

# Worship transcript for January 24, 2021

**Prelude (Janelle Gill, Romeir Mendez, and Danté Pope)**

“Peace” (Tim Green)

**Call to Worship (Rev. Kathleen Rolenz)**

Let there be joy in our coming together!  
Come into this time and this place  
And let our enthusiasm inspire you  
Come into this circle of caring  
And let our warmth envelop you  
Come into this minute, this moment this movement  
For it's a new dawn  
It's a new day  
It's a new life for us all  
Come, let us worship together

Each week we kindle a chalice flame symbol of the light of truth, warmth of community and fire of commitment. To light our chalice this morning, we welcome Jen Vanmeter, Mark Davenport and Cooper and Simon.

**Chalice Lighting (Jen Vanmeter, Mark Davenport, and Cooper and Simon Vanmeter Davenport)**

**Hymn**

347 “Gather the Spirit”

Gather the Spirit; Harvest the Power  
Our separate fires will kindle one flame  
Witness the mystery of this hour  
Our trials in this light appear all the same

Gather in peace, gather in thanks  
Gather in sympathy now and then  
Gather in hope, compassion and strength  
Gather to celebrate once again

Gather the Spirit of heart and mind  
Seeds for the sowing are laid in store  
Nurtured in love, and conscience refined  
With body and spirit united once more

Gather in peace, gather in thanks  
Gather in sympathy now and then  
Gather in hope, compassion and strength  
Gather to celebrate once again

Gather the Spirit growing in all  
Drawn by the moon, and fed by the sun  
Winter to Spring, and Summer to Fall  
The chorus of life resounding as one

Gather in peace, gather in thanks  
Gather in sympathy now and then  
Gather in hope, compassion and strength  
Gather to celebrate once again

### **Welcome (Shari Gilbert)**

Gather in peace! Welcome to All Souls Church. My name is Shari Gilbert and it's my pleasure to serve as today's Worship Associate.

We've been here for nearly 200 years and have a tradition of justice and spirituality. We acknowledge that the physical building of All Souls sits on the ancestral homelands of the Piscataway Conoy Tribe, whose existence pre-dates All Souls church.

Our congregation seeks to live up to the vision inherent in our name, All Souls. It's a vision of a human community where all people are welcome at the table, where the divisions that separate us in our daily lives come tumbling down and we recognize ourselves as part of one human family.

I'd like to extend a special welcome this morning to those of you who are new to our community. We welcome the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Gloucester! This is the place where if we were in the sanctuary, we would turn and physically greet one another. We can still do that – only in a ritual which we are calling “Beholding” We invite you to remain on mute, but to scroll through the gallery of faces. If you find someone you don't recognize, you might want to send them a private chat message and welcome them to build our community. Welcome to All Souls!

### **Congregational Concerns and Prayer (Rev. Rolenz)**

Welcome all Souls! I'm Kathleen Rolenz, serving as All Souls Interim Senior Minister. I'm so glad to be here with all of you, some 300 plus Souls coming together from literally all over the globe! We create community wherever we are – and this is the day that Spirit has brought us together. Our life together as a community has not stopped – in fact, there are some programs coming up we want you to know about.

### Congregational announcements

On Tuesday, January 26, from 4 – 5:15 pm, I'm hosting another "All Souls at 200" a continuing conversation about how we wish to celebrate All Souls 200th Anniversary this fall.

This coming Wednesday, January 27, join Rev. Louise Greene and Music Director Jen Hayman for a drop in covenant group entitled: Songs of Resistance, from 7:30 – 8:30 pm.

After church the next two Sundays, the Board hosting a conversations on January 31 & February 7, 11:45 AM to discuss extending the interim period for an additional year. All members are invited to participate.

The theme for February is Spiritual Friendship and I'd like to honor our friendships by creating a slide show. Send me a picture of yourself with a long-time friend, be sure to include your name and the name of your friend in the picture. It will be part of the service on February 7th.

We turn our hearts and minds now to the joys and concerns of our own members and friends, and to the wider world in which we live.

Congratulations to Ben Kreider, new Brandeis graduate with Doctorate in Social Policy. Ben's dissertation examines low-wage immigrant worker organizing. Hooray and blessings on the job search!

Sending healing thoughts to Shelley Finlayson, recovering from foot surgery Friday. We are holding Shelley, husband Jack Metzler, and daughter Camille in our prayers.

Our hearts are with Jacqui Gallagher, whose brother Ralph is hospitalized in CA. Ralph has COVID pneumonia and is immune compromised from cancer treatment. We send love to Jacqui and Ralph.

We are thinking of the family of Emily Dyer, currently in town to move her belongings from Riderwood. Emily died in January 6, and her zoom Celebration of Life will be in mid-February.

And finally, our deepest condolences go to Patee Roper, whose cousin, Deborah Harrison died this past week. She had been dealing with a long-term illness, but her death was unexpected and a shock. She was a beautiful soul and will be deeply missed.

### Prayer

Let us join our hearts and minds now – in a time of meditation, reflection, prayer.

O Spirit of Life

It feels as if we are on the brink of something new

We can see change is coming – that the long season of lockdown is on the horizon

That the hopes and dreams that have lain fallow or been undermined for the past four years

May now find fertile ground.

In the holy quiet of this moment,

We pray for this new Administration and this legislature.

That our leaders will be wise, their decisions just; their countenance stable;

We pray for this District; this nation and this world  
That underneath the rancor and division we find common cause  
As we pray that the great movements and moments of our time  
Will take root in the soul of this Nation for there is no perfect Union,  
there are no perfect people  
There are only citizens of this one, precious planet  
And members of this one fragile humanity  
O Gracious Spirit of Life – immerse us in mercy, kindness & compassion  
Embolden us to challenge injustice and inaction  
And as the poet said:  
...one thing is certain:  
If we merge mercy with might, and might with right,  
then love becomes our legacy  
and change our children's birthright...  
It's a new day, a new day, a new life  
May we- and those who lead us – live wisely and well into this new dawn. Amen.

### **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.

### **Sermon (Rev. Rob Keithan)**

“This Is the Way”

In lieu of reading—shared breaths.

Friends,

There is much cause for celebration. In addition to ending what is widely recognized as the worst Presidency in our nation's history, this week's inauguration was full of significant milestones, historical breakthroughs, and symbols of a more equitable administration and a more diverse United States. These actions alone, we know, are not enough. But they are important, as they

help us to see and hear and most importantly to feel some vision and momentum for the way forward.

The events of the last month call us to hold a dual reality: that everything has changed, and that nothing has changed. Undoubtedly, with a new Administration and a Democratic majority in both houses—albeit razor thin—aspects of our national political landscape are radically different. To me, the strong winds on Wednesday were the winds of change, blowing out toxicity and bringing in possibility.

And yet. And yet, with regards to race and economics and so many other aspects of historic and structural inequality—nothing has changed. There are still many who consciously embrace white, male supremacy, and there are still many people and many institutions, including All Souls, that have considerable work to do in addressing the ways we unconsciously perpetuate white male supremacy. It's the current all around us, and if we're not intentional and committed to paddling upstream than we just get getting carried downstream.

I was talking with Rochelle Rice, All Souls Associate Director for Music and Arts, about this service, and she reminded me of what Melissa Harris-Perry said to us in January 2017, shortly after Trump was elected. She said that one of the reasons Trump happened is that when Obama got elected too many liberals and progressives took a break. We relied on other people to do the paddling upstream, and the consequences were disastrous.

The danger now, Rochelle said, and I agree completely, is that the uplifting feeling of the inauguration will lure us in to forgetting the insurrection on January 6. Whether consciously or unconsciously, our brains and our bodies might want to forget that travesty and focus on the positive. But we cannot. As Rev. Kimberly Quinn Johnson preached last Sunday, anger is important. Anger is necessary. "Anger," she told us, "is the fire that won't let me walk away or turn my back on pain, harm, and injustice."

So what do we do? How can we hold this dual reality, of change and not change, and take advantage of the opportunities we have with new energy?

This question has answers at many levels, of course, from individual to international. But I want to focus very specifically on what we do as a congregation. And not just a generic congregation, but who we are as All Souls Church. We are a large congregation with a long history and a lot of momentum. Our location in the nation's Capital means that we have a scope of concern that is local, national, and international. Many of our members and volunteer leaders work in government or large nonprofits, and there are high expectations and a high capacity for what we do as a congregation. Other staff that have served here temporarily have noted that the pace at All Souls is very fast.

There are positives to this, for sure. But there are also downsides. Within my arena, the Social Justice Ministry, it's easy for people to bring their professional work culture into their congregational work. But it is simply not possible for a small group of volunteers to do the work of entire professional organizations or agencies. And in many of these professional settings, there is enormous pressure to attract and retain funding, so there's an emphasis on output and measurable outcomes that can be captured in numbers. We want to do some of this at All Souls,

because we certainly want our work to be effective. But our circumstances and calling as a congregation means that we have to approach doing the work and evaluating the work very differently.

As President Biden mentioned on Wednesday, we face multiple challenges at once. Longstanding racial injustice and white supremacy. Climate change. I would add access to affordable housing, access to healthy food, and access to humane and logical paths to legal residency and citizenship just to name a few. They are complicated, interconnected, and require much more than just policy change. The only way to truly tackle them, and to create culture change, is through deeper forms of collaboration over the long haul. This kind of work is about more than transactional objectives someone can quantify for a grant report. This work cannot be outcome-driven to succeed. It must be relationship driven.

The title for my sermon “This is the Way” is intended as a light-hearted reference to the shift I’m talking about. The phrase comes from a popular TV show called The Mandalorian, which takes place in the Star Wars world after Return of the Jedi.

The short story—without spoilers—is that “This is the way” is a ritualistic saying of the Mandalorian people, who are fierce warriors with a highly dogmatic commitment to their own beliefs and way of being. But the focus of the show is how the central character, one of the most notorious Mandalorians, is doing things in highly un-orthodox ways to protect someone he cares about, who happens to be an incredibly adorable baby Yoda creature. Although the Mandalorian was deeply conditioned to believe and act only in certain ways, his compassion for another being compels him to change.

In our context, I believe we need to shift our concerns from being about issues to being about people. And not just people plural, but individual persons we know because we have met them and work with them.

Let me give you a snapshot of what I mean, related to one of our most long-standing social justice ministries: supporting affordable housing. Our most significant contributions in this arena was playing a lead role in the construction of Columbia Heights Village, just a few blocks from All Souls, which currently houses more than 1000 residents in its 406 units. Just a few years ago, the Change All Souls Housing Corporation worked closely with the Columbia Heights Village Tenant Association and a national nonprofit to buy out Clark Realty, a for-profit developer, and give more authority to the residents.

But there is much more to do, so much more. Because Washington, DC, is one of the most rapidly gentrifying cities in the country.

One of the key priorities in our housing ministry, in addition to building new affordable housing, is to preserve existing housing. And I want you to know about the cycle that happens again and again through public housing projects in the city. It goes like this:

- The District of Columbia Housing Authority does wildly inadequate upkeep and maintenance of public housing, often resulting in unsafe and unhealthy conditions.
- Eventually, the years of neglected maintenance renders the buildings so compromised

that DC can legally tear them down.

- The DC government makes empty promises to the residents about the speed of construction and the right of return. In the end, most residents aren't provided with any other meaningful housing options; they're just given vouchers and forced to find somewhere else to live in a city that gets less and less affordable every year.
- With the former residents scattered throughout the city, their political power is almost entirely eliminated. Then the construction itself is drawn out over so many years that few people want to return, because they and their families have been settled into new neighborhoods and new schools for 3 to 5 years or more.

So new housing gets built with fewer units and fewer affordable units and a private developer makes millions. Versions of this process have happened and continue to happen all across the city. The Navy Yard and Wharf were built in this exact way.

A few years ago, I participated in a series of visits that the Washington Interfaith Network set up with tenant associations we work with in several properties slated for redevelopment. WIN's focus in these situations is to support the tenant's associations in building power and being heard. Seeing the buildings and hearing from the residents was very powerful. As we were leaving Garfield Terrace on 11th Street NW, which is public housing for seniors and people with disabilities, one of the speakers shouted down the hall "Don't forget about us." I still see her, and hear her, in my head. And it changes how I approach the work.

Her circumstances, and the status of public housing all over DC, haven't really changed as a result of the national election. Speaking on a call in November, one of our organizing partners from CASA of Pennsylvania said "The win is not the election. The win is when our communities have what they need." If you want to become involved in the housing ministry, email me and I'll get you connected. We're currently working to support the Tenants of Park Morton public housing, located between Georgia Avenue and the Old Soldier's Home, who are organizing fiercely against the exact cycle I've described.

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Although the timeline for returning to in-person worship and meetings is still unknown, I am approaching it as an opportunity to re-launch our social justice ministry. Much of the attention in the last year has been on the election, and rightly so. And other groups really slowed down during the pandemic. So it's a good time to think about re-starting in different ways.

And an interesting thing has happened in the past 10 months. Pre-pandemic, it was very hard to find times for all the leaders of the social justice groups to meet together. Folks are so busy, and so stretched, that even though most people said they wanted to meet altogether it never really clicked. But after the pandemic restricted us to our homes, I started doing regular check-in calls and got more participation than ever. So now there's a level of relationship that hasn't existed before. And as we've talked about this re-launch of the social justice ministry, there is widespread agreement that we should do less things, and do them more collaboratively so that the work is more effective and more sustainable.

There is also widespread agreement that relationship building has to be at the core of what we do. This certainly includes building relationships with people and organizations outside of All Souls, but it also includes getting to know each other. There is a particular model that we're following, thanks to training from the Washington Interfaith Network, but the action is really basic. You talk to another person. Intentionally. And your primary goal is relationship building, not achieving some other objective in a way that makes the interaction feel perfunctory or transactional. That's all it is: you talk to one other person with a genuine focus on getting to know them.

And seriously, it's a pretty telling sign of the dominant culture that this work is even necessary; that we have to be intentional about something as simple as talking to another person to get to know them. But in so many places, at All Souls and elsewhere, it doesn't happen because we feel so much pressure to jump in and get the work done. I am here to tell you (and myself!), and I will keep telling you (and myself!), that building relationships IS the work. Building relationships IS the work. Say it with me: building relationships IS the work.

If you want to try this out in real time, I encourage you to join the racial justice action group meeting happening at 11:45 this morning. It will start with one-to-one conversations, and then move to looking at the group's work on education and advocacy in the coming months.

I generally try not to close sermons with a list of three things, because it seems too formulaic, but sometimes there really are three things that make sense to close with. So hopefully you'll bear with me if I do it from time to time.

First, I invite you to get involved, or re-involved, in the Social Justice Ministry. Whether you've been an active leader for decades, or your brand new – there is a place for you. And I invite you to approach the work knowing that it has to be different than what happens in other venues. Here at All Souls, it's going to focus on relationship building, and spiritual reflection, and achieving more through collaboration.

Second, regardless of whether you are or want to be involved in the Social Justice Ministry, I invite you to bring a focus on relationship building to whatever you do at All Souls Church. Whatever committees you're on, or groups you're in, or if you're just flying solo, I invite you to invest in relationships. I think you'll be glad you did.

Third and finally, I want to return to my overall message today. Wednesday's inauguration was, and should be, a cause for celebration. It represents so much hard work by so many people, and offers some desperately needed possibilities for change. But let the events of these recent weeks also be a cause for collaboration. Remember Melissa Harris-Perry's message to us in January 2016. We cannot outsource responsibility for our city and our country to elected leaders, or even to our civil rights heroes.

I understand why President Biden is calling for unity. But the call I'm hearing from our neighbors and organizing partners is not for unity. It is for justice. It's for real change that lasts. As our colleague from CASA said, "the win is not the election. The win is when our communities have what they need."



So let us dedicate and re-dedicate ourselves, as All Souls Church, to the work of justice. Amen.

**Anthem (All Souls BAM Ensemble)**

“I Find It Hard to Say (Rebel)” (Lauryn Hill)

I find it hard to say, that everything is alright  
Don't look at me that way, like everything is alright  
'Cause my own eyes can see, through all your false pretenses  
But what you fail to see, is all the consequences

You think our lives are cheap, and easy to be wasted  
As history repeats, so foul you can taste it  
And while the people sleep, too comfortable to face it  
His life so incomplete, and nothing can replace it

And while the people sleep, too comfortable to face it  
Your lives so incomplete, and nothing can replace it  
Fret not thyself I say, against these laws of man  
'Cause like the bible says, His blood is on their hands

And what I gotta say, and what I gotta say, is rebel  
While today is still today, choose well  
And what I gotta say, is rebel  
Repent. The day is far too spent. You might as well

Wake up!  
Are you satisfied?

**Offering (Shari Gilbert)**

Kindness. Sharing. Tolerance. Unity. Trust.

Those were some of the positive and uplifting words spoken during the Biden-Harris inauguration ceremonies, normal yet welcoming and assuring words after these years of discord, disharmony, and divisiveness.

Those words and this time of hard work and optimism ahead remind me of my introduction to All Souls church.

The first time I stepped foot into All Souls was in July of 1987. My then boyfriend, future husband, and now former husband was an activist in the Let Nicaragua Live! Campaign, a campaign and activists supporting the 1979 Sandanista Revolution that had ousted a US-backed dictator.

Let Nicaragua Live met in All Souls that Sunday in July 1987, and we sat up in the balcony to the right of the organ.

Fast forward 22 years to November of 2009. We had two children, 10 and 8, and were going through a divorce. We had attended the Arlington UU church with my inlaws but had never attended All Souls Unitarian. I was crazy – I worried about parking! Anyway, unbeknownst to me, during our separation, he, my former husband, had started taking our kids to All Souls and had enrolled them in RE. He asked me to consider bringing them to All Souls on the weeks they were with me and after some resistance, I agreed. So the second time I stepped foot in All Souls was with them, on one of the Sundays the kids were with Dad, and they showed me around, showed me what they'd started. They showed me where the kids went to RE, and then we sat together, my divorcing husband and I, during my first service at All Souls. We sat up there. I'm pointing to the balcony up here, to the right of the pulpit.

Needless to say, I was hooked and quickly picked up on what they had started. The kids attended RE every Sunday, and we parents accompanied them every other Sunday on our weeks with the kids, and it became a part of our collective lives.

I've tried to reword that saying "the family that prays together stays together" to apply to our situation. But really, I guess, it still applies. I still call his family my in-laws, and we are very much in touch with each other. I've waved to his new wife during services, back when we met in the Sanctuary, and, in fact, Rob Keithan performed their wedding service several years ago.

So when I thought about the new administration and those words

Kindness. Sharing. Tolerance. Unity. Trust.

I thought about the role All Souls played in our divorce. Don't get me wrong, there were tough times of discord, disharmony, and divisiveness, as we navigated our way through the messiness of divorce. But here we are, on this side, where kindness and unity and trust have won.

We at All Souls and our country have work to do in the days and months ahead. But. We. Will. Do. It! With...

Kindness. Sharing. Tolerance. Unity. Trust.

Let this morning's offering begin.

## **Hymn**

16 "'Tis a Gift to Be Simple"

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free,  
'Tis the gift to come down where I ought to be;  
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,  
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.

When true simplicity is gained,  
To bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed;

to turn, turn, will be my delight.  
Till by turning, turning we come round right.

### **Benediction (Rev. Keithan)**

Our benediction in music is a powerful song with powerful lyrics from the band Delta Rae, and it also has some strong and disturbing images from the insurrection at the Capitol. So I want to give it some context.

As I spoke about in the sermon, although there are some aspects of our national political situation that are vastly different, there are also many things about our nation that are unchanged. And we have to be willing to do things differently here at church in order to address the real problems.

This video is intended to be uncomfortable. Songwriter Ian Hölljes says: “The silence of white moderates has been a problem for as long as civil rights have been an issue, which is forever in this country.” The lyrics: “All good people, won’t you come around? Won’t you come around? Won’t you come around?” are not intended to be self-congratulatory, but rather a profound question about what we’re going to do. So, alongside the historic firsts and positive symbolism of the inauguration, I invite you to also hold this challenge as reminder of the work undone.

### **Music (All Souls BAM Ensemble)**

“All Good People” (Ian and Eric Hölljes)

There are dogs in the yard,  
howling at the moon  
There are sinners like me  
our judgment’s coming soon  
And I stand at the bottom  
of this dark and lonely well  
Saying “please give me answers  
so I might escape Hell”

I watched from my window  
as they gunned down unarmed men  
Tried to say it’s not my problem:  
couldn’t happen to my friends  
But the truth is they’re my brothers,  
and they’re my countrymen  
And if we lose our better angels,  
we won’t get them back again

Come on and raise your voice above the raging seas  
We can’t hold our breath forever when our brothers cannot breathe  
Come on and raise your voice above the raging seas  
We can’t hold our breath forever when our sisters cannot breathe

All good people, won't you come around?  
Won't you come around? Defend your brothers

Well I've lived outside Atlanta  
in Durham and Nashville  
I spent years in California,  
in the valleys and the hills  
And they say we'll fix the problem,  
yeah we all live the dream  
But when shots ring out in Charleston

Come on and raise your voice above the raging seas  
We can't hold our breath forever when our brothers cannot breathe  
Come on and raise your voice above the raging seas  
We can't hold our breath forever when our sisters cannot breathe

All good people, won't you come around?  
Won't you come around? Won't you come around?  
All good people, won't you come around?  
Won't you come around? Defend your brothers?

All good people, won't you come around?  
Won't you come around? Won't you come around?  
All good people, won't you come around?  
Won't you come around? Hold up each other?