

Worship transcript for August 9, 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! Today’s service is special, as we mark the 75th anniversary of the United States’ atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and look to the story—the incredible story—of the Hiroshima Children’s Drawings for inspiration.

Today’s service is also notable because it’s the last of our remote, pre-recorded services, and the last service before our new interim Senior Minister, Rev. Kathleen Rolenz, takes to the pulpit. Look for more information in the coming week about the details, but she literally will be preaching from the pulpit in our Sanctuary once again. It’s not the same as having all of you in the building, of course, but we hope it’ll make the services feel more grounded in our space and more connected to the church.

We appreciate all of you, in the Washington, DC area and everywhere else, who are part of the All Souls family.

Come, let us worship together.

Chalice Lighting, Pastoral Concerns, and Prayer (Rev. Louise Green)

As I light this chalice, I remember many All Souls visionaries who tended our connection with Hiroshima, the Peace Museum, and our precious Children’s Drawings.

Those who held the imagination of ministry and history together, over so many years: Rev. A. Powell Davies, Paul and Jane Pfeiffer, Bob and Molly Freeman, Judith Dyer. Also Mel Hardy, Chuck Wooldridge, Religious Educator Gabrielle Farrell, Rev. Rob Hardies, filmmakers Bryan Reichhardt and Shizumi Manale.

Many more than we can name today, those who have honored peacebuilding and justice-seeking. May our current work and action honor their memories, and their ongoing legacy which we hold together as All Souls. Blessed Be.

It is good to be with you in recorded service today! And, drumroll.....We anticipate our new format next week, August 16, with new Interim Senior Minister Kathleen Rolenz. Welcome, Kathleen! (We can now watch and connect at the same time on Sunday mornings, beginning

with her first service at All Souls. Electronic Coffee Hour with Rose is a great way to keep it going after service.)

We gather with so many on our minds and in our hearts. We hold these people and situations close today, in our circle of care:

Julie Agarwal and her friend, Anya, who is grappling with difficult health challenges.

Bob Bloomfield and Barbara McCann as they sit with the news that Bob's tumor is growing once again.

We send prayers to our All Souls Religious Educator Dolores Miller's mother, Leona, as she prepares to pass from this life, as a result of pneumonia and Covid 19. Blessings for Leona, Dolores and family.

We remember the life of long-time UU Carla Finkel who died in home hospice on July 29. Peace and comfort particularly to her husband Rob and daughter Julia.

This week we mourn with Beirut, Lebanon, on the great loss of life, and many thousands injured, after the destruction of massive explosions. We lament and grieve for so much suffering, and pray for healing in a tragic time.

And now, a moment of silence for those on your heart and mind.....

Would you pray or meditate with me?

Spirit of Life, Creator of Love, our world is filled with sorrow and our people carry so much. Family and friends who are sick, in treatment, and leaving this life. Caregivers who struggle to make arrangements and maintain systems of support. Family who face difficult distance and restriction, just when they are yearning to hold those they love.

Our hearts are breaking, and we grow weary. Let us be gentle with ourselves, and compassionate to all who hold great burdens. May we offer kindness and encouragement to everyone we encounter. Let us be peacemakers in all we do. 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)

“Putting the Peace-s Together”

In 1995, I had the opportunity to visit the United Nations headquarters in New York City as part of a Unitarian Universalist youth conference, and I had an experience that I’ve remembered very clearly ever since.

At the UN, there’s a statue of Saint Agnes from a Roman Catholic Church that was 1/3 of a mile from where the atomic bomb fell on Nagasaki. I remember reading about its location, looking at the statue from the front, and thinking that it was in pretty good shape.

But then I stepped around to the back. And the back is charred and badly distorted.

I was so wrong. There was part of me that really wanted to believe that it wasn’t that bad. But it was. The impact of the atomic bombs was as horrific as horrific gets. And despite the popular myths about why the bombs were dropped, military experts, historians, and even the US Naval Museum itself are clear that it was the Soviet Union’s entry into the war that caused the Japanese surrender. And the US military knew that was the deciding factor months before we dropped the bombs.

It’s tempting to believe the myth rather than confront the real horror.

I submit that many of us, including me, are in a similar struggle with the idea of policing. The idea of the friendly neighborhood policeman is largely a myth. Policing in this country started with slave patrols, and then became a tool for massive corporations to have the government crack down on workers and union organizers.

In the last few months, mainstream society has finally started paying attention to what some black, indigenous, and people of color activists and researchers have been saying for years, which is that minor or even major reforms of institutional policing aren’t enough. We need a dramatically new approach if we want real change to happen. And for those of us who don’t personally have negative experiences with the police, based on our race, class, or just luck, we have to take responsibility for our own education, and part of that is coming to terms with the fact that we’ve been wrong all along. That our ideas of friendly neighborhood policing were a myth designed to obscure the true history, and that we wanted to—and to a large extent did—believe that.

And, please, I want to be clear—I'm talking about police and policing as a collective, systemic, and historical entity. There are bad apples in the system, but it's not about individuals. There are also good apples in the system too, including members of All Souls and other UU congregations, members of our families, friends, neighbors, etc. There are officers who are fantastic human beings, and that's important. But this work isn't about them, either, because it's not about individuals. It's about a system that needs to change.

Collectively, we have both learning and un-learning to do. And those of us who have been wrong about our understanding of the police, including me, and including the church, need to pay a lot more attention to the people who have been right. It doesn't matter what I wish was true. I am called, and I believe that we are all called by our Unitarian Universalist faith, to (1) pay attention to what is actually going on, and (2) to pay particular attention to the perspectives of people and groups who have been targeted for harassment and violence.

To this end, I'm pleased to announce that All Souls is launching a new group, with the working name Racial Justice Action. Racial Justice Action will complement our internal transformation efforts by giving All Souls ways to make an impact on these issues outside the congregation, starting with how to end racist policing. The launch meeting is tonight at 7:30 PM; you can get more information and register your interest in the work whether or not you can attend tonight's meeting.

As a window into the inner resources we have available to help us learn, and change, I want to say more about the Hiroshima Children's Drawings, and bring in both some larger context and some specific aspects of the story that speak to our circumstances now as we face pandemics of virus and racism.

I preached a little bit about this in early June, somewhat expectedly—I was scheduled to preach about the drawing at a congregation in Grand Rapids and Rev. Rob Hardies got sick, so I did a slightly different version of the same sermon for All Souls. The basic background is that our Senior Minister at the time, Rev. A. Powell Davies, had been closely following the United States development of atomic weapons and was absolutely horrified by a newspaper story celebrating their use. Word got back to him that children in Japan lacked the most basic of school supplies, so All Souls took a collection and shipped a half-ton of items across the Pacific. The following year, All Souls received a package of drawings that children at the Honkawa Elementary School in Nagasaki had made with those supplies.

Let's reflect for a moment on the context. At Pearl Harbor in 1941, the Japanese government launched a pre-emptive attack on the United States. Our countries were not at war. In the years that followed, we were in a vicious battle abroad while committing horrible acts of racism against Japanese Americans at home. And then, even though Japan was already defeated militarily, we became the first nation to use atomic weapons and killed hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians.

Given this context, we cannot understate the potential for animosity between our nations. We had inflicted so much hatred, violence, and suffering on each other.

Out of this comes the drawings. And I want to set the context.

The Honkawa school was relatively close to ground zero and lost more than 400 students and teachers when the bomb dropped on August 6, 1945. Everything and everyone in it and around it was destroyed.

Six months later, in February 1946, the school reopened with 45 students with 4 teachers. We're talking a lot now about schools re-opening, right? Well, here was their context, with a few photos and with the exact words of several of the students who made the drawings that we were able to track down:

“The building itself was just concrete. All the parts that we made of wood had burnt down. Everything was concrete. There was no glass in the window frames. The window frames were all bent because they were made of iron. When it rained it would actually come into the building and everyone would run to the corners. The school really didn't have anything.”

One historian interviewed in the film said: “People will talk about what they did during the war, and after the bombing. But they don't talk about what happened after. It was too hard.”

So, when the school supplies arrived from All Souls, it made an enormous impact on the students and teachers. And one of the most simple, and touching reasons is that many of the supplies, including writing instruments, were colorful. Because all those students and teachers were living in a world where, literally, most of the things that had color had been destroyed.

Which, I think, makes it even more remarkable that the children drew what they did. Because they were drawing scenes that they could not see. They were a combination of memories and hopes for a world that did not currently exist for them.

Fast forward to the recent past. Over the decades, the drawings began to deteriorate due to age and moisture. A group of church members formed the Hiroshima Children's Drawings Committee in 2005 to consider how the drawings could be preserved and become truly a part of the ministry of All Souls. The committee eventually connected with Shizumi Shigetsu Manale, a Japanese American artist and dancer, who saw the drawings and realized the potential of bringing the story to a wider audience. She brought in documentary filmmaker Brian Reinhart, the committee restores the drawings with a grant from All Souls Beckner Advancement Fund, and together they're able to locate 20 of the original artists, meet them, take the drawings to be exhibited at the Honkawa School in 2010, and over the span of 6 years make an incredible documentary film about it. Ways to view the film are in the email announcing this service and on the homepage.

Equally as important as that initial exchange, though, is that the relationship has continued. Delegations from Japan have come here as well, and with people from All Souls have literally stood under the Enola Gay at the Udvar-Hazy Center and prayed together. And we've worked with a Japanese Buddhist organization, the Risshō Kōsei Kai, and numerous other organizations in the United States to share the drawings and work for peace.

So, despite the level of conflict that existed between our nations, we've found away to both be honest about the horrors AND have real, genuine relationships with each other. That's why the Rumi felt so fitting:

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing

and rightdoing there is a field.

I'll meet you there.

The children's artwork is a reminder of the potential in each of us, and the partnership is a reminder of the potential we have together. Our potential to survive horror, and, AND, our ability to transcend barriers and animosity.

May these examples inspire us and sustain us today.

Amen.

NOTES

[The Atomic Bomb Didn't End the War](#) by Peter Kuznick

Background on the [Honkawa Elementary School](#)

Music (All Souls Bluegrass Band)

“My Silver Lining” (The First Aid Kit)

I don't want to wait anymore I'm tired of looking for answers
Take me some place where there's music and there's laughter
I don't know if I'm scared of dying but I'm scared of living too fast, too slow
Regret, remorse, hold on, oh no I've got to go
There's no starting over, no new beginnings, time races on
And you've just gotta keep on keeping on
Gotta keep on going, looking straight out on the road
Can't worry 'bout what's behind you or what's coming for you further up the road
I try not to hold on to what is gone, I try to do right what is wrong
I try to keep on keeping on
Yeah I just keep on keeping on

I hear a voice calling
Calling out for me
These shackles I've made in an attempt to be free
Be it for reason, be it for love
I won't take the easy road

I've woken up in a hotel room, my worries as big as the moon
Having no idea who or what or where I am
Something good comes with the bad
A song's never just sad
There's hope, there's a silver lining
Show me my silver lining
Show me my silver lining

I hear a voice calling
Calling out for me
These shackles I've made in an attempt to be free
Be it for reason, be it for love
I won't take the easy road

I won't take the easy road
The easy road, the easy road

I won't take the easy road
The easy road, the easy road

Show me my silver lining, I try to keep on keeping on
Show me my silver lining, I try to keep on keeping on
Show me my silver lining, I try to keep on keeping on
Show me my silver lining, I try to keep on keeping on

Offertory/Benediction (Rev. Green)

Even in a time of social distance, All Souls depends on your gifts to carry on the work of this congregation. Please help support programs, building, staff, and much new technology, as we do the work of love and justice in the world. Thank you for your generosity in your electronic financial support today.

I close today with the words of Rev. Howard Thurman:

In the quietness of this place, surrounded by the all-pervading presence of the Holy, my heart whispers: Keep fresh before me the moments of my High Resolve, that in good times or in tempests, we may not forget that to which our lives are committed.

Keep fresh before us the moments of our high resolve.

Go in peace, return in love, All Souls. Amen.