodies, turning your orbit around

Voices whine
Skyscrapers are scraping together
Your voice is smoking
Last cigarettes, all you can get, turning the orbit around

Our love
Our love
Our love is all we have

Our love
Our love is all of God's money
Everyone is a burning sun

Tall buildings shake, voices escape singing sad, sad songs (tuned to chords)
Strung down your cheeks, bitter melodies, turning your orbit around

Voices whine
Skyscrapers are scraping together
Your voice is smoking
Last cigarettes, all you can get, turning the orbit around

Offertory/Benediction (Rev. Allen)

As we near the end of our service, I invite you to consider making a gift to All Souls as it ministers to the immediate and broader community, as it provides weekly worship and monthly Vespers, as it organizes vigils and public actions, hosts online gatherings and classes – and offers care in practical and tangible ways – to those in need.

You can make a one-time or recurring donation by going to our homepage, by mailing a check to the church, or by texting your gift. We are so grateful for your generosity.

And we are grateful for your presence! If you've joined us on Sunday morning, I hope you'll return at 11am for our weekly Coffee Hour of conversation and camaraderie. You'll find the log-in information in the email sent out this morning.

As we leave this sacred time together, I'd like to return us to the words of Rev. Theresa Soto, excerpted from their poem "Spilling the Light." Rev. Soto writes...

The thing you must be is yourself.
Unadulterated, shedding the willingness
to journey alone, as though you are made of something
hard and unforgivable. You are human. You belong,
right here, right now. And together, we will chase away
the sickness, the secrets, and leave only the open
Possibility that the future is a space for growth.

Music (All Souls Bluegrass Band, recorded live at the 2020 Prism Concert)

"Salt Creek" (traditional Bluegrass reel)