

Worship transcript for October 25, 2020

Prelude (All Souls BAM Ensemble: Rochelle Rice, vocals; John Lee, guitar; Janelle Gill, piano; Romeir Mendez, bass; Dante Pope, drums)

“Liquid Spirit” (Gregory Porter)

Un re-route the rivers
Let the dammed water be
There’s some people down the way that’s thirsty
So let the liquid spirit free

The people are thirsty
‘Cause of man’s unnatural hand
Watch what happens when the people catch wind
and the water hits the banks of that hard dry land

Clap your hands now
Go ‘head and clap your hands now
Clap your hands now

Watch for that wave
It might come like a final flood
The people haven’t drank in so long
The water won’t even make mud

After it comes, it might come with a steady flow
Grab the roots of the tree
Down by the river, fill your cup when your spirit’s low

Clap your hands now
Go ‘head and clap your hands now
Clap your hands now

Dip down and take a drink
And fill your water tank
Dip down and take a drink
And fill your water tank

Un re-route the rivers
Let the dammed water be
There’s some people down the way that’s thirsty,
so Let the liquid spirits free

Well, the people are thirsty
Because of man’s unnatural hand

Watch what happens when the people catch wind
Of the water hitting banks of hard dry land

Clap your hands now
Clap your hands now
Go 'head and clap your hands now
Clap your hands now

Dip down and take a drink
And fill your water tank
Liquid Spirit

Call to Worship and Chalice Lighting (Rev. Kathleen Rolenz)

From many places of the Spirit we gather this morning,
From places of abundance to overflowing, when the world feels too much with us;
From dry places of weariness and worry
From places of rage and hope
From places of longing and places of love
Spirit of Life – gather us all together into this place, this hour, this moment
And allow our hearts to be refreshed and renewed –
And from that place – rejoice.

Let the kindling of this flame rekindle in us the inner light of love, of peace, of hope. And “as one flame lights another, nor grows the less,” we pledge ourselves to be bearers of the light, wherever we are. Come, let us worship together.

Hymn (All Souls BAM Ensemble)

119 “Once to Every Soul and Nation”

Once to every soul and nation comes the moment to decide;
In the strife of truth with falsehood for the good or evil side;
Then to stand with truth is noble, when we share its wretched crust;
Ere that cause bring fame and profit, and 'tis prosperous to be just.

Though the cause of evil prosper, yet 'tis truth alone is strong;
Though its portion be the scaffold, and upon the throne be wrong.
Then it is the brave one chooses, while the coward stands aside;
Till the multitude made virtue of the faith they have denied.

Welcome (Kevin McCulloch)

Welcome to All Souls Church! I'm Kevin McCulloch, a member of All Souls and your worship associate this morning. 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, gender identities—where ALL people are welcome at the table of love and fellowship.

I would like to especially welcome any newcomers to our community. If this is your first time, we invite you to let us know in the chat so that we can warmly welcome you! Please take a moment now to behold one another, with your sound on mute.

Congregational Concerns and Prayer (Rev. Tony Coleman)

Good morning, All Souls! My name is Tony Coleman, and I serve as minister of adult spiritual development. We're now at the part of our service where we share news of what's happening in the life of our community.

Firstly, this week All Souls will mail over 1,000 statements to people who've made gifts to the church in the first three quarters of this year. We are so grateful for your support! For those who made pledges, these statements serve as a reminder to continue making the gifts that keep the church afloat. If you have any questions about your gifts or pledges, please contact Gary Penn or Traci Hughes-Trotter.

We want to let you know that each and every Sunday, we have opportunities for children and families to come together for virtual religious education. You can check out the All Souls website for more details about what we're doing, where, and when.

I also want to share a couple of ways that you can stay connected with our community throughout this week: today, right after worship, we have our virtual coffee hour. On Wednesday, Rev. Louise will host her centering circles, a time to chat and reflect with others.

Speaking of community and connection, as you know, the election is right around the corner. Please know that we on staff know and feel the unprecedented challenges of this season, so in this week's e-news we published information about what All Souls will be doing the week of the election to create spaces of support and empowerment. You need not be alone!

Now, let us turn to the prayers, joys, and concerns of our community:

We offer prayers of healing and wholeness for Judy Leaver and Cynthia Durham, two All Souls members who underwent surgery this week. May they recover quickly, comfortably, and peacefully in this already challenging time.

We offer prayers of peace and safekeeping for the people of Guinea and for All Souls member Ryan McChristian who is a foreign service officer posted there. As Guinea's streets continue to surge with protests surrounding their recent presidential election, may the spirit of Justice and Peace lead to a better tomorrow.

In the silence that follows, I invite you to remain muted and speak the names of the people or places that are on your heart this morning, for celebratory or sorrowful reasons...

...let us continue in prayer...

In this moment of quiet and centering, in this time of prayerful awareness,

Let us gather our energies, our anxieties, and our empathy.
Let us gather our fears, our frustrations, and our frenzied thinking.
Let us gather our cynicism, our second thoughts, and our swollen hearts.
Let us gather our pain, our paranoia, and our paralyzed faith.
Let us gather our deepest hopes, our heaviest loads, and our whole selves.
Let us be together, gathered in this quiet moment, to honestly name
What is honestly ours.

May this be a moment to connect with your truth;
May this be a time to embrace your-self.
And, above all else, may this prayer be a reminder that
You are not alone:
Not now and not ever.
Not here and not anywhere.

Ashe, may it be so, and amen.

Hymn 123 (Amelia Peele, Jen Hayman, and Rochelle Rice, vocals; Gordon Kent, vocals and piano; Stephen Benson II, video production)

“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)

Excerpt from “In This Place: An American Lyric” (Amanda Gorman, Youth Poet Laureate of the United States)

There’s a poem in this place—
in the footfalls in the halls
in the quiet beat of the seats.
It is here, at the curtain of day,
where America writes a lyric
you must whisper to say.

There’s a poem in Charlottesville
where tiki torches string a ring of flame
tight round the wrist of night
where men so white they gleam blue—
seem like statues
where men heap that long wax burning
ever higher
where Heather Heyer
blooms forever in a meadow of resistance.

There’s a poem in the great sleeping giant
of Lake Michigan, defiantly raising
its big blue head to Milwaukee and Chicago—
a poem begun long ago, blazed into frozen soil,
strutting upward and aglow.

There’s a lyric in California
where thousands of students march for blocks,
undocumented and unafraid;
where my friend Rosa finds the power to blossom
in deadlock, her spirit the bedrock of her community.
She knows hope is like a stubborn
ship gripping a dock,
a truth: that you can’t stop a dreamer
or knock down a dream.
How could this not be her city
su nación
our country
our America,
our American lyric to write—
a poem by the people, the poor,
the Protestant, the Muslim, the Jew,
the native, the immigrant,
the black, the brown, the blind, the brave,

the undocumented and undeterred,
the woman, the man, the nonbinary,
the white, the trans,
the ally to all of the above
and more?

Tyrants fear the poet.
Now that we know it
we can't blow it.
We owe it
to show it
not slow it
although it
hurts to sew it
when the world
skirts below it.

Hope—
we must bestow it
like a wick in the poet
so it can grow, lit,
bringing with it
stories to rewrite—
There's a poem in this place—
a poem in America
a poet in every American
who rewrites this nation, who tells
a story worthy of being told on this minnow of an earth
to breathe hope into a palimpsest of time—
a poet in every American
who sees that our poem penned
doesn't mean our poem's end.
There's a place where this poem dwells—
it is here, it is now, in the yellow song of dawn's bell
where we write an American lyric
we are just beginning to tell.

Sermon (Rev. Rolenz)

It was while walking through the National Portrait's Gallery of America's Presidents where my hope in the future of this country was alternately destroyed and restored. Let me explain. My main reason for visiting the portrait gallery was to see the famous painting by Kehinde Wiley of President Obama, but, I didn't want to just rush to it. I wanted to go through the gallery and read the descriptions of each President, especially the ones I didn't know all that well. Of course, you begin with George Washington – not much new there – John Adams – Thomas Jefferson – James Madison – I knew most of their stories.

Then you get to Andrew Jackson – a presidency disgraced by the Indian Removal Act – followed by Martin Van Buren, also known as Martin Van Ruin because the economy tanked during his Presidency – William Henry Harrison – his run for President more like a carnival than campaign – followed by John Tyler. Tyler, also referred to as “His Accidency” because he was the first vice president to ascend to office following the death of Harrison. He was a firm believer in manifest destiny, considered slavery as part of states’ rights and owned slaves which he did not see fit to free. It was under Taylor’s Administration that James Russell Lowell penned the words that we sang in this morning’s hymn “Once to Every Soul and Nation.” Lowell, who was a staunch abolitionist, wrote a poem entitled “The Present Crisis,” from which the lyrics of the hymn were drawn, as a direct and stinging rebuke to Tyler’s annexation of Mexico to Texas, and thus allowing the possibility of another slave state.

I wasn’t thinking about Lowell’s poem when I was staring at the picture of Tyler. I was thinking about today’s President Crisis. Because frankly, and I’m just speaking for myself here – it’s been like one present crisis with this present president for the last four years. So I went to the Gallery hoping, perhaps naively to be cheered up by the stories of our nation’s unfolding. And I was – but not because of the stories of how great America has been, but because of the honest portrayal of these leaders strengths and failings; and in some cases, their absolutely miserable Presidencies. The thing that I love most about history is how it reminds us that we are not unique and that every generation in every era of life finds itself in crisis. Sometimes we are led by wise, seasoned and just leaders who put the nation’s health and well-being over their own. And other times, as the litany of leaders in the Gallery reminds us – they are felled by their own greed or mismanagement, self-interest or racism.

In a draft of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson first penned “these truths – political equality, natural rights and the sovereignty of the people” we hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable. Benjamin Franklin read Jefferson’s draft and scratched out the words “sacred and undeniable” and suggested instead that they were “self-evident.”

This is the starting point for Jill Lepore’s book from 2018, entitled: “These Truths: A History of the United States.” At the center of her 789 page book is an exploration of the paradox that exists at the heart of this nation. Lepore writes: “Truths that are sacred and undeniable are God-given and divine; the stuff of religion. Truths that are self-evident are laws of nature, empirical and observable, the stuff of science. This divide has nearly rent the Republic apart.” [1] She continues: “It has often been said, in the 21st century...that Americans lack a shared past and that, built on a cracked foundation, the Republic is crumbling...[sic] What then, of the American past? ...Between reverence and worship, on the one side, and irreverence and contempt on the other, lies an uneasy path away from false pieties and petty triumphs over people who lived and died and committed both their acts of courage and their sins and errors long before we committed ours.” [2] What Lepore is getting at here is the fact that this nation was founded and continues to live between in the twin poles of paradox; between stories of sacrifice and suffering; of progress and procrastination; between the shining city on a hill and in the swampy cesspools of politics. It’s all there. And in her book, she tells the story of this country from the perspective not only of those in power, but of those voices who have been marginalized and whose stories have not been told. The genocide of Indigenous peoples, the horrific realities of slavery, the on-going violence against women, the diabolical exploitation of Chinese workers, the imprisonment of Japanese

American citizens, the brutal mistreatment of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, genderqueer and non-binary persons – to name but a few. But more so than single acts of discrimination, she tells the stories of systemic oppression that is baked into this country as surely as the American flag flies red, white and blue.

There's so much written about this upcoming election – and there are so many angles we can explore about what this means for us as religious and spiritual people; as citizens who hold democracy as one of our 8 Principles. But, if we try to look at this as what Robin DiAngelo suggests, from beyond the Good/Bad Binary, what I see as our nation's spiritual task is to tell and to hold the Whole Truth about this country – the good, the bad, the ugly – because it is only by telling the truth about who we are as a nation can we begin to imagine changing it.

That's why one of President Trump's recent Executive Orders is so disturbing and offensive. Please bear with me as I read you an excerpt– entitled “Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping” sent to me by a federal employee who now must adhere to this edict: “Thanks to the courage and sacrifice of our forebears, American has made significant progress toward realization of our national creed... Today, however, many people are pushing a different vision of America that is grounded in hierarchies based on collective social and political identities rather than in the inherent and equal dignity of every person as an individual. This ideology is rooted in the pernicious and false belief that America is an irredeemably racist and sexist country; that some people, simply on account of their race or sex, are oppressors, and that racial and sexual identities are more important than our common status as human beings and Americans.” And then later in the document, it goes on to say “it shall be the policy of the United States not to promote race or sex stereotyping or scapegoating in the Federal workforce or in the Uniformed Services, and not to allow grant funds to be used for these purposes. In addition, Federal contractors will not be permitted to inculcate such views in their employees.”

These “views” are referred as divisive ideas. So, what this means is that any Federal program that teaches anti-racism or anti-oppression, that deals with sexual harassment in the workplace is now forbidden. And any Federal contractor or subcontractor who dares to teach, or perhaps even talk about, anti-racism, anti-oppression can be reported, through a hotline to investigate complaints. Departments can lose their funding; people can lose their jobs. Just when I think it can't get any worse – it does. There has been so much lost in the past four years; and in the past seven months, but the loss of freedom to speak about systemic racism; to address sexual harassment directly – is, an attack on the soul of this nation.

“Once to every soul and nation comes the moment to decide” writes Lowell. Lowell was directly attacking slavery and manifest destiny as the evil of his day. We have a litany of ills – but this is a sermon, not a political rant, so I want to explore that word “soul” for a minute. I don't believe in the soul as something ephemeral or supernatural – though if that is your belief, there's nothing wrong with it of course. I don't believe the soul survives us after we die. Instead, I believe the soul is something inextricably tied to essence. It's grounded in our daily reality and is reflected in who we are at our deepest level. It is the place where selfishness evaporates, and loving is easy and flows like water. It is a place where we are fully free and fully mindful of the impact that freedom has on others. It is the place of graceful awareness. It is kindness embodied. Take those qualities and imagine them writ large as a nation and you get what Martin Luther King called

Beloved Community. He envisions it as a society based on justice, equal opportunity, and love of one's fellow human beings.

This is why this election and this particular Administration hurts so much. It's not because of the pettiness or the smallness of the ego-centeredness or the one-off tweets, although all of those things are annoying. It's because of what I saw in Charlottesville, VA on August 11-12, 2017; and it's about what happened on the streets of Minneapolis and in the small town of Kenosha, Wisconsin. It's because of children in cages, separated from their parents who may never find each other again; it's because of hurtful, hateful rhetoric that divides us; it's because of the desire to reinforce a single story of whiteness – of sameness – and to suppress, silence and/or eliminate the voices who say “that is not my story of America.”

We can't let that happen. We don't know what's going to happen on November 3rd. Predictions are that we may not know well into that week. I want you to know that I will be here in Washington DC that week and will be present and available for whatever you need. There is even some talk about not knowing who the next President will be well into December.

I surely hope not, as not knowing will be an additional strain on an already stressed country. But, depending on what happens, we can form Circles of Resistance or Circles of Support. All Souls – we have a prophetic imperative to use our voice – our pulpit and our place in this community to lead -even through covid times. We have an important role to play in shaping the future of this nation. We can reject the attempts to silence our voices; instead our vision of the Beloved Community must be clearer and stronger; we must be able to articulate that vision over and over again without hesitation; we have to say yes, of course – we hold these truths to be self-evident – that we must

Police the police and Abolish police brutality and gun violence

End economic injustice, mass incarceration and the racist systems that created it

Ensure Educational opportunities, GLBGTAI rights, Reproductive freedom and a planet brought back from the brink of environmental devastation;

Humanize Health care & Honor indigenous nations

Provide a Path to citizenship

Be respected on the world stage again – putting not America first, but cherishing our status as global citizens...and the list doesn't stop here!

Of course I want these things – shouldn't you? Just by naming them we won't claim them, but we might fan the flames of a more perfect union. And there is one thing in this whole mess – one important message that we cannot lose sight of and that is indeed hope. Hope, as my colleague Traci Hughes Trotter reminded me – is a verb. Hope is where youth poet laureate Amanda Gorman, landed – and for a nineteen year old young black girl to talk about hope –all of us had better listen. “Hope” she says, “Hope— we must bestow it like a wick in the poet so it can grow,

lit, bringing with it stories to rewrite—because there’s a poem in this place –There’s a place where this poem dwells, she says, it is here, it is now, in the yellow song of dawn’s bell where we write an American lyric, we are just beginning to tell.”

This is the American lyric we are beginning to tell. That we will not be defeated by whatever outcome we face, because this Present Crisis will pass, like the plague, and it will be as Amanda Gorman predicts – to tell a history written that need not be completed, and remember we are a nation composed, but not yet completed. May it be so.

Anthem (All Souls BAM Ensemble)

“My Petition” (Jill Scott, Vidal Davis, and Andre Harris)

You say you mean good for me,
But you don’t do it
You say you have a plan, but you just don’t go through with it.
You say you know the way to go,
And I should follow
But, all of your empty promises
Leave me hollow.

And oh,
I wanna trust you
I wanna have faith in you
But you Lie to me repeatedly

And oh,
I wanna have faith in you,
but you just don’t come through
Like you say you could.

Oh, say can you see?

You say that I’m wrong for
Stating my opinion to you.
You say that I’m wrong and there’ll be quiet consequences too,
But I know my rights babe.
There’ll be no law abridging
The freedom of my speech
Or the right for me to petition for a remedy of grievances.

How do I trust you?
How do I have faith in you
when you lie to me repeatedly.

And oh, how do I have faith in you
when you just don't come through
Like you said you would?

Oh, say can you see?

I want fresh fruit, clean water, and
Air that I don't see.
I want, I wanna feel safe on my streets.
I want, I want my daughter to be smarter than me.
I want, I want to feel
I want to feel, I want to feel free.

but you keep lying to me.
give it to me like you said you could.

Oh, say can you see?
You lied!
Oh, say can you see?

Black lives, child lives, elderly lives, trans lives
Black lives, children's lives, even my life
they all matter,
but you keep lying to me
and it hurts,
but I believe.
By the dawn's early light.

Offering (Kevin McCulloch)

Now is the time in our service when we consider how much All Souls means to us, and how much we can give back to the church community.

Speaking for myself, it wasn't until I first attended one of these online services that I realized how much I missed seeing so many familiar faces week after week. And I don't just mean the faces of people that I know well. I've gotten to know many of you over the years, but one of the riches that come from attending a church like ours is that, over time, you start to feel a real connection to people even if you don't know their name. It's easy to discount the small comfort of familiar faces—oh, there's a person who sings in the choir; oh, there's a person I took a class with once; oh, there's a person who once welcomed me in the pews—until a global crisis sends us all into exile for months on end.

I enjoyed our pre-recorded worship services, but I'm glad that we've found a format that lets us see each other again, even if the associations we're now able to make—oh, there's a person who always has a friendly dog in their lap; oh, there's a person with a curious painting on their wall—are strange, and strangely intimate. It's these small windows into other people's lives that help us

to be human, and to recognize the humanity we share with other people, even—or especially—if they are different from us in significant ways. I just never expected the small windows to be so literal!

As we pause now, I encourage you to reflect on the gifts that you receive from our congregation, whether large or small, and consider how much you can give in return. This morning's offering will now be received.

Hymn (All Souls BAM Ensemble)

348 “Guide My Feet”

Benediction (Rev. Rolenz)

We are the ones we have been waiting for.
We are not perfect, but we are perfectly fitted for this day.
We are not without fault,
but we can be honest to face our past as we chart a new future.
We are the ones we have been waiting for.
May we be bold and courageous to chart that new future
May we have faith in a future that is not known
We are the ones we have been waiting for.

Music (All Souls BAM Ensemble; Rochelle Rice, video production)

“13th Century Metal” (Brittany Howard)

[Introductory words from Rochelle Rice:] Today's music benediction was written by one of my favorite artists, Brittany Howard.

She's known for her high-powered, dynamic voice, but this song is a spoken manifesto of her commitment to personal responsibility and service to her community. A commitment to internal growth and learning for the betterment of herself and those around her.

I'd like to express gratitude to my band, friends of All Souls, Janelle Gill, John Lee, Romeir Mendez, and Dante Pope, and dear congregants who helped amplify Brittany Howard's word's “we are all brothers and sisters, each and every one of us,” which I interpret to include people who identify as non-binary.

The soundscape and visual interpretation for this piece is different than what we usually expect at All Souls. I recommend that you turn your volume up and experience the song in full screen. The text will be posted in the chat for your reference.

May these words and images empower us to protect our light, embody compassion, and to love in a radical way.

I promise to think before I speak
To be wary of who I give my energy to
Because it is needed for a greater cause
Greater than my own pride
And that cause is to spread the enlightenment
Of love, compassion, and humanity
To those who are not touched by its light
I stand to protect and focus myself
In the betterment of my fellow being
We are brothers and sisters, each and every one of us.
I promise to love my enemy,
And never to become that which is not God
I dedicate myself to the spirit of service
Of what is good and fair and righteous
Every day that I am alive
I am given opportunities to become that which I admire most of others
I am nonviolent
I am a master student, and my spirit
Will never be stomped out.
I am dedicated to oppose those whose will is to divide us,
And who are determined to keep us in the dark ages of fear.
I hear the voices of the unheard,
Speak for those who cannot speak,
And shelter the minds that carry a message
Of peace, love, and prosperity.
We are all brothers and sisters
I repeat, we are all brothers and sisters
We!
Us!
Wherever you go and wherever you have been
just always remember to give it to love
We must give it to love
While we are fighting for our lives
we must give it to love
We are brothers and sisters.
Give it to love!
As we go to the polls this November
and we vote our consciences and our minds and our hearts,
we must remember to give it to love
We are all brothers and sisters each and every one of us,
and we must give it to love.
We must give it to love.