

Worship transcript for October 11, 2020

Prelude (Nicole Rumeau, vocals; David Cole, guitar; Corey Null, bass; Lenard Starks, piano)

“Serenity” (Lenard Starks; words attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr)

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change;
And the courage to change the things I can;
And the wisdom, I pray each day, the wisdom to know the difference.

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

Whoever you are and whoever you love, you are a beautiful, and equal, child of God. And a beautiful, and equal, member of the living family of All Souls. And you are welcome here. Come, let us worship together.

The words for our chalice lighting are from Rev. James Stoll, a Unitarian Universalist and the first minister from an established denomination to come out publicly as gay, which he did in 1969. Rev. Stoll was an activist for civil rights and liberties generally, and in coming out spoke these words, which are just as relevant today:

“If the revolution we’re in means anything,” he said, “it means we have the right to be ourselves, without shame or fear.”

[[Note](#): His subsequent advocacy within the denomination led the Unitarian Universalist General Assembly of 1970—50 years ago this year—to pass a resolution condemning discrimination against homosexuals and bisexuals.]

Hymn (members of the All Souls Jubilee Singers)

18 “What Wondrous Love”

What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul,
What wondrous love is this, O my soul?
What wondrous love is this that brings my heart such bliss,
And takes away the pain of my soul, of my soul,
And takes away the pain of my soul.

When I was sinking down, sinking down, sinking down,
When I was sinking down, sinking down,
When I was sinking down beneath my sorrows ground,
Friends to me gathered round, O my soul, O my soul,
Friends to me gathered round, O my soul.

To love and to all friends I will sing, I will sing,
To love and to all friends I will sing.
To love and to all friends who pain and sorrow mend,

With thanks unto the end I will sing, I will sing,
With thanks unto the end I will sing

Welcome (Shari Gilbert)

Welcome to All Souls Church! I am Shari Gilbert, serving as this morning's Worship Associate. Welcome to a community where our search for spirituality and our passion for justice meet and mingle. Where our head and our heart are divided no more. Where music is an expression of our joy, prayer a sign of our faith, and acts of justice a symbol of our hope.

Welcome to a place where when we say All Souls we mean it, a place where ALL people—people of all races, creeds, sexual orientations—where ALL people are welcome at the table of love and fellowship. Welcome one and all!

I would like to especially welcome any newcomers to our community – those joining us for the first time. We hope you'll stay afterwards for coffee hour with meet and greet new and long-time friends.

Now, as a symbol of the welcome and love embodied in our name, All Souls, let's take a few moments to behold one another. Although you will continue to be on mute, we set aside this time to see each other's faces, to greet one another in the chat and to be in community together.

Congregational Concerns and Prayer (Rev. Keithan)

Our Fall suite of Adult Spiritual Development offerings are up on the All Souls website. There's a wide diversity of opportunities: a course on how to revive and optimize your resume if COVID has led to job loss or a possible job change; a series on Eddie Glaude's new book, *Begin Again*; and much more. Some of the courses have limited space and are filling up, so be sure to check out the website and sign-up if interested.

Our monthly Vespers is this Wednesday, starting at 7:30.

There's still space available in this afternoon's Reeb Project Phone Bank, and Spanish-speakers are especially welcome because we're doing calls in both English and Spanish to voters in Virginia. Check the calendar on the homepage to get connected.

And finally, today, we'll start coffee hour immediately after the worship service on this same Zoom call, so you can just stay on for some informal fellowship time.

Today is National Coming Out Day, which is especially important to mark because earlier this week several Justices of the Supreme Court attacked the decision that cleared the way for same-sex marriage nationwide. It was a sobering reminder of how many people's rights, and lives, hang in the balance right now, so we offer a prayer of love, care, and solidarity with the LGBT community.

Also, we recognize that activists in Minneapolis and elsewhere were angered and dismayed this week when Derek Chauvin, the former Minneapolis police officer charged with Floyd's murder, will be allowed to leave the state of Minnesota under updated bail conditions. This, and other threats of hatred and violence from Michigan and elsewhere, are also a sobering reminder of the work we have to do.

And now for personal concerns here at All Souls.

We mourn the death of Alex Zanolli at the age of 90 on Sept 28 after a brief illness. For 25 years, Alex was the long-time partner of All Souls member Nadine Dutcher. Our hearts are with Nadine and extended family at this time of loss.

Also, the Celebration of Life for Will Hayes will take place this coming Sunday, October 18 at 2:30 pm, via Zoom. The link will be on the All Souls calendar for the service.

Spirit of Life, God that is known by so many names,

We start by offering our gratitude for those who came before, the courageous souls who were willing to declare and claim their identities publicly. Our world is better, and stronger, because of the risks they took.

We pray as well for everyone today, in this congregation, in this country and around the world, who cannot live openly in the fullness of who they are. Our world is diminished by the need to conceal and withhold our true selves.

And, finally, we pray for our future. For everyone's future. There is so much at stake now. Dear God of love and justice, help us hold our compassion as well as our anger. Help us hold our outrage and our anxiety. Help us hold our hope and our fear.

Help us remember that we are not the first, and we shall not be the last, to live through challenging times. Help us remember the courage of those who came before. Help us as we rise to meet the challenges of our time. Amen.

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.

Sermon (Rev. Kathleen Rolenz)

“Clutching Pearls, Pounding Sand”

It started – where else – on the internet. I should know better than to engage with people, but I just couldn't help myself. A friend of mine – who would identify as progressive and liberal – wrote a post comparing the current disregard for public health and safety with the philosophy of Ayn Rand.

To summarize, Rand valued unfettered self-interest above concern for the common good. He and I were exchanging posts about those who disregard wearing a mask because it impinges on their personal freedom. But, as part of the capstone of his critique of Rand he called her probably the worst word you can fling at a female-identified person – a word that reduces a woman to a single body part.

I posted on the thread “you know, you can condemn Rand's philosophy as greedy and self-centered, but please, don't call her that name.” He was immediately offended. In fact, as is so often the case on Facebook, others began to pile on – some in his defense – others in mine – until it reached a fevered pitch and he finally said something like: “Oh stop your pearl clutching. This is not about you. It's about Rand and her philosophy.” I had never been called a pearl clutcher before, so I had to look it up! One definition is “outrage or dramatic protest, especially from a woman, caused by something the person perceives as vulgar, in bad taste or morally wrong...”

With this comment, I stopped the debate, sat back and took a deep breath – parsing out my feelings. Until this point in our relationship, my friend and I shared many of the same values. He believes in feminism and is raising two daughters. He's posted publicly about his support for Black Lives matter and LGBTQAI concerns. So this? I wondered? Pearl clutching?

The theme for this month is Paradox: Living in the Both + And. In many respects, last week's sermon by Rev. Rob Keithan and mine today are like two bookends that are holding up some of the ways All Souls is exploring the theme of paradox this month, in worship, in small groups, and in our social justice work. How do we live in the both + and when we ourselves may be feeling so polarized?

There are apparently a whole lot of books Rev. Rob and I have both been reading that are standing between our bookend sermons, but here's a perspective from one he didn't mention last week – Ezra Klein's book, published in January of this year entitled “Why We're Polarized.” Klein writes “there is much awry in American politics...but I've come to believe the master

story – the one that drives almost all divides and fundamentally shapes the behavior of participants – is the logic of polarization.”

Then, Klein goes on to introduce a familiar concept; that politics is not just shaped by our ideological beliefs, but by our very identities. “When politicians, including the irreligious, end speeches with God bless America,” it is not because they are making an appeal to a higher power, but because they are making an appeal to our bedrock identities.

If you don’t believe me, ask yourself why there are so few open atheists or even agnostics in national politics. Identity shapes our world view, but it does not mechanistically decide it. And while we often speak of identity as a singular, it is always a dizzying plural – we have countless identities, some of them in active conflict with each other, others lying dormant until activated by threat or fortune.”

When I challenged my friend’s use of a misogynistic word, it was no longer a philosophical argument about Rand. I suspect what stung was that an important part of his identity was challenged – that of a feminist man – who cares about the lives and status of women. I think that’s why he reacted so defensively. And that’s another reason why it’s so difficult to navigate relationships with people whom we know and care about, but whose political views are so different than ours.

Which leads me to the second part of the title of this sermon, “Pounding Sand.” That same week on Facebook, I was engaging in a conversation/debate with a friend of mine from high school who’s liberal views did a 180 as he aged and is now a political conservative. He posts almost daily – getting his news from Breitbart, Fox and other media that he trusts.

As I argued with his posts which supported the President’s policies, one of his friends piled onto the conversation and said “you liberals – go ahead and keep pounding sand...it’s not going to change my mind or the next election. We win, you lose.” I had never heard the phrase “pounding sand” either, but after looking that up, it meant exactly what I guessed it to be “to engage in a pointless, menial task.”

I had to laugh. Indeed, engaging with those who don’t share my beliefs seems like a pointless, menial task – because it wasn’t just about our differing political opinions. It goes deeper than that. I thought about something Klein wrote, which was: “what we are often fighting over in American politics is group identity and status – fights that express themselves in debates over policy and power but cannot be truly reconciled by either...Over the past fifty years, our partisan identities have merged with our racial, religious, geographic, ideological and cultural identities. Those merged identities attained a weight that is breaking our institutions and tearing at the bonds that hold this country together.”

Although there is much about his perspective I appreciate, I don’t agree that the weight of our merged identities is breaking our institutions. What he sees as a breakdown, I see as a breaking open towards an even greater freedom to allow the multiplicity of our complex, messy and merged identities to co-exist. The freedom, liberty and justice for all that is the promise of democracy – is still an unrealized dream of the Beloved Community because we – as a people –

and as a nation – have not truly experienced, true freedom. In fact, we cannot really even imagine it yet what that freedom would look like – with all of our identities – our multiple, complex, infinitely fascinating identities– fully participating in the public square without fear.

I allowed myself to imagine a world in which we could fully live in the both +and.

Imagine with me – what if a gun-owning, NASCAR-loving, straight white male was to discover that he actually likes to wear pink skirts instead of cargo shorts – what if he could do that without reprisal?

What if a trans person can walk down the street in whatever expression of fabulousness they are feeling that day without derision or fear of violence?

What if a queer person of color, who is a poet, a veteran, an activist, a church-goer, a financial planner, a fiscal conservative, and a social progressive could testify before their city council and bring all of their identities into the room – because they all have shaped the person they’ve become?

I would argue with those who dismiss identity as a purely liberal or progressive construct,— because our identities do matter. Our intersectional selves shape us. We know diversity is part of the larger plan because we see it so clearly in nature – we are all so much more than even the sum of our parts. The ability to hold this extravagant diversity in our minds, in our culture and in our politics is what we are afraid of because we cannot yet imagine it – nor can we imagine how it might change us. Part of the fear that’s in the country and culture has always been a struggle about identity – whose identity is allowed to dominate in the public sphere – and which identity is suppressed?

So – here’s where I’ve got to get real too. If I want to hold in my head the possibility of that extravagant diversity becoming real in the public square, then I’ve got to make room in my heart for both the pearl clutchers and the sand pounders; I’ve got to somehow make room for my Breitbart follower friend from high school. But, if I’m really committed to living in the both + and, then I’ve got to practice the Paradox myself.

This is where living in the both + and gets difficult – even painful at times. Because we as human beings have not yet figured out how to settle our differences without war or rancor, the best tool we have is the democratic process – and democracy is an imperfect both/and. We can all believe in settling our differences with a vote. But then one side wins – and one side loses. Then, maybe four years later, it’s tables are turned and there are different winners and losers. It can seem like a never-ending pendulum swinging over a pit of partisanship. We finally take things to a vote because it is a lot better than murdering your opponent or banishing them to Siberia.

At the same time, we – the people – are striving to realize yet another way of living in the both + and, where perhaps new solutions to old polarized points of view can be realized. I’m encouraged that there are new and different models, both for organizing and for being activists in the world that are being born even as we live within this polarized time. Dr. David Camp’s Voice Project trainings described by Rev. Rob last week is one such model. There is a new

generation of activists, writers, poets, pundits, philosophers, and organizational strategists who are creating an alternative narrative of how we can be together in the world in new ways, people like adrienne marie brown and her work on “Emergent Strategy” that are permeating organizing strategies during this election.

But what about our model? The model we live in and work with and support week in and week out, year after year, for now two hundred years in this community. I’m talking about the model of church. We have – this church. And why church? Because this is the place where – at the center of all of our paradoxical and diverse identities – we find the best expression of who we all are together and who we are striving to better become – a diverse, spirit-growing, justice-seeking community.

We grow our spirits in this church by living in the paradox of the both + and – and the not-yet. We strengthen our justice-seeking muscles in this church by the on-going practice and disciplines of prophetic witness and faithful presence. We deepen our souls in this church by the ability to live in the creative tension of paradox – often accused of just clutching our pearls – sometimes feeling like we are doing nothing more than pounding sand.

And yet – deep down we are convinced that in our worshipping and our marching, in our speaking out and our singing, whether in our sanctuary or in the streets, we are demanding the change we can envision, and we are seeking to embody that change in the community we create.

These weeks leading up to the election – and beyond – are going to test every last nerve, every breath, every fiber of our being. In the next couple of weeks, the ministry team, staff and I will be engaged in conversations about what may happen in the days just before, day of and just after the election. We’ll be involving you in that conversation.

But– I can already feel the tension rising in me – the breathless desire to ensure the election goes the way I want it to. But should my candidate win, I do not intend to gloat over the loss that my high school friend will be feeling.

I hope instead to acknowledge that loss and try – again – and again – to see how we might build this country together.

I’m not naïve; it may not be possible for us to reach across this proverbial aisle. But we keep at it – he and I – God knows why sometimes – but maybe it’s because I know he is more than a MAGA hat and I’m more than a Chalice pin.

It’s doesn’t sound like much compared to the task of rebuilding a country – but it’s a start, and paradoxically, it may be the best way to start. Whatever happens post November 3, I hope– as we said two Sundays ago during Yom Kippur – that we will all be ready to begin again—it may not exactly be love, but it maybe we begin again, with hope and faith in the future we build together.

Anthem (All Souls Jubilee Singers; Carolyn Davies, piano)

“There Is a Time” (Craig Courtney; words from Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)

There is a time, there is a season for every purpose under heaven:
A time to be born, a time to die, a time to plant, time to reap,
A time to kill, a time to heal, a time to destroy, a time to build.
There is a time, there is a time.

A time to weep, a time to laugh, a time to mourn, a time to dance,
To scatter stones, to gather stones, a time to embrace, a time to refrain,
A time to search, a time to lose, a time to hold, a time to release.
There is a time, there is a time.

A time for silence, a time to speak, a time to love, a time to hate,
A time for war, a time for peace.
There is a time, there is a time.

Offering (Shari Gilbert)

Last Sunday I dialed into All Souls live from Pittsburgh where we were visiting my daughter, my older child.

When I first attended All Souls REALLY LIVE in 2009, I had a son and a daughter. I now have a daughter and a son, in birth-order speak.

My kids, 21 and 19, are transgender. Anakin, 19, he/him, started his transition from female to male in 2016, and he came out at the closing session of his Our Whole Lives classes. I can still picture him – the kids going around the RE room for introductions, and him jubilantly announcing, “I’m Anakin, he/him!” throwing out his arms, kicking his legs up in the air, with all the kids clapping and celebrating with him.

Mara, she/her, now 21, came out to her dad and me just one year ago. In her quieter way, she did it separately with Dad, first, and then me. She and I were walking in the forest, as she calls the woods behind our Glover Park neighborhood, and I can still picture her – at a bend in the path, 5 minutes into our walk, stopping, turning to me, and simply saying, “Mom, I’m transgender.”

Mara and I attended All Souls the next morning, and she was thrilled to come out to Rev. Hardies and also to Eileen Findlay, her OWL teacher 7 years previously.

Thank you, All Souls, for providing a safe space to help my children prepare for Their Whole Lives. Thank you for providing a supportive and loving space for them to discover and herald their true selves.

And that’s why I support All Souls, and thank you, my loving, encouraging, and caring spiritual home.

On the screen and in the chat, you’ll find a link to be able to give in real time. I hope that you will give as generously as you can. This morning’s offering will now be collected.

Hymn (All Souls Jubilee Singers)

298 “Wake Now My Senses”

Wake now, my senses, and hear the earth call;
Feel the deep power of being in all;
Keep, with the web of creation your vow,
Giving, receiving as love shows us how.

Wake now, my reason, reach out to the new;
Join with pilgrim who quests for the true;
Honor the beauty and wisdom of time;
Suffer thy limit and praise the sublime.

Wake now, compassion, give heed to the cry;
Voices of suffering fill the wide sky;
Take as your neighbor both stranger and friend;
Praying and striving their hardship to end.

Wake now, my conscience, with justice thy guide;
Join with all people whose rights are denied;
Take not for granted a privileged place;
God’s love embraces the whole human race.

Wake now, my vision of ministry clear;
Brighten my pathway with radiance here;
Mingle my calling with all who will share;
Work toward a planet transformed by our care.

Benediction (Rev. Rolenz)

These words, from Rev. Joseph Cherry

If we have any hope of transforming the world and changing ourselves,
We must be bold enough to step into our discomfort
Brave enough to be clumsy there,
Loving enough to forgive ourselves and others.

May we, as a people of faith, be granted the strength to be so bold, so brave and so loving. May it be so.

Music (All Souls Jubilee Singers; Fred Katz, percussion; David Cole, guitar; Corey Null, bass; Lenard Starks, piano)

“Turn the World Around” (Harry Belafonte and Robert Freedman; arr. by Larry Farrow)

We come from the fire, living in the fire,
go back to the fire, turn the world around.

We come from the mountain, living in the mountain,
go back to the mountain, turn the world around.

Oh, so is life. Ah, so is life.

Do you know who I am? Do I know who you are?
See we one another clearly, Do we know who we are?

Oh, oh, so is life a-ba-tee, Wah, ha, so is life.

Water makes the river, river wash the mountain,
Fire makes the sunlight, turn the world around.
Heart is of the river, body of the mountain,
Spirit is the sunlight, turn the world around.

We come from the mountain, living in the mountain,
go back to the mountain, turn the world around.
Oh, oh, so is life a-ba-tee, Wah, ha, so is life.

So is life!