

Worship transcript for August 30, 2020

Prelude (members of the Jubilee Singers; Taryn Wilgus Null and Robert Jayes, vocal leads)

“Hold On!” (traditional spiritual; arr. by L. Starks)

Paul and Silas were bound in jail,
Had no money for to go their bail.
Keep your eyes on-a the prize,
Hold on!

Paul and Silas began to pray,
The doors popped open and they walked away.
Keep your eyes on-a the prize,
Hold On!

Hold on! Hold on!
Keep your eyes on-a the prize. Hold on!

The only chains that we can stand,
Are the chains of hand-in-hand.
Keep your eyes on-a the prize,
Hold on!

Keep your hand on the justice plow,
I wouldn't take nothing for my journey now.
Keep your hands on-a the plow,
Hold on!

Hold on! Hold on!
Keep your eyes on-a the prize. Hold on!
Hold on! Hold on!
Keep your eyes on-a the prize and Hold On!

Call to Worship (Rev. Rob Keithan)

Friends, we know that our waters are troubled, both literally and figuratively. Let us join our hearts and spirits and voices as we answer God's call and wade into that water. Come, let us worship together.

Hymn 210 (members of the Jubilee Singers; Roy Barber, vocal lead)

“Wade in the Water”

(Chorus) Wade in the water, wade in the water, children, wade in the water, God's gonna trouble the water.

1 See that band all dressed in white. God's gonna trouble the water. The leader looks like an Israelite. God's gonna trouble the water. (Chorus)

2 See that band all dressed in red. God's gonna trouble the water. It looks like the band that Moses led. God's gonna trouble the water. (Chorus)

Welcome and Chalice Lighting (Rev. Kathleen Rolenz)

Greetings and welcome to All Souls Church Unitarian Long Distance Worship. I'm Rev. Kathleen and I'm serving as the Interim Minister. In today's service, I am joined by the Rev. Rob Keithan Minister of Social Justice, with music provided by members of the Jubilee singers, directed by Lenard Stark.

Wherever you are – whether a long-time member of All Souls or watching for the first time, we want to welcome you.

Your ministry and music team decided to continue our recorded services until Sunday, September 13th, which is Homecoming Sunday. Beginning on the 13th, we will be offering you a combination of live worship with some pre-recorded elements via a Zoom platform.

We are in the midst of planning for the many ways which you can connect to this community regardless if this is your first time or your fiftieth year with All Souls. Please watch the newsletter and the website for updates.

We like to say that although the building is closed, the church is never closed. We continue to build a diverse, spirit filled and justice seeking congregation. We welcome you to All Souls worship this morning.

We light this chalice for the light of truth, the warmth of community, and the fire of commitment. May these inspire our worship this morning.

Pastoral Concerns and Prayer (Rev. Keithan)

I have one congregational, and one larger, pastoral concern to share today. First, our hearts go out to Esther Strongman, who recently lost her mother. We send love to Esther, John, and her entire extended family.

Second, today's service is about the work done, and still to do, in the struggle for civil rights and justice for all people in this country. In honor of both All Souls history, and our present, I'm recording in our church lobby, the Reeb Lobby, dedicated to the life and work of Rev. James Reeb, who died while working for voting rights in Alabama.

In his eulogy for Rev. Reeb, given at Brown Chapel in Selma on March 15, 1965, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said:

Naturally, we are compelled to ask the question, Who killed James Reeb? The answer is simple and rather limited when we think of the who. He was murdered by a few sick, demented, and misguided men who have the strange notion that you express dissent through murder. There is another haunting, poignant, desperate question we are forced to ask this afternoon, that I asked a few days ago as we funeralized James Jackson. It is the question, What killed James Reeb? When we move from the who to the what, the blame is wide and the responsibility grows...

This past week, two more unarmed black men were shot in the back by police. Trayford Pellerin was shot by police in Lafayette, Louisiana, and died. And— in front of his children—Jacob Blake was shot by police in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Although he is alive, he is likely paralyzed from the waist down.

As King said, this struggle is not about the individuals committing the violence. It's about the larger systems, and it's about the role we can and must play in making change.

And so, in your, and our, prayers today, I invite you to speak aloud the names of people in your immediate circle who need a little extra love, but also to say the names of those who lost their lives to the institutional racism and violence that still plagues our nation.

Spirit of Life and Love, Dear God,

At a time when there is so much work to do, and yet so many obstacles to doing it, fill us with the determination of those who went before us, known and unknown, who preserved in the face of unspeakable odds.

And be with us, in our congregation, in our community, and in our country, as we navigate our own struggles: with systems of oppression, with the pandemic, and with the routine challenges of our imperfect lives.

Renew our spirits and revive our courage so that we may do the work that remains ours to do.

Amen.

Hymn 123 (Ann Watters and Nicole Rumeau)

“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. Rolenz)

“Necessary Trouble”

Lynn Ungar

Admit it. So many of our troubles
are optional, self-centered, even
absurd. I have borrowed trouble
too many time to count, even
when no one offered to loan it.
I’ve made work from laziness
and embarrassment out of inattention.
I have chosen to be clever
rather than kind, and Lord knows
irritable when what was needed
was some measure of grace.
Don’t even get me started
on the unnecessary troubles
wished on us by those
who’ve chosen division
over the more perfect union
we were promised.
There isn’t time.
The walls, it seems, are closing in.
There is only time for
necessary trouble, as in
God’s gonna trouble the waters.
As in, the tide is rising
and we’re going to need
a bigger boat.

Message (Rev. Rolenz)

“Good Trouble, Clean Pain, New Road”

The year was 1965 and I remember sitting in my parent’s living room. I was too young to fully comprehend why my parents suddenly turned up the volume on the TV or why my mother clasped her hand over her mouth. All I knew that whatever my parents were watching was disturbing. Years later my mother told me about watching the broadcast of the march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge with horror. This summer we’ve seen that iconic moment replayed over

and over again – as we witness a young John Lewis beaten while people are running and screaming. And in television sets all across the nation, some Americans were appalled. Just as that broadcast interrupted a show my parents were watching, it interrupted the lives of white America. The images from that Bloody Sunday are credited with fast tracking the passage of the landmark Voting Rights Act of 1965.

This summer we witnessed the deaths of two iconic figures of the civil rights movement; the pastor and activist C.T. Vivian and Representative John Lewis. In the events leading up to Lewis' memorial service and celebration of life, we heard and saw those images all over again, adding this new one of him standing on what is now Black Lives Matter Plaza.

I want to remind you of the words he wrote for this occasion:

While my time here has now come to an end, I want you to know that in the last days and hours of my life you inspired me. You filled me with hope about the next chapter of the great American story when you used your power to make a difference in our society That is why I had to visit Black Lives Matter Plaza in Washington... Ordinary people with extraordinary vision can redeem the soul of America by getting what I call good trouble, necessary trouble. Voting and participating in the democratic process are key. The vote is the most powerful nonviolent change you have in a democratic society. You must use it because it is not guaranteed. You can lose it.”
RETURN TO SPEAKER

In 2015, many members of Unitarian Universalist Churches across the country came to Selma, Alabama to commemorate Bloody Sunday, and to hear the remembrances of Representative John Lewis, President Obama, and Clark Olson & Orloff Miller, the two UU ministers who were with James Reeb when they were attacked. Members of All Souls were at that march in 2015 – I remember, because I was walking alongside many of you on that bridge that day, feeling a palpable sense of hope, a renewed urgency, a feeling that we were shaking the country up by instigating good and necessary trouble – that finally, finally, this dream that Lewis and C.T. Vivian, King and Reeb, Rustin, Parks and Nash and Hamer, Lowry and Farmer, Randolph and Young, Coretta King and so many others fought for may be on the verge of becoming a reality.

I felt that hope again, following the murder of George Floyd. I have tried to maintain relationships with my high school friends, most of whom are conservative and supporters of the current President and Administration. Yet, right after the death of George Floyd, for one brief day – we were all united in outrage. They even said the word I have never heard them say before: this is racist. This is wrong, they said. This is horrible. For a brief moment, I even had a fantasy that is probably a luxury that generally only white people indulge in – that these conservative high school friends and I might soon be walking across that metaphorical bridge arm and arm, they have finally seen America for what it is.

Well, that fantasy lasted less than 24 hours!! When the protests continued for a second day, and when, at night, incidents of violence and looting were reported, my white high school friends' opinions, quickly turned sour. “This is not a new civil rights movement” one wrote to me. “This is just raw anarchy. No leaders. No discipline. No ethics or morals. No respect for property. I can't support that.” One friend, who has done a little bit more thinking about racial justice than

the others, said “The country needs more John Lewis’s and Martin Luther King Jr.’s not hoodlums and rioters.”

I suspect that what these comments point to – and are indicative of – is the desire to embrace one interpretation of John Lewis’s invitation to get into “Good Trouble – Necessary Trouble”, the interpretation that leans towards advocacy for enforcing or reforming existing laws and policies. This kind of Good Trouble has to involve us into the struggle that was so central to John Lewis’s career – a massive, orchestrated outreach to ensure that anyone who is eligible to vote – will vote – in this election. This kind of good trouble begins by acknowledging the assault that has occurred upon communities of color in a systemic and the coordinated effort to make it more difficult to cast a ballot. As we get ever closer to the Presidential election, I suspect that many of us will be involved in some form of voter registration – and get out the vote efforts. Minister of Social Justice Rob Keithan and the Reeb Voting Rights Project will address this effort at the end of this sermon.

But there is another kind of good and necessary trouble beyond enforcing laws written in victories that we thought were won more than half a century ago. That is the Good Trouble we get into when we stir up conscience, memory, humility, and integrity, particularly among white people – in the ingredients in a recipe that we have come to call with the shorthand phrase – “getting woke”. When you have the courage to start this kind of good trouble, with a friend, a community, or a nation, there is just as much pain involved as getting beat on the head with a sheriff’s billy club, but it’s a different kind of pain. Therapist and activist Resmaa Menakem says that pain can be experienced in two ways, as “clean pain” or “dirty pain” and that’s what I want to talk about for the rest of this sermon – especially the “clean pain” part. Because if you’re like me – you’ve felt a considerable amount of pain and trauma this year – not only with the pandemic but with the deaths of unarmed black and brown bodies this year and the divisive rhetoric coming from the nation’s highest office. And if you are black or a person of color in this country, your trauma is likely not created by these events, but may be triggered. As the sympathetic postings of my high school friends descended into the usual racist tropes, I began to feel a turning in myself. My grief began to turn to anger which began to turn to rage. I noticed the anger in my own body making me feel nauseous most of the time. And that’s when I turned to Resmaa Menakem’s book: “My Grandmother’s Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending our Hearts and Bodies” for support and inspiration.

Menakem’s book is directed at three audiences; black or dark-bodied people, white people and law enforcement officers. Menakem is a trauma therapist, and a healer whose work centers around the trauma of white-body supremacy. He begins this therapy sessions by telling his clients about the two kinds of pain: clean pain and dirty pain. Of this he writes: “clean pain is pain that mends and can build your capacity for growth. It’s the pain you experience when you know, exactly, what you need to say or do, when you really, really don’t want to say or do it, and when you do it anyway. It’s also the pain you experience when you have no idea what to do, when you’re scared or worried about what might happen, and when you step forward into the unknown anyway, with honesty and vulnerability.”^[1]

Dirty Pain is the pain of avoidance, blame and denial. When people respond from their most wounded parts, become cruel or violent or physically or emotionally run away, they experience

dirty pain. They also create more of it for themselves and others. A key factor in the perpetuation of white-body supremacy is many people's refusal to experience clean pain around the myth of race. Instead, usually out of fear, they choose the dirty pain of silence and avoidance, and invariably, prolong the pain." [2]

Manakem's book is brilliant in dozens of ways, but this insight – between clean and dirty pain, has given me a language to frame an important reality that will continue long past the upcoming elections or the next President. It has to do with our spiritual stance and how that helps us experience and process our own pain. How we behave and what we do with our own pain matters. After the election is over, even if our particular candidate – whomever that is – wins – we will still be left with white body supremacy; we will still have to face the legacy and current realities of racism – we will still have to deal with our own continuing pain.

While there are other communities that are doing effective healing work, the one that I know best – and that can be well equipped to provide this kind of healing – is the church – churches like this one. I want to acknowledge that the practice of non-violent resistance has its detractors and critics; and that criticism about current methods of protest can also be one more way that white people try to control how people of color express their anger. At the same, I have always been powerfully drawn to the spiritual work involved in non-violent resistance.

When I attended the Clergy Training on the night before the United the Right Rally in Charlottesville, it was stressed over and over again that in no way were we to engage, debate, taunt, or accost the right-wingers in front of us. We were to calm our bodies and to dig deep into whatever spiritual practices we did to maintain our spiritual composure. To do otherwise, would risk becoming the very thing we despised; confronting hate with hate – a zero sum game where everyone loses.

On the same day the world lost John Lewis, it also lost one of the giants of the civil rights era – C.T. Vivian. Vivian's life was not as prominent as John Lewis – he was, first and foremost a pastor and preacher. One of his iconic moments was caught on tape when he confronts Sheriff Jim Clark on the steps of the courthouse in Selma, Alabama. “ The people of this county have come to vote. You know in your heart what's right. You are not as evil a man as you act, Sheriff Clark. “ Vivian tells Clark to his face. Vivian keeps making his case to Clark who turns his back on him. “You can turn your back on me, but you cannot turn your back upon the idea of justice” Vivian said to Clark. Shortly after this, Clark turns and hits Vivian with a club, pushing him back into the crowd and out into the pouring rain. Throughout it all, Vivian retains his composure; he doesn't let up on the pressure or his righteous and holy anger, but he acts from what I believe Manakem would call “clean pain”...which is “the pain you experience when you know, exactly what you need to say or do, when you really really don't want to say or do it, and when you do it anyway.” No one, not even C.T. Vivian was looking for a Billy club to his skull that day – yet, he could also not speak to the moment at hand. From a place of clean pain, not dirty pain; from a place of righteous anger, not hatred; from a place of clarity for the mission and purpose at hand.

This year – and this upcoming election and beyond – will require everything from us, but we are not doing it alone. While we are walking on the same road as our civil rights ancestors, it is also a new road. The tactics and techniques of the civil rights movement of John Lewis and C.T.

Vivians must be adapted for who and what we are now. We are building this road even as we walk on it! The purpose I see for our continuing and expanding the work of these and other leaders is because this is not just a new Civil Rights movement we are experiencing. It's a Reckoning with something that goes deeper than laws and policies And we are not going to stop until white supremacy culture and racism in all its forms have been reckoned with – not someday, not after this year's election, but now. Immediately.

In his recent article in The Atlantic "The Power of American Denial" Ibram X. Kendi makes an essential case for America to abandon its complacency and its denial. I want you to hear a few excerpts from that article in his own words:

"One path forward leads to mere restoration...On this path, Americans consider racism to be a serious problem, but they deny the true gravity of the problem and the need for drastic action. ...[On the other path] Americans can realize that they are at a point of no return. No returning to the bad old habit of denial. No returning to cynicism. No returning to normal – the normal in which racist policies, defended by racist ideas, lead to racial inequality.

On this path, the American people demand equitable results, not speeches that will make them feel good about themselves and their country...the abolition of slavery seemed as impossible in the 1850s as equality seems today. But just as the abolitionists of the 1850s demanded the immediate eradication of slavery, immediate equality must be the demand today. Abolish police violence. Abolish mass incarceration. Abolish the racial wealth gap and the gap in school funding. Abolish barriers to citizenship/ Abolish voter suppression. Abolish health disparities. Not in 20 years. Not in 10 years. Now."

May it be so.

Music (The Jubilee Singers; Ann Watters, Nicole Rumeau, and Tim Rhodes, soloists)

"Rock-a My Soul" (traditional spiritual; arr. by Howard Roberts)

The day is past and gone.
The evening shade appears.
Lord keep us safe this night
Secure from all our fears

Rock-a my soul in the bosom of Abraham
Rock-a my soul in the bosom of Abraham
Rock-a my soul in the bosom of Abraham
Oh__ rock-a my soul. Oh, rock-a my soul

<i>I may be weak</i>	Rock my soul
<i>I may be strong</i>	Rock my soul
<i>I'm leaning on</i>	Leaning on
<i>I'm leaning on</i>	God's mighty arm
Oh, rock-a my soul	

Rock-a my soul in the bosom of Abraham
Rock-a my soul in the bosom of Abraham
Rock-a my soul in the bosom of Abraham
Oh__ rock-a my soul. Oh, rock-a my soul

My soul is glad Rock my soul
My soul is free Rock my soul
I'm goin' home Go-in' home
I'm goin' home to live with Thee
Oh, rock-a my soul

Rock-a my soul in the bosom of Abraham
Rock-a my soul in the bosom of Abraham
Rock-a my soul in the bosom of Abraham
Oh rock-a my soul. Oh, rock-a my soul

Rock-a my soul in the bosom of Abraham
Rock-a my soul in the bosom of Abraham
Rock-a my soul in the bosom of Abraham
Oh rock-a my soul. Oh, rock-a my soul

Rock-a my soul in the bosom of Abraham
Rock-a my soul in the bosom of Abraham
Rock-a my soul in the bosom of Abraham
Oh rock-a my soul. Oh, rock-a my soul

Testimonial (Reeb Voting Rights Project)

Offering (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, as we continue to dream of, and work towards, a different world. 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.

Hymn 201

“Glory, Glory, Hallelujah!”

1 Glory, glory, hallelujah! Since I laid my burden down. Glory, glory, hallelujah! Since I laid my burden down.

2 Feel like shouting, “Halleluja!” ...

3 Life is sweeter, so much sweeter. ...

4 Feel like dancing, hallelujah! ...

5 Love is shining all around me, ...

Benediction (Rev. Keithan)

At the end of his eulogy, Dr. King said:

“The greatest tribute that we can pay to James Reeb... is to continue the work he so nobly started but could not finish.” May we take those words to heart, and make them true with our actions. Amen.

Music (Jubilee Singers; Nicole Rumeau, vocal lead)

“Like a Tree” (Margaret Douroux)

Just like a tree that’s planted by the water, I shall not be moved.
Though the winds are blowing all around me, I shall not be moved.

These winds will never last,
This storm is sure to pass,
This trial is just a test, so
I shall not, I shall not, I shall not be moved.

Though waves of affliction sweep over my soul
And billows and storm clouds continue to roll.

Faith in God’s promises anchors my soul;
I shall not, I shall not, I shall not be moved.