

Worship transcript for December 27, 2020

Prelude (Todd Simon, piano)

“Love’s in Need of Love Today” (Stevie Wonder)

Call to Worship (Rev. Tony Coleman)

In this time of worship, we come together as a community of individuals, individual screens joined by a single window, alone and together.

May this be a time in which we become more than a collection of squares.

May this be a time in which we remember that we are one:

Powerful, beautiful, alone, and together.

Come and worship.

Chalice Lighting (Vania and Zara Broderick-Dursun)

As we light the chalice this morning, we invite you to also light a candle at home. We Light Our Flaming Chalice to illuminate the world we seek. In the search for truth, may we be just; in the search for justice may we be loving; and, in loving, may we find peace.

Hymn

“We Are Climbing Jacob’s Ladder”

We are climbing Jacob’s ladder (3x)

We are climbing on

Ev’ry round goes higher, higher (3x)

We are climbing on

If I stumble, will you help me? (3x)

We are climbing on

Though the road is steep and rugged (3x)

We are climbing on.

Welcome (Vania Broderick-Dursun)

Good Morning! Welcome to All Souls Church! My name is Vania Broderick-Dursun and I get to be your worship associate this morning.

Since 1821 the members of this church have been walking together toward an important place, a place that Martin Luther King called the Beloved Community. We are moving ever forward toward a place where walls that separate us fall away so that we can stand together as one human family. With joy and determination we walk this path together, regardless of where you began

your journey, how much or how little you carry with you, or with whom you choose to hold hands along the way. We are all going there to lend our hands to the creation of a diverse, justice-seeking, spirit-growing community that is true to the dream of all souls. We invite you to join us on this grand adventure.

I'd like to extend a special welcome to those of you who are visiting this morning. We're glad you're with us. Feel free to let us know in the chat where you're viewing us from, and if you'd like to receive our weekly e-newsletter.

We move now to our moment of "Beholding". As the music plays, scroll through the Zoom gallery and share a wave or a greeting in the chat with some of the other folks who are part of the great family of All Souls.

Congregational Concerns and Prayer (Rev. Louise Green)

As we circle round Zoom this morning, we are holding all those present, and those not here, yet on our hearts and minds. I am Rev. Louise Green, the Minister of Congregational Care.

We begin wishing Rev. Tony Coleman a beautiful last Sunday at All Souls (for now!), and appreciate all that he has contributed over the last two years. His moving to Tennessee to be with family is our loss, yet this has already benefited many. Such as First Congregational Church Memphis, where he is Associate Pastor, and where we know folks love him as we do. Thank you so much, Rev. Tony.

Our thoughts are with a number of people and situations this morning:

Cynthia Durham, who rejoiced via telephone that she could eat solid foods for Christmas, several months after her abdominal surgery.

Chuck Woodridge, whose mother Juanita has been hospitalized with COVID in Louisville KY.

Jose-Luis Sanchez, who prepares for treatment for colon cancer in January.

The family of Moisés Santos, working with the consulate of El Salvador and the District, on final arrangements complicated by the pandemic.

And in this poignant holiday season, all our families with incarcerated loved ones. Today we hold a member whose 52-year-old son is suffering from COVID in prison, along with many of his fellow inmates. We mourn the tragic health-care inequities in prisons and jails which create great risk and loss. We deeply lament the intersecting systems and long-term factors which lead to the mass incarceration of black and brown peoples.

And now your names and situations into this space, in a moment of silence...

Hear the radiant words of Marchaé Grair, an African American writer and spiritual director who has worked for the UCC and UUA denominations.

Creed for the Marginalized

I am powerful
I deserve to live
Joy is my birthright

I am beautiful
I deserve to thrive
Community is my anchor

I am worthy
I deserve to be free
Liberation is my legacy

You can't take what my ancestors taught me
You can't destroy what my ancestors created
You can't heal in me what was never broken

You don't have to honor me for my life to matter
You don't have to save me because I'm saving myself
You don't have to notice me for this miracle to keep unfolding

I am the miracle
Because I live
And believe I deserve to

Hymn 123

“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)

“Munich, Winter 1973 (for Y.S.)” (James Baldwin)

In a strange house,
a strange bed
in a strange town,
a very strange me
is waiting for you.

Now
it is very early in the morning.
The silence is loud.
The baby is walking about
with his foaming bottle,
making strange sounds
and deciding, after all,
to be my friend.

You
arrive tonight.

How dull time is!
How empty—and yet,
since I am sitting here,
lying here,
walking up and down here,
waiting,
I see
that time’s cruel ability
to make one wait
is time’s reality.

I see your hair
which I call red.
I lie here in this bed.

Someone teased me once,
a friend of ours—
saying that I saw your hair red
because I was not thinking
of the hair on your head.

Someone also told me,
a long time ago:
my father said to me,

It is a terrible thing,
son,
to fall into the hands of the living God.
Now,
I know what he was saying.
I could not have seen red
before finding myself
in this strange, this waiting bed.
Nor had my naked eye suggested
that colour was created
by the light falling, now,
on me,
in this strange bed,
waiting
where no one has ever rested!

The streets, I observe,
are wintry.
It feels like snow.
Starlings circle in the sky,
conspiring,
together, and alone,
unspeakable journeys
into and out of the light.

I know
I will see you tonight.
And snow
may fall
enough to freeze our tongues
and scald our eyes.
We may never be found again!

Just as the birds above our heads
circling
are singing,
knowing
that, in what lies before them,
the always unknown passage,
wind, water, air,
the failing light
the failing night
the blinding sun
they must get the journey done.
Listen.
They have wings and voices

are making choices
are using what they have.
They are aware
that, on long journeys,
each bears the other,
whirring,
stirring
love occurring
in the middle of the terrifying air.

Sermon (Rev. Coleman)

It was the fall semester of my first year of divinity school. To help make ends meet, I had taken a job as a gallery educator for the university's art museum. The training was intense and thorough. For weeks we listened and watched curators pour out their years-practiced knowledge all over the art objects in our various galleries. We learned about Asian Art and European Art, American Art and Contemporary Art.

When it came time for us to learn about the African gallery, I didn't know what to expect. Over the course of those few weeks, I had gotten the sense that very often the fashion choices of museum curators matched the art that they studied. The contemporary curators we met had funky, thick framed glasses and wore clothes with simple bold lines. The curator of Asian art wore a shiny-threaded jacket printed with Japanese script and coy fish depicted in the style of woodblock prints. So, I wondered as we waited, what would this scholar of African art look like?

Well, he wasn't what I expected. He wore a tight-fitting black t-shirt and slim jeans. He had a goatee, the color of salt and pepper, the same as his crew cut hair. And, on his fingers he wore big, almost gaudy, silver rings, one of which had been molded to look like a human skull. Now that I saw what he looked like, I wondered: what was he going to say to us about African art?

He led us to one of the many glass cases that sat on pedestals in the room. A 2-and-a-half-foot tall wooden sculpture, stained in black, of a woman whose features were elongated and exaggerated, he explained to us, tracing his hand from the top of the case to its bottom. Beside her, he went on, almost inscrutable, a tall bird, carved from the same piece of wood as the woman, attached to her at the elbow and hip.

This crew cut, jean-wearing art scholar, leading our gaze across this finely sculpted piece of wood had our attention rapt. The object itself was captivating but so was the man's voice: the awe and the reverence and the love in it. He brought that piece of art, mummified in the stale air of that museum container, to life.

Maybe because of how he spoke or because of the striking beauty of the sculpture, one of us asked, "Is this art sacred?" What followed, his answer to that question, forever changed the way I think about how Spirit moves in our world. He said to us, "No, this isn't a sacred object. This was created in a context that did not divide the world into sacred and profane. You see," he told us,

“before there was ‘the sacred’ there was Power. And this,” he said as he turned back to look at it, “is a powerful object.”

Its power, we learned, came from a spiritual essence invested into the wood it was made from. Its power, we learned, came from the person who carved its forms, this woman and this bird, allied in their efforts to help humanity soar. Its power, we learned, came from the people who created it, the people for whom it was meant, the people beyond the glass case, who lived in a place beyond the museum, whom we would almost certainly never see.

This morning marks the second day of Kwanzaa. If you’re unfamiliar with the observance, Kwanzaa has seven days, and each corresponds to a particular principle. Today begins Kujichagulia. Translated from Swahili, this word means “self-determination.” However, this is not the self-determination of the rugged individual who finds meaning in a kind of stubborn idiosyncrasy. This is not the self-determination of consumer capitalism wherein identity finds expression in the uniqueness of overly complicated Starbucks coffee orders. This is not the self-determination of a president who makes decisions in a silo, ignoring the input of advisors and dissenters alike. Instead, this is a form of self-determination that recognizes and reaffirms our right to craft our own destiny and our need to draw on the resources of our community to do so.

James Baldwin, the author of the poem that serves as this morning’s reading, built a life and an artistic discipline from this variety of self-determination. Here was a black man who rubbed shoulders with the white literary luminaries of his time. Here was a gay man who met with religious leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Black Panthers like Eldridge Cleaver. Here was an artist who wrote about the beauty and confines of Black religious experience and who wrote about the subtlety and complications of same-gender love. He was a person who chose to be no one other than himself, to live in multiple countries, amidst multiple worlds, while at all times remaining vehemently, determinedly himself. James Baldwin drew on the power of his own life as he drew from the power of the communities that shaped him. For some of his literary contemporaries, his work would never be good enough, and for some of his partners in the struggle for Black freedom, his sexuality would always be a sticking point. Nevertheless, he speaks to us now, because he did not see the truth of his context nor the reality of his story as stumbling blocks but rather, he saw them, as sources of power.

What, friends, are your sources of power? What truths lie inside you, waiting — begging — for expression? What destiny, what identity, what self do you need to affirm and celebrate in this time?

More often than not, society teaches us that power functions in a hierarchical fashion. Power moves from top to bottom as those with power oppress those without it. Or, power moves from bottom to top, as those without power seize it from those who already have it. What James Baldwin’s life exemplifies for us, though, what the Kwanzaa principle of Kujichagulia teaches us, what that wooden sculpture sitting in that art museum taught me, is that power also lives inside us, drawn from the very marrow within us and enhanced by the community around us. Power, in other words, is generated from us alone and, simultaneously, from us together.

We are like the birds Baldwin saw in Munich that winter in 1973. “We have wings and voices/ are making choices/ are using what [we] have.” Each of us bears the other, whirring, stirring, love occurring/ in the middle of the terrifying air.”

In this flock, when we are flying at our best, we fly together for the sake of one another, alone. This is the dynamism of community. This is the fullest expression of Kujichagulia. This is the essence of the Yoruba word we sometimes say after prayers, “Ashe.”

All Souls, over the last year and a half, you have blessed me in so many ways. You have moved me with your stories. You have inspired me with your dreams. You have humbled me with your challenges. And, above all else, you have taught me something deep and abiding about what it means to be together, to journey alone alongside a whole bunch of others. You have taught me about the power of spiritual community; it’s ability to elevate, to deepen, and to transform.

It’s true. I will not be here come 2021, but, that does not mean we will not be together. I know that, no matter where the air may take us, we will be flying together, friends, alone and together, soaring ever closer to that horizon of wholeness, what James Baldwin called The New Jerusalem, what William Ellery Channing called The Great Family, what we have named, following Dr. King, the “Beloved Community.” As long as we are journeying to that place, we will be journeying together. As long as we continue to draw from the truthful spaces in our lives and to draw from the energy of the spiritual community that lives beyond a sanctuary’s walls, we will be together.

My prayer for you and for me as we step into 2021 is that we find and be in that place. My prayer is that we sink into the power that lives in us alone, just as we reach out and gather up the power that lives in our community. My prayer for you and for me as we step into 2021 is that you find not only spaces that are sacred, not only places that are holy, not only moments that are blessed, but also, I pray that we find sources of deep and abiding Power — alone and together, whirring, stirring, love occurring in the middle of the terrifying air.

And so, let us say, alone and together,
Ashe and Amen.

Anthem (Nicole Rumeau, vocals; Todd Simon, piano)

“Deeper” (Tamia)

I have loved and I have lost
Broken rivers I have crossed
I have made it through the flames
Like a diamond, I’ve been shaped
A thousand times again
Now I can love deeper
I wanna love harder
So love like you’ve never been hurt
‘Cause love can change the world

Now let's go higher
Together we stronger
So love like you've never been hurt
'Cause love can change the world
I've seen the first become the last
Heroes rising out of ash new
And after everywhere I've been
I know the journey is the wind
And I wouldn't change a thing
Now I wanna love deeper (deeper)
I wanna love harder (harder)
So love like you've never been hurt
'Cause love can change the world
Now let's go higher (higher)
Together we stronger (stronger)
So love like you've never been hurt
'Cause love can change the world
'Cause when we go deep
That's when it gets real
That's when you feel real love
I wanna feel real love
I want a woman you see
To be the person I am
I wanna feel real love
I wanna feel real love
Now I can love deeper (deeper)
I wanna love harder (harder)
So love like you've never been hurt (like you've never been hurt)
'Cause love can change the world
Now let's go higher (higher)
Together we stronger (stronger)
So love like you've never been hurt
'Cause love can change the world
Say you're with me yes
Love can change the world
We can change the world
I have loved and I have lost
Broken rivers I have crossed
I have made it through the flames
Like a diamond, I've been shaped
I would do it all again

Offering (Libbie Buchele)

Hi, my name is Libbie Buchele, and I'm the president of the Board of Trustees here at All Souls Church. It has been such a pleasure having Reverend Tony with us over the past year and a half,

and I'm honored to be a part of this last service with him. Reverend Tony, thank you so much for faithfully serving with us, even as your life moved you to Tennessee. I will miss you.

Now is the time in our service where we give towards the future of this congregation and its work. As many of you may have read in my newsletter posting a couple of weeks ago (half of you immediately search your newsletters), I recently celebrated 25 years at All Souls and 25 years in DC. I moved to DC to work for the Federal government. On my first day of work, I filled out my tax forms, and then I had to fill in the forms for the thrift savings plan, the Federal government's 401K. Part of the form asked me to fill in my beneficiaries in case of my death. I had no idea who to put in! I was not even 30! So, like most of us when faced with this dilemma, I bequeathed my entire 401K to my younger sister and my older brother.

So, just recently, I got online to finally make some much-needed changes to my 401K allocation. It brought back memories of who I was when I first made those allocations. I started thinking about what my life was like when I first moved to DC, and the many ways that All Souls has enriched my life. On the eve of our church's bicentennial, I started wondering what the next 200 years would look like at All Souls, and what our legacy we will be leaving behind for future congregants. With that in mind, I made yet another change in my 401K allocations, this time to allocate 3% of my 401K to All Souls Church.

This kind of giving, called "planned giving," hasn't gotten a lot of emphasis at All Souls, and I'd like us all to think about this type of giving as we finally move out of 2020 and into a new year! Reverend Kathleen mentioned this idea a few weeks ago, and I thought it was a great idea. A lot of people think that legacy giving is all about bequeathing things in their wills, but you can also make beneficiary allocations through life insurance policies or through 401ks. It's a chance for all of us to leave something behind, and I don't know, it's kind of like leaving memories of yourself behind, and investing in future generations at the same time. But, what do you name a planned giving program in a questioning UU church? Question Mark Souls? Legacy souls?" or, dare I say it? "Heavenly Souls?" "

As we move into 2021, think about what legacy you will leave behind.

And, by the way, if you've made a pledge to All Souls but have not yet made a contribution to fulfil that pledge, this is a good time to do so before the end of 2020. If you haven't pledged or donated yet this year, take a moment during this time of music and hymn, to click on the link or send a text, and make a contribution to the future of this church and its congregation. The morning's offering will now be received.

Hymn

"There's a River Flowin' in My Soul"

There's a river flowin' in my soul
There's a river flowin' in my soul
And it's tellin' me that I'm somebody
There's a river flowin' in my soul

There's a river flowin' in my heart...

There's a river flowin' in my mind...

Benediction (Rev. Coleman)

Music (Nicole Rumeau, vocals; Todd Simon, piano)

“Jazz Ain't Nothin' But Soul” (Betty Carter)

Jazz is makin' do with 'taters and grits
Standin' up each time you get hit
Jazz ain't nothin' but soul
Jazz is livin' high off nickels and dimes
Telling folks 'bout what's on your mind
Jazz ain't nothin' but soul
Trumpets, cussin', saxophones
Rhythm, makin' love
People wearin' fancy clothes
It's the voice of my people
For me, jazz is all the truth to be found
Never mind who's puttin' it down
Jazz ain't nothin' but soul
Jazz ain't nothin' but soul
Jazz ain't nothin' but soul
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