

Worship transcript for November 29, 2020

(Begins approximately 10:15am)

Announcement Music: “Painted Sky” by Lizz Wright and Maia Sharpe;
Performed by Rochelle Rice, Jen Hayman, Amelia Peele- vocals; Gordon Kent- piano; Dante Pope- percussion

PRELUDE: Give Thanks By Janelle Gill- piano

CALL TO WORSHIP Rev. Rob Keithan

At a time when so much is changed, or strained, or just gone,
may these words, may this music,
and may this time together be a balm and blessing.
Come, let us worship together.

CHALICE LIGHTING: Dana and Josie Martin

“I light this chalice in honor of our Unitarian Universalist Faith.
I am a living Member of the great family of All Souls.”

OPENING HYMN #157: Step by Step the Longest March
(performed by Rochelle Rice- vocals; Janelle Gill- piano)

Step by step the longest march
can be won, can be won

Many stones can form an arch,
singly none, singly none

And by union what we will
can be accomplished still

Drops of water turn a mill,
singly none singly none

WELCOME: Morgan Duncan, Worship Associate

(Text missing)

MEET & GREET: People are greeting one another. Music in background.
“With a Little Help From Friends” by John Lennon and Paul McCartney
Performed by Gordon Kent- vocals and piano; Jen Hayman, Amelia Peele, and Rochelle Rice, –
vocals; Dante Pope- percussion

CONGREGATIONAL CARE: Rev. Louise Green

Good morning, All Souls. I'm Rev. Louise, your minister of Congregational Care.

Thank you to every person who made calls, had Zooms, and wrote emails to others at All Souls in our Thanksgiving Connect program. We checked in with many, and offered gratitude and good wishes to all.

We celebrate the beautiful and healthy great-grandchild of Judith Bauer! Charlotte Judith was born last Sunday afternoon. Week one prayers to CJ, recovering mom Melissa, and all her proud family.

Cynthia Durham came home from rehab care on Tuesday after a month of surgery recovery. We celebrate Cynthia's birthday today and wish her very well.

Healing thoughts to brothers Rowan and Milo Caylor, parents Marisa and Nick, and to the grandparents also helping with care. Let's hope this is a steadier week!

Sending love and blessings to Alex Wilson, now in Binghamton NY to tend to his mother Patty. She is seriously ill with COVID, as are many in her senior community. Prayers to all in this community, and to Alex, spouse Alan Abramson, and their son Ben.

Our prayers remain with:

Chris Milner's father in home hospice/ Susan, Forrest, Charlotte, Graham.

Bob Bloomfield, in home hospice/ Barbara McCann.

We offer deep condolences for those who mourn:

Megan Gray, whose beloved father David died of old age in Texas in late August. Thinking today of Megan, Carys and Quinn.

Andrea Swalec, whose dear father John died last Sunday from COVID in the Detroit area. Her mother Dori is still recovering from COVID there. Thinking of Andrea, husband Jim, toddler Marin, and Andrea's sister Erica who shares their household.

We mourn with all those in the UU world, and All Souls community, who mourn the very sad news of the death of Rev. Dr. Hope Johnson. She was a truly amazing leader in our denomination, a mentor to many, and a deep lover of All Souls music.

And now, your names and situations into this circle: spoken aloud where you are, or in heart and mind. Moment of silence

PRAYER:

Holy Oneness, Light and Sound beyond speaking:

We meditate on this first Sunday of Advent season.
In this wisdom tradition of the way of Jesus,
remembering clearly that we forgot to listen.

Wise guides and astronomers soon set out from Persian lands.
Before a Jerusalem king, before the new family in Bethlehem,
they are still home gazing at the night sky:
learning from brightly shining Jupiter that the journey is now.
Auspicious birth has occurred, and the road is opening.

We take in Northern Hemisphere winter sparkle,
Polaris and the Big Dipper,
A full Moon with eclipse emerging,
waning Light towards Winter Solstice, three weeks away.

We gaze at Southern Hemisphere summer radiance,
Alpha Centauri and Southern Cross,
A full Moon with eclipse arriving,
growing Light towards Summer Solstice, three weeks away,

Listening and hearing Night Sky teachers, heeding the call:
We deepen in understanding and humility.
We re-commit to the way of life-long learning.

Star of wonder, star of night/ Star with royal beauty bright,/
westward leading/ to that sanctuary of intuition and inner knowing/
still proceeding/ into the quiet calm of unfolding sacred time.

Guide us to Your perfect Light. Guide us to Your perfect Light. Amen.

Meditation: Spirit of Life by Carolyn McDade

Performed by Amelia Peele, Jen Hayman, Rochelle Rice- vocals; Gordon Kent- piano and vocals

Fuente de amor, ven hacia mi
Y al corazón cantale tu compasión
Sopla al volar, sube en la mar
Hasta moldear la justicia de la vida
Arráigame , 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.

Moment of Silence + Chalice Viewing

Reading: Rev. Rob Keithan

Our reading is from Rev. Julia Hamilton, who at the time was the Executive Director of the UU State Advocacy Network of NJ. They were working to advance a bill for marriage equality in the state legislature, and these words were written after a defeat in the Senate stopped progress of the bill for the year. [Link to press release] Rev. Hamilton writes:

It is not easy, this road to justice. But then again, ‘easy’ is not what we were promised. In fact, we were not promised anything.

We are the ones who have made promises, a covenant with one another that we will not give up, that we will be here for as long as it takes.

It is a commitment that I do not take lightly, and every time we have the chance to [side with love], every time we show up and make good on that covenant, we move... closer to the beloved community that we are building together.

SERMON: Rev. Rob Keithan, Learning to be Different

This is the fifth Sunday of November, and the final service on our monthly theme of Prophetic imagination. As you know if you’ve heard me preach before, I like to take big themes and get very concrete. And today, my words are about the intersection of two streams of thought.

First, there’s a stream about Beloved Community, and trying to figure out what it means to us. One of the things that’s become clear in recent years at All Souls is that we do not have a shared understanding of what Beloved Community means. Our understanding is grounded in Dr. King’s

vision, of course, but there are some significant differences between when he was writing and our context now.

Second, there's a stream about some work I've done recently with the Beckner Committee and the staff about covenant. And not just the promises we make, but what expectations and structures we have about addressing breaks.

We've focused too much on the first part. The words. The aspirations. But, frankly, naming the goals is the easy part of the work, and it is far from being sufficient. The harder work, the messier work, the necessary work is what happens when we mess up.

And for many reasons—the political polarization in our society, the resistance to racial justice, the challenges we've been through here at All Souls—when we think about messing up it's easy to immediately think about big-C conflict. And we absolutely need to get better at that. But there's an even more basic foundational element, and practice. And that's being able to talk to each other about the small stuff, early and often, before it gets to the major conflict level.

One of things I've talked about with both Beckner and the staff is: in cases in the past when you've either given or received constructive feedback, what's helped that go well? What are the circumstances that help it go better?

There are many common answers that emerge. One of them is ALWAYS that it's easier to give and receive feedback when you trust people, and you trust people because you know them.

So that's one simple way of understanding the task of building Beloved Community: we have to get to know each other.

It's a simple premise, but it's not easy because it constantly runs into one of the others tendencies we have at All Souls, which is true of historically white congregations and institutions in a general sense, but I think is particular acute here in DC, which is that it's easy to be very task focused. We focus too much on outcomes and not enough on relationships.

We're trying to create change in our world, yes? The thing that's going to position us best to do that is if we can do it here. We desperately want to create a more justice-centered multicultural world outside. Our best chance of being able to do that as if we work on it inside. For me, that's one of the fundamental purposes of religious community: learning and practicing how to be a better human being.

And here's the thing—it's not a fast process. Unlearning unconscious bias and unjust patterns is a lifelong process. As Rev. Rebecca Parker once said, challenging white supremacy is not a task that you can cross off your to-do list.

Let me put this in the larger context. Reinhold Niebuhr was one of the most important theologians of the 20th Century, and a favorite of President Obama. In his 1932 book "Moral Man and Immoral Society," Niebuhr offers a critique of revolutionaries who think it's possible to make last change quickly.

Quite simply, any political system that's changed quickly can also be unchanged quickly because the underlying culture is still the same. So, he argues, the best course is to work for deep change over time, because it's harder to undo.

This is a lesson that I'm still learning, because I'm impatient to get things done. I'm a doer. I like tasks. I like to fix things. I have extensive to-do lists and crossing off tasks fills me with joy. So there have been plenty of times, and still are, when talking and getting to know people and processing differences have felt like a distraction from the work. But the more I learn, the more it becomes clear: the relationships, the community, the trust—this IS the work. It is not, and cannot be an afterthought. It is, and needs to be, the central building block.

Yes, there is much to do, and being in DC makes us acutely aware of it. But ultimately personal transformation and social transformation boils down to a simple premise: if we want things to turn out differently, we have to do things differently. Let me say that again: if we want things to turn out differently, we have to do things differently.

So that means we spend more time building relationships. It means that we spend more time talking about how we'll give and receive constructive feedback, and it means that we'll try, and mess up, and learn, and try again.

And it means learning. It means learning about the problematic systems and patterns that perpetuate oppression, and it means learning how to think differently, believe differently, and act differently. The work is different for people with different identities, for sure. The self-awareness and accountability work I need to do as a white cisgender man is quite different than the trauma-processing and healing work needed for people with nondominant identities.

But at some level, I'm guessing, you've chosen All Souls because you think this religious community is a place to do whatever work you need to do. I know some of you have struggled with whether or not All Souls can be that place for you, and I know that people have left because they concluded that it could not be for them.

There are some unique aspects of the struggles we've had at All Souls in recent years, but frankly there are also some very common patterns happening throughout Unitarian Universalist congregations, and many historically white religious communities generally. The Unitarian Universalist Association has been grappling with these dynamics at the denominational level, and similar to the way the All Souls Board of Trustees created a Transformation Team to look at All Souls commitment to anti-racism the Association Board created a Commission on Institutional Change to "analyze structural racism and white supremacy culture within the UUA." Earlier this year, the Commission on Institutional Change published its report, called "Widening the Circle of Concern," which is an amazing combination of theological reflection, systemic analysis, stories, and concrete recommendations for how UU congregations and the Association overall can do better.

There's a study guide for the report that the All Souls Board is going to do, the staff is making plans for our own study, and we're going to offer the study group as a common read for the

whole congregation starting in January. Look for details on dates and structure in the next week or two.

Also, there will be a virtual Jubilee Anti-Racism Training over MLK Weekend. It's a powerful, in-depth analysis of systemic racism, and frankly is one of the experiences that most changed my life. And there will be many more classes and conversations in the coming years.

A Beloved Community has to be a Learning Community. And it can't just be the neat, relatively safe kind of learning that happens in classes and formal structures. It also has to be the messy kind, the informal kind, that happens because we know each other. It means that we know why people have chosen to stay at All Souls and other Unitarian Universalist congregations but also know why some people have chosen to leave. It means asking different questions of each other. It means having conversations that cross the dominant society's barriers.

I want to close with one of my favorite quotes, which I've used in countless meetings and events over the years but, realized with a keyword search last night that I've literally never used in the 17 years I've been preaching. It's from Stephen Biko, better known as Steve, an anti-apartheid activist in South Africa. He was murdered by police there in 1977, and both his work and his death played a major role in turning world-wide opinion against apartheid. His words summarize my philosophy of life and religion quite well. He writes:

We regard our living together not as an unfortunate mishap
Warranting endless competition among us
But as a deliberate act of God
To make us a community...
Jointly involved in the quest for a composite answer
To the varied problems of life.

May it be so, and amen.

ANTHEM: Saint Honesty by Sara Bareillis and Lori McKenna
Performed by Rochelle Rice- vocals; Janelle Gill- piano

We're leaving all the windows open
We don't even mind the rain
Or where we let the floors get wet
So what if the hardwood stains?
'Cause we're collecting evidence
Of one remarkable storm
How wild it was to find it, finally feel the climate
Instead of only staying dry and warm

Rain on us, Saint Honesty
Salvation is coming in the morning, but now what we need
Is a little rain on our face from you, sweet Saint Honesty

So we won't sleep tonight
While we brace against the wind
Oh, these hearts, they're weather-makers
We'll go where they take us
Until we find ourselves shelter again
We won't settle for the silence
We won't drown in the tears
We'll say every single word even if we think they'll hurt
Let the rain wash away these tears

Rain on us, Saint Honesty
Salvation is coming in the morning, and now what we need
Is a little rain on our face from you, sweet Saint Honesty

Oh, we won't let go, we'll be soaked to the bone
Baptized by truth, we will reap what we sow
Build our own higher ground when the rain's coming down
This is worth it to me, Saint Honesty
Rain

Salvation is coming in the morning
Wait patiently, aiming straight for it
But now what we need
Is a little rain on our face from you, sweet Saint Honesty

OFFERING: Morgan Duncan, Worship Associate

The bravest thing I have ever done was to get out of a boat. By a spectacular stroke of fortune I ended up on a two week yacht cruise to the Galapagos Islands. Shortly after sailing away from the coast of Ecuador, the yacht stopped so that those who wanted to scuba dive at this point of interest could do so – that group contained everyone but me. I didn't see any point of interest. To the best of my knowledge there was nothing for miles but us. I was, apparently, looking in the wrong direction. We had stopped over the deepest part of the Atacama Trench, so we were about 26,000 feet from the ocean floor, and this is where they wanted to get out... I attempted to demur... I don't have scuba gear, or training or any real experience of deep water, or, a death wish. But I was fitted out with some spare snorkel gear and a life vest and was told I would have fun floating until everyone came back. Soon they all flipped backward off the inflatable boat we'd been shuttled onto from the yacht, leaving an increasingly impatient crewman, and me. What I wanted to do was to humbly beg the guy to take me back to the relative safety of the yacht and let me spend my time coming up with excuses for why I had chickened out. Instead, I put my legs over the side of the boat and felt myself sink into one of the deepest parts of the Pacific Ocean. Once my heart stopped racing and I lay calm on the warm skin of the sea, peering

into its truly endless depths, I found the experience life changing. I felt simultaneously exhilarated and at peace. I even had a close encounter with a giant sea turtle, and since then, I have had a better mark to measure what's frightening against. None of this would have been possible without letting go of the side of that boat.

It's good to belong to a church that understands and supports the scary business of getting beyond our habits and comforts.

Now is the time in our service where we contribute to the continued work of the church, which for many of us has served as a much-needed source of hope during the past year.

The church's fiscal year ends on June 30th, however, as we approach the end of 2020 (which frankly can't come fast enough!), the Executive and Stewardship Team is asking to those of us who have made a pledge to All Souls but who have not yet made a contribution to fulfil their pledge to do so before the end of 2020. So, during this time of music and hymn, take a moment to click on the link or send a text, sign in, and, if you're able, make a contribution towards your pledge.

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

CLOSING HYMN #95: There is More Love
Performed by Rochelle Rice- vocals; Janelle Gill- piano

There is more love somewhere.
I'm gonna keep on 'til I find it.
There is more love somewhere.

There is more hope somewhere.
I'm gonna keep on 'til I find it.
There is more hope somewhere.

There is more peace somewhere.
I'm gonna keep on 'til I find it.
There is more peace somewhere.

There is more joy somewhere.
I'm gonna keep on 'til I find it.
There is more joy somewhere.

There is more love somewhere.
I'm gonna keep on 'til I find it.
There is more love somewhere.

BENEDICTION: Rev. Rob Keithan

It may be messier, and it may take longer, but we're only going to get through this if we know each other, and trust each other, and can talk about the things that really matter. So let's learn to be different, knowing that this is the work.

BENEDICTION IN MUSIC: Blessed the Brave by David Batteau, Larry Klein, and Lizz Wright
Performed by Rochelle Rice- vocals; Janelle Gill- piano

Counting days, my loving arms
Always open when you come
Hearts may break
I know, cause I have one

But let my kindness
Be like blindness
Counting days as you go away

Blessed the brave
Lost in the waves
blessed the strong
Our love will carry on

Counting days, oh people
It cuts both ways
Sweet tears may fall
I know why you fail

But let your kindness
Be your blindness
sitting in this grace

Blessed the weak
The river runs deep
And honey, blessed the scared
That mean love, love is still there

Let my kindness
Be like blindness
Counting days sitting in this grace