

Worship transcript for June 28, 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)

Good morning, friends, and welcome to this week’s long-distance worship service. We’re so glad that you’ve decided to take the time out of your day to enter into and experience the Sacred with us.

As these weeks of being separate continue, I just want to take a moment to remind you of all the ways that we can still be together. In addition to these long-distance services, we have a virtual coffee hour, every Sunday, from 11am-12pm, that our office and events manager, Rose Eaton, hosts. We have online religious education programming for children and families. And so many of All Souls’ affinity groups and social justice groups are steadfastly gathering and doing their work for our church and the wider community.

In addition, I also want to share something special that’s happening in the week ahead.

Our newly selected Interim Senior Minister, Rev. Kathleen Rolenz wants to know what questions you have for her as we prepare to embark on this new journey together as a church. So, Rev. Kathleen is inviting you to submit your questions to her via the email address allsouls@allsouls.ws, and then she will host three different Zoom gatherings to answer as many of those questions as she can. You can learn more about these gatherings and the many other opportunities I’ve mentioned by visiting the All Souls website at all-souls.org.

Friends, there are so many ways that we can still do and be church, even though we cannot gather in our sanctuary. There are still so many ways that we can express and live into our relationship with the sacred, even beyond our pews and pulpit. I invite you now to join Rev. Rob Keithan as he leads us in one of those ways, lighting a candle or a chalice to prepare ourselves for worship.

Chalice Lighting and Pastoral Prayer (Rev. Rob Keithan and Eleanor Keithan)

Now is the time to light our chalice. I invite you to do so at home, to these words from Dag Hammarskjöld:

Each morning we hold out the chalice of our being to receive, to carry, and to give back.

We turn now to our pastoral prayers.

Our grief is with Emily Hogin, Michael Fountaine, and his family as they mourn two significant losses: the death of Michael's father, Brian, and also the loss of Michael's 4 year-old cousin, Melina, who died this week from an incurable brain tumor. Let us all offer them prayers of love, and prayers of comfort, in this terrible time.

Our thoughts and well wishes are with Cynthia Rosenwald as she enters a process of vocational discernment and discovery.

Let us rejoice with Tom Taylor and his family, as Tom is returning home from several weeks in a rehab facility after a fall.

We offer our goodbyes and well-wishes to Michael Sheridan as she settles in North Carolina for this new chapter of her life.

And finally, we offer a final prayer for Rev. Rob Hardies, All Souls Senior Minister for these last 19 years. Rev. Rob's last day is this Tuesday, so we offer prayers of thanks, appreciation, and good luck to him as he embarks on the next chapter of his journey.

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

Spirit of Life and Love, God of wholeness, brokenness, and everything in between,
Be with us as we struggle to accept ourselves, and each other.
Be with us as we hold the at times overwhelming grief and sadness of our world.
Be with us as we yearn to find answers amidst the chaos.
Be with us as we seek the courage, and resilience, and endurance to keep working for the equality and liberation of all people.
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)

“Harrowing,” by Parker Palmer

The plow has savaged this sweet field
Misshapen clods of earth kicked up
Rocks and twisted roots exposed to view
Last year’s growth demolished by the blade.
I have plowed my life this way
Turned over a whole history
Looking for the roots of what went wrong
Until my face is ravaged, furrowed, scarred.

Enough. The job is done.
Whatever’s been uprooted, let it be
Seedbed for the growing that’s to come.
I plowed to unearth last year’s reasons—

The farmer plows to plant a greening season.

Message (Rev. Coleman)

“I have plowed my life...turned over a whole history/ Looking for the roots of what went wrong...”

So many of us can relate to that sentiment, can’t we? So many of us have had that experience, where we find ourselves looking at the landscape of our lives, shoulders slumped under the weight of our own regrets, and wonder: How? How did I get here? What went wrong? Was it the choice to move to that city? Did I pick the wrong partner? Should I have stayed at that other job? Could I have parented differently? Where did I go wrong?

Our society suggests that if we do everything right—if we go to the right schools, if we work with the right amount of rigor and intensity, if we associate with the right people and build the right networks, if we achieve the right amount of success, well then, we’ll find happiness. It’s a relatively simple equation: do the right things, make the right moves, and reap perfection.

The poem that serves as this week’s reading was written by a man who did just those things. He got a Ph.D from Berkeley. He taught at Georgetown. He wrote and published; he organized and pursued activism in causes that mattered to him. He was living out a perfect dream. However, he eventually had to admit, the dream he was living wasn’t his, and so, with time, that dream devolved into a depression. It was slow at first. He could shake it off and keep on going, keep denying the truth of what the deepest parts of his psyche, the most vocal parts of his soul, were telling him. But, before long, it became crippling; before long, his truth wouldn’t accept being ignored, so it took over his life. It was from that place that this poem began taking form inside Parker Palmer, the spiritual author whose words serve as our reading this morning.

His journey from ignoring the truth of his life to letting it speak out loud was a journey paved with pain, with heartache, and with humiliation. It's a journey that led him deep into the dark places of his life, places that he never thought himself ready to visit. It was a spiritual journey, rife with paradox and confusion and moments of deep emptiness.

Anyone who's had a bout with depression and come out on the other side knows a thing or two about that journey. Anyone who's been forced to pick up the pieces of their lives after a devastating crisis—a diagnosis, an addiction, a divorce—knows that journey. And, I think, anyone truly awake to the moment our world finds itself in right now, may also know a thing or two about this journey.

As our country continues to struggle our way through a pandemic that our highest leaders grossly mismanaged, as our streets continue to pulse with angry, grieving, hopeful shouts of protest, as our church continues to grapple with the realities of white supremacy and institutional racism, anyone who's truly awake to this moment knows something about the harrowing spiritual journey that Parker Palmer describes.

And like Parker Palmer, we, each of us, is faced with a choice—do we persist in the comfort of our status quo, do we stay in a job that saps our spirits, do we stay in a relationship that is unhealthy, do we stay quiet in a world that throbs with injustice, do we let the comfort of the known drown out the voices of truth within us, or do we act?

I think for a lot of us, we've heard our lives or the events of this moment ask us this very question, and I think a lot of us have answered, quickly and certainly, yes. Yes to acting. However, while a lot of us have said "yes" to taking action, we haven't yet said yes to the discomfort and the disquiet that our yeses will actually provoke.

Resmaa Menakem, a clinical therapist, trainer, and author, recently published a ground-breaking book called *My Grandmother's Hands*. In it, Menakem offers readers a powerful framework for understanding the deep, historical, and abiding relationship between trauma and race. For Menakem, conversations about race, even those hard-hitting, radical, and deeply analytical conversations about white supremacy and the persistence of systemic racism, too frequently don't actually go far enough, because, ultimately, they remain at the level of the mind, and the real work needs to start in the body. So many of us have become accustomed to taking action by provoking conversation. So accustomed, in fact, that we've grown to a level of intellectual understanding and existential comfort with deeply discomforting topics. We've found a way to engage at a distance, by keeping our action at the level of the analytical. For Menakem, these kinds of conversations are exactly part of the problem; comfort, in fact, is exactly part of the problem. In a recent interview, Menakem said:

"...white comfort trumps my liberation [as a black man]. Even [people of color] genuflect to white comfort, because we know, when white people get nervous, people lose their jobs. When white people get nervous, people get hung from trees. When white people get nervous, babies get put in cages."

In other words, discomfort, the place of harrowing, the place of uprooting the plants in the field that this morning's reading points to, that place begins to feel dangerous.

The same is true for our own personal journeys of self-revelation, isn't it? So many of us are so much more comfortable reading about prayer than we are actually praying; so many of us find comfort in reading about meditation or spiritual practice or the benefits of therapy, but when it comes time to do the work, to set off on the journey, we slink away and submit to the status quo.

Friends, the kind of liberation that awaits us, the liberation that awaits our individual lives, the liberation that awaits our collective life, cannot come from the dull action of conversation and intellection alone. These are changes that happen in and beginning with our bodies; the soil out of which the fields of our lives are made.

"So then, Tony, what's the first step?" you may be asking. "If I want to take up the journey that Parker Palmer described in his poem; if I want to take up the work of anti-racism at the site where race lives, in my body, what do I do?"

Well, if you ask Parker Palmer, he'd say, "let your life speak." In his book titled with that same phrase, *Let Your Life Speak*, he writes, "Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you." Listen to the stirrings of intuition inside you. Pay attention to the repulsions in your spirit and the sparks of joy in your gut. Discern and discover.

If you ask Resmaa Menakem those same questions, he might refer you to his "five anchors for moving through clean pain," the first of which is "shut up." Check your impulses. See what feelings rush up inside of you as a white person when you find yourself surrounded by people of color. See what feelings pulse inside of you as a person of color when you find yourself having conversations about race with white folks.

What I find so striking about the journey toward self-discovery and transformation is that these two different authors, these two radically different thinkers and healers, suggest that the journey starts in the exact same place. Whether we're letting our lives speak or shutting up, we start the journey with silence.

Do you make time for silence? If there were ever a time to start, it's now. Let me be clear, though, I don't mean the silence of apathy or complicity. I don't mean the silence of a guided meditation, not the silence of relaxing or decompressing, but the brave silence of sitting with no other intention than being silent. The brave silence of confronting what's actually true about your experience right now. The silence that pays attention to fear and makes space for grief. The silence that names uncertainty and courts discomfort. The silence of Self meeting itself in the ambiguity of the now.

This is the beginning, friends; this is the first step of confronting the prejudices that have kept us comfortable, the prejudices that have maintained the status quo of our lives. And I don't mean only the prejudices of race and racism but also the prejudices of our warped self-realities, the ways we prejudge our own abilities to have a different life, the ways we prejudge our worthiness for real love, the ways we prejudge our capacity to live creatively.

“I have plowed my life...turned over a whole history/ Looking for the roots of what went wrong...” Parker Palmer writes. “Whatever’s been uprooted, let it be/ Seedbed for the growing that’s to come. I plowed to unearth last year’s reasons—The farmer plows to plant a greening season.”

Rather than continue to look at the roots of our lives and simply have conversations and simply read books about what went wrong, let us hold those roots in our hands and be silent, let your life speak, shut up. Feel the truth of your discoveries; silently sink into the authenticity of your confusion, your fear, your anger. And let that energy be for you a force that propels you to sow new roots, a force that propels you to grow new leaves and blossom. Let us not plow just to find newer ways to name and describe and diagnose what’s wrong. Let us plow and uproot to make space for new life. Let us embrace our brokenness as we journey, together, toward wholeness.

Ashe and Amen.

Music (Rochelle Rice, vocals; Janelle Gill, piano; Romeir Mendez, bass; Dante Pope, drums)

“Song for Mia” (Toshi Reagon and Lizz Wright)

I went down to the water, all night long
I put my feet in, all night long
And I went down to the water, all night long
And I put my dreams in, all night long

And what you said to me, I can’t say
I’ll take these bad dreams and I’ll throw them all away
I’m at the shore now, the waters at my back
I can feel the waves coming they’re, heavy and black
But I can’t turn away now
They’re singin’ a song
And I, I’m in harmony
And I’m singing along

And what you did to me, I can’t take no more
I’ll take these bad dreams and I’ll lay them at the shore

The edge of the ocean I’ll never see
I look out in the distance, it’s staring back at me
And I went down to the water all night long
And I put my dreams in, all night long
I put my fear in, all night long
I put my dreams in, all night long

Offertory/Benediction (Rev. Keithan)

As we near the end of our service, I invite you to make a donation to support the ongoing ministry of All Souls to this congregation, this city, this country, and this world.

And I close today with the words of Rev. Barbara Pescan:

Because of those who came before, we are;
in spite of their failings, we believe;
because of, and in spite of, the horizons of their vision,
we, too, dream.

Let us go remembering to praise,
to live in the moment,
to love mightily, [and]
to bow to the mystery.

Music (Rochelle Rice, Jen Hayman, and Amelia Peele, vocals; Gordon Kent, piano; Dante Pope, percussion)

“Painted Sky” (Lizz Wright)