

Worship transcript for October 4, 2020

Prelude (Matt McCleskey, guitar and vocals)

“This Land Is Your Land” (Woody Guthrie)

This land is your land, and this land is my land
From the California, to the New York Island
From the Redwood Forest, to the Gulf stream waters
This land was made for you and me

As I went walking that ribbon of highway
I saw above me that endless skyway
Saw below me the golden valley
This land was made for you and me

I roamed and rambled, and I've followed my footsteps
To the sparkling sands of her diamond deserts
All around me a voice was sounding
This land was made for you and me

When the sun come shining, then I was strolling
And the wheat fields waving and the dust clouds rolling
A voice was chanting as the fog was lifting
This land was made for you and me

This land is your land, and this land is my land
From California to the New York Island
From the Redwood Forest, to the Gulf stream waters
This land was made for you and me

Call to Worship and Chalice Lighting (Rev. Rob Keithan)

Friends, we live in strange and challenging times. To get through it all, let us hold fast to our values, to our calling, and to each other. Come, let us worship together.

The words for our chalice lighting come from Leslie Pohl-Kosbau, a lifelong Unitarian Universalist layperson from the First Unitarian Church of Portland, OR.

Flame of fire, spark of the universe
That warmed our ancestral hearth,
Bringer Agent of life and death,
Symbol of truth and freedom.
We strive to understand ourselves
And our earthly home

Hymn (members of the All Souls Choir)

159217 “This Is My Song”

This is my song, o God of all the nations,
A song of peace for their land and for mine
This is my home, the country where my heart is,
Here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine
But other hearts in other lands are beating
With hopes and dreams as real and high as mine.

My country’s skies are bluer than the ocean,
and sunlight beams on cloverleaf and pine;
but other lands have sunlight too, and clover,
and skies are everywhere as blue as mine.
O hear my song, thou God of all the nations,
a song of peace for their land and for mine.

Welcome (Kerry Reichs)

Good morning, and welcome to our live long-distance worship at All Souls Church! My name is Kerry Reichs and I’m so glad to be back as your Worship Associate today.

For almost 200 years, our congregation has sought to live up to the vision inherent in our name, All Souls. Our mission is to build what Dr. King called the “Beloved Community” – a vision of human community where the divisions that separate us in our daily lives come tumbling down and we recognize that all people are welcome at the table of God’s love and human fellowship. As Unitarian Universalists, we are diverse in many ways but united in our belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and in the obligation to express our faith through acts of justice and compassion. We invite you to join us as we seek to create a diverse, justice-seeking, spirit growing community that is true to the dream of all souls.

If we were together in our uplifting sanctuary, I’d now invite you to turn to someone near you in the pew for a handshake or a hug. Instead, I invite you to “behold” – rather than absorbing the light streaming through our sanctuary windows, bask in the light emanating from the faces of your All Souls friends in DC and around the world. Although you’ll remain on mute, please exchange smiles and waves and chats as you draw strength and joy from the exquisite gallery of this congregation. Again, welcome to All Souls Church!

Story for All Ages (Dolores Miller and the children of All Souls)

“Turtle Tale” (Bob Asch; adapted by Dolores Miller)

Congregational Concerns and Prayer (Rev. Kathleen Rolenz)

In this spirit of shared solidarity we pause – we breathe – we create space together – we pray – and we add our own joys and sorrows in the chat.

We are sending healing wishes to Rose Eaton, All Souls staff member now recovering from an onset of Bell's palsy. Please be patient as Rose figures out strategies to cope with temporary partial face paralysis, and eye issues associated with this condition. Her time on screens will be more limited, and her appearance may be different. Kindness without multiple questions would be appreciated!

Two congregant memorial services took place this last week:

Monday marked the Celebration of Life held by family for Dr. James Hill, an All Souls congregant in past decades, and a retired microbiologist at Howard University. Dr. Hill was known in recent years for walking tours and porch visits in LeDroit Park, where his extensive neighborhood and DC knowledge was shared. His niece Kendra Hamilton expressed her appreciation to All Souls as a place Dr. Hill felt at home. Our thoughts are with the family during this week of transition.

Saturday was the Celebration of Life for Tom Taylor, officiated by Rev. Louise at a funeral home in Bowie. Tom was a long-time member, and a retired early childhood educator who helped found the national Head Start program. His children Keith and Linda grew up at All Souls and asked family and friends for contributions to the congregation in lieu of flowers. We send prayers to the extended family in this season of loss.

And one memorial service is pending. A Zoom celebration of life for Will Hayes will be on Sunday, October 18 at 2 PM. The link to the service will be on the All Souls Church Calendar.

We pray for the full recovery of the President of the United States and the First Lady who tested positive for the Covid Virus this past week. May this experience lead to greater humility, compassion and empathy that translate into better policies and practices. This week marks the beginning of a national week of mourning for the now 208,000 persons who have died as a result of this terrible virus.

Please join me in a moment of meditation, reflection and prayer – as is your practice.

Oh Spirit of Life – what a life we have been given.

It is a life we do not take for granted; knowing that we can lose it so quickly. We hold in prayer these families named, and all those unnamed, whose lives and struggles triumphs and joys touch our lives.

But we gather together in this space for a moment to rest – to center – and to pray.

Because if ever we needed this mindful time – it is now.

Every day brings anew headline, a heartache, a meanness, a separation

And every day brings a phone call at just the right time, a note of hope, a far away friend or a next door neighbor who says “I’m here – I’m thinking of you – you’re important to me.”

We remember this hour that we are not alone, but deeply and meaningfully interconnected; all of us, and that if we look beyond our ideas of right doing and wrong doing – there is a field – a place at which we meet and connect and learn with and from one another.

So we pray for one another, and for this church, we also pray for this country and its leaders. We pray for continued strength, persistence and resilience to demand our nation live up to its ideals. May we not fall into cynicism or despair, but be lifted up by the hands, hearts and minds of this community and our fellow citizens. May we take the inspiration we find in this hour, out into the world. Silence for a moment then...Amen.

Hymn 123 (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. Rolenz)

“On Compassion” (the Dalai Lama)

Let me explain what we mean by compassion. Usually, our concept of compassion or love refers to the feeling of closeness we have with our friends and loved ones. Sometimes compassion also carries a sense of pity. This is wrong—any love or compassion which entails looking down on the other is not genuine compassion.

To be genuine, compassion must be based on respect for the other, and on the realization that others have the right to be happy and overcome suffering just as much as you. On this basis, since you can see that others are suffering, you develop a genuine sense of concern for them.

“My Country, Right and Wrong”

So, I tried to print something at the church recently, while I was in Pierce Hall for the Mutual Aid work we host 3 days a week. I was using the main printer and copier—a huge machine behind the front desk. When I got there, I found that nothing had happened. As I moved towards being able to read the display, I was really hoping that it would say something that was easy to fix, like that it was out of paper. But I was emotionally and spiritually preparing myself to need to open 7 doors and 8 flaps in a precise manner that probably wouldn't fix the problem anyway.

When I read the display, though, there was an unexpected message that I'd never seen before. It said “printer is in an error state.” And for whatever reason, it just filled me with sympathy. And I thought, and I'm pretty sure I actually said out loud, “Awww. Aren't we all?”

Because seriously, there are so many, SO MANY things about our lives and our world that are in an error state right now.

When we chose the church's monthly themes in June, I thought the one we picked for this month would be relevant, but now that we're here it's even truer. The theme for October is Paradox: Living into the Both & And. There are so many multiple realities occurring at once. We're severely limited in what we can do personally, yet so many things are happening publicly and politically. Then again, isn't paradox at the very center of our national story? The United States was founded on the principles of both freedom and domination. And the struggle between those two is present throughout our institutions, politics, and culture today.

The original question I was going to reflect on today was “How do we feel about the country?,” but I want to get more specific. More tangible. So instead I'm focusing on: how do we feel about people whose views we disagree with? Ultimately, that's the tension we're in right now. And not just in this Election, related to differences in candidates or parties. I'm talking about our differences of opinion on issues and values and worldviews.

I'm reminded of the semester in college that I spent studying conflict. I found myself less interested in the conflicts between significantly different nations or peoples, like between Russia and the United States, and moreso in conflicts in communities that otherwise had a lot in common, like the Catholics and Protestants in the UK. Or Sunni and Shia Muslims in the Middle East.

And when I think of this conflict, I'm often reminded of an experience I had while driving across the US to Portland, Oregon, in 2008 for my ministerial internship. My friend and I stopped for gas in Greer, ID, population 3,100. It's 3 ½ hours west of Missoula, MT. As we stood by the car filling up, we heard some teenagers talking about the people in the next town over, Orafino, which also has a population of 3,100. To summarize and paraphrase the content of their conversation, their basic point was: all the people in Orafino were so dumb. It took some restraint, but I did resist the urge to ask them why, given that the people of Orafino were probably more similar to them than 99.9% of the rest of the world. In the end, both my studies

and my personal experiences lead me to agree with scholars like Jonathan Haidt, who say that our brains are, at least to some degree, hard-wired towards tribalism.

This year in the United States, our divisions are perhaps more obvious, and more raw, than anytime in recent history. And it's understandable that we have some very strong, and frequently very negative, feelings about people with different beliefs than ours.

At the same time, our faith caused us to work for justice, which involves changing peoples' minds on issues, which, which requires having disagreements with people about our different beliefs. So my question is, how can we do this justice work, which absolutely needs to be done, without reinforcing our tendency to dislike and demonize other groups?

And again, I want to keep the focus as tangible as possible. So I'm not consider our views about public figures of complete strangers. I want to talk about what it looks like to have compassion and respect for people WE ALREADY KNOW with whom we disagree: neighbors, coworkers, friends, and the final frontier: family.

And I'm not trying to offer a one size fits all solution, because there isn't one. I'm just trying to offer a perspective that I think can be helpful in some situations, BOTH for making real change happen, but ALSO for our own mental and spiritual health. Especially given our levels of stress and fatigue from the coronavirus, self-care is critically important. And especially for black, indigenous, and people of color, and people with low incomes, who a bearing the burden of impact more than the rest of us.

And the self-care piece is tough, because so many of us, with a wide range of identities, passionately and forcefully want our nation to be a better place. And this kinds of passion is important, and necessary. And, there are times when it's simply not as effective or sustainable as other approaches.

Allow me to introduce another paradox, as explained by Dr. David Campt. Dr. Campt, an African-American scholar and activist, is best known for his White Ally Toolkit, but he also works on how liberal and progressive people can connect with voters who hold different views or people who tend not to vote. All Souls teamed up with the First Unitarian Church of Portland, OR, to support Dr. Campt leading online versions of his courses on voting, as well as recording versions that are now available for free on his website. Just so you know, there are two courses about mobilizing non-voters: one for general audiences and one that is specifically focused on people of color talking to each other. And there are two courses about fostering dialogue across the ideological divides. One is specifically about finding common ground and one is about being persuasive. We'll share the link in the chat and the transcript for this service.

<https://thedialoguecompany.com/voice>

I took his course on mobilizing non-voters, and want to give you a taste of it. All his courses draw on the fundamental value and practice of compassion, so it's applicable to many situations.

Returning to our monthly theme, it starts with what Dr. Campt describes as the paradox of trying to influence people. The paradox is tied to a human response called "reactance." When someone

wants to change us, most of us have a built-in opposition. That's reactance. So our goal is to work with someone in a way that doesn't trigger reactance. The metaphor Dr. Camp offers is that it's like trying to catch a butterfly. If you reach too fast, the wind blows it away. I'll offer another metaphor: it's like trying to get a toddler to do something quickly. The more you're in a hurry, the more they'll try to do ANY OTHER THING besides what you want them to do. But if you can meet them where they are, which generally means bringing 7 more items than you planned, you might get somewhere.

Anyway, here are Dr. Camp's own words about both the political and personal benefits of the approach he recommends:

...in a world that is demonstrating an insufficient degree of compassion, it is vital that people of conscience look at their relationships with friends, family, and acquaintances as important arenas to both exhibit compassion and to encourage it. The polarization in society has made many people of compassion afraid to have conversations with others, regardless of the salience of politics to our daily lives. Many of us can only imagine unpleasant arguments that tend to tear down relationships.

As a result, our relationships are less authentic, since we cannot have conversations about some important things we care about. In addition, the friends/families who may not value compassion as much as we do never get to hear our perspective about how our values affect our concerns about public issues. Thus we undermine our own social change goals because we are afraid to engage those closest to us.

This is one of the things that attracted me so much to his work, and after taking his training has even further convinced me of its value: it has clear public as well as clear personal benefits.

Justice work requires both the skills of a sprinter and the skills of a marathoner. Right now, All Souls Reeb Project for Voting Rights is in full sprint mode, and if you're not yet involved I ask you to consider it. We released a final calendar this past week, and there's something meaningful you can do through the Reeb Project literally every single day (except Fridays and Halloween) from now until Election Day working in Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Virginia, and Wisconsin. The Reeb Project is a leader in the UU community on this work, and our closing hymn, We Shall Be Known, was created by All Souls Music Ministry for the national UU the Vote campaign.

All this said, if we focus too much on the skill of sprinting, we fail. We need to learn the same lesson as the turtle in this morning's story—there's not just one way of being that works all the time. Regardless of who wins the Presidential election, we're still going to have a deeply divided country. So it really matters that we have skills for making connections across differences. Elections can be won by running a successful campaign, but lasting social transformation requires building a movement. It requires slow and sustainable change that happens over time. It happens over multiple conversations, in relationships that endure.

The silver lining in recognizing this is that we can give ourselves permission to dial back our expectations, BOTH of how fast others will change AND how fast we can change them.

Expecting people to change their minds quickly on deeply held beliefs sets up a scenario where everyone loses.

In the training with Dr. Campt, we did a few role-playing exercises. At least twice, he pointed out that I had moved too quickly to trying to change the person's behavior, BEFORE I had established trust with them based on genuine compassion and connection. And he was absolutely right. I'm a very outcome-oriented person by nature, and these times only increase this tendency. It works fine in some situations, but not when the goal is genuine relationship. I kept reaching too fast for the butterfly and needed to slow down, WAY down.

And, the truth is, I needed to realize that feeling a genuine sense of compassion for someone couldn't just be a box to mindlessly check while I was headed for the "real" goal. And, again, the reason to focus on genuine compassion isn't just so we can be more effectively politically.

Dr. Campt says:

Learning to do so will be good for our own spiritual health. Shifting to compassion-based dialogue methods will require us stretching ourselves: we will need to learn important skills such as calming our spirits, purposely ginning up our compassion even though we might disagree, seeing other people with opposing views as fundamentally equal to us, and putting aside the ego telling us that we are, deep down, superior.

That's another key piece of the work, the spiritual work, that this process invites us and requires us to do: acknowledging and managing our own sense of superiority in these interactions. It is a bit of a paradox as well: the reason we have our beliefs is that we think they are better than the alternatives. If I'm talking to a white friend who isn't invested in ending racism, or I'm talking to a guy who isn't conscious of his own sexism, I definitely want to change them because I think racial justice and gender justice are better. And I think Campt would agree, and say that we absolutely should hold to our beliefs. It's not either/or, it's both/and. To be effective, and to be in a better place spiritually, we have to hold our beliefs AND be able to find genuine compassion for the people we're talking to.

One way to do this, especially right now, is to remember that basically everyone, like my friend the printer, is in an error state to some degree.

Another way is to get creative; to find little practices or phrases that help you avoid judgment. The Southern phrase "well bless their heart," is perfectly suited for this purpose, I think. It's a great paradox asset, because it allows you to say a little and say a lot, all at the same time. For example, if you can't think of anything positive to say about President Trump having the coronavirus, it's a great time to just say "well, bless his heart."

Anyway, as I move towards closing, I want to say a little about the closing song in today's worship, Nina Cried Power. It was recorded live at All Souls this past November, when Rev. Jacqui Lewis from Middle Collegiate Church preached about Revolutionary Love. The song's power will speak for itself, but it's also about power. It's about people crying for power, and claiming power.

One of the key lines is: “It’s not the wakin’, it’s the risin’.”

Put another way, it’s not claiming to be woke that makes the difference. It’s not self-righteousness that makes the difference. What makes the difference is doing the work. What makes the difference is how we’re building a movement. “It’s not the wakin’, it’s the risin’.”

So, as the song plays, I hope you can feel its power, and your power, and our collective power.

And with our power, in the words of Langston Hughes, we can “Let America be America again. Let it be the dream it used to be.”

Amen.

Anthem (All Souls Choir; Amelia Peele, Rochelle Rice, and Melinda St. Louis, trio; Jen Hayman, piano; Devree Lewis, cello)

“One Voice” (Ruth Moody)

This is the sound of one voice,
One Spirit, one voice
The sound of one who makes a choice
This is the sound of one voice

This is the sound of voices two
The sound of me, singing with you
Helping each other to make it through
This is the sound of voices two

This is the sound of voices three
Singing together in harmony
Surrendering to the mystery
This is the sound of voices three

This is the sound of all of us
Singing with love and the will to trust
Leave the rest behind, it’ll turn to dust
This is the sound of all of us

This is the sound of one voice
One people, one voice
A song for every one of us
This is the sound of one voice

Offering (Kerry Reichs)

What a decade October 1 was! After watching the headlines crowd for attention, I said to a friend, “Looks like RBG successfully argued her first case before God.” My friend pressed back, arguing that RBG would never pray sickness upon anyone, that she was ‘better than that.’ It made me pause and ask myself, “what did I really mean versus what did I meme?”

The thing is, I’d weathered the isolation of quarantine, the anxiety of the pandemic, the pressure of running two homeschools while working full-time, the loss of socialization with my friends and communities, the election and dumpster-fire debate-induced stress, the death of a friend. For half a year I’d survived job insecurity, anxiety spikes every time I had a pollen-sore throat, and asking my five-year old to put on a mask to play. But when RBG died, I started crying and didn’t stop.

A former lawyer, I’ve always felt a special affinity for this groundbreaker and role model. When she lay down to rest for good, I fell into something approaching despair, a hopelessness I’d never experienced. Two days after the devastating news, I dragged myself to zoom church. After the sermon and beautiful music, I sat for a long time, letting sounds and thoughts flow through me. Faced with a seemingly overwhelming number of things to be anxious about, I considered my t-shirt: WWRBGD?

What would the demure firebrand have done? I think she would have looked inside, drawn strength and direction from her own core values. So, I reflected on mine, and the mantra that rose to the top was: “Forgiveness doesn’t cost a thing.” More than pardoning an injury, forgiveness is compassion, stepping into the shoes of another, acknowledging the brokenness and beauty within every human. As the Dalai Llama expressed, to be genuine, compassion must be an unbiased, respectful realization that others have an equal right to be happy and overcome suffering. It doesn’t work if you don’t actually mean it.

I can’t say I felt great the Sunday after RBG died. I’m pretty terrified about an increasingly chaotic future. But I stopped crying. I felt less isolated. And I was strengthened knowing that at All Souls I have a committed community working together to persuade that our vision will best serve the most. I give generously to All Souls because this congregation keeps the compass set to forgiveness and compassion, but also action. I ask that you do, too. On the screen and in the chat you’ll find a link to give in real time. Please join me for today’s digital offering.

Hymn (sung by UU congregants nationwide in support of UU the Vote)

“We Shall Be Known” (MaMuse)

We shall be known by the company we keep
By the ones who circle round to tend these fires
We shall be known by the ones who sow and reap
The seeds of change alive from deep within the earth

It is time now
It is time now that we thrive
It is time we lead ourselves into the well
It is time now
And what a time to be alive
In this great turning we shall learn to lead in love
In this great turning we shall learn to lead in love.

Benediction (Rev. Keithan)

This country has always been right and wrong, and always will be. So it goes with us—we are imperfect beings. So let us commit to genuine compassion. May it be a healing balm to us and to our world. Amen.

*Music (All Souls Choir; Shacara Rogers and Rochelle Rice, soloists;
Gordon Kent, keyboards; Corey Null, bass; Dante Pope, drums)*

“Nina Cried Power” (Hozier)

It’s not the wakin’, it’s the risin’
It is the groundin’ of a foot uncompromisin’
It’s not forgoin’ of the lie
It’s not the openin’ of eyes
It’s not the wakin’, it’s the risin’

It’s not the shade we should be cast in
It’s the light and it’s the obstacle that casts it
It’s the heat that drives the light
It’s the fire it ignites
It’s not the wakin’, it’s the risin’

It’s not the song, it is the singin’
It’s the heaven of the human spirit ringin’
It is the bringin’ of the line
It is the bearin’ of the rhyme
It’s not the wakin’, it’s the risin’

And I could cry power (power)
Power (power)
Power, Lord
Nina cried power
Billie cried power
Mavis cried power

And I could cry power (power)
Power (power)

Power, Lord
Curtis cried power
Patti cried power
Nina cried power

It's not the war but what's behind it
Lord, the fear of foul men is mere assignment
And everythin' that we're denied by keepin' the divide
It's not the wakin', it's the risin'

And I could cry power (power)
Power (power)
Power, Lord
Nina cried power
Lennon cried power
James Brown cried power

And I could cry power
Power (power)
Power (power)
Power, Lord
B.B. cried power
Joni cried power
Nina cried power

And I could cry power
Power has been cried by those stronger than me
Straight into the face that tells you to rattle your chains
If you love bein' free

Ah, Lord, I could cry power (power)
'Cause power is my love when my love reaches to me
James Brown cried power
Seeger cried power
Woman cried power

Yeah ah, power
James cried power
Millie cried power
Kenny cried power
Billie, power
Dylan, power
Woody, power
Nina cried