

Worship transcript for January 31, 2021

Prelude (Shacara Rogers, vocals; John Lee, guitar)

“Sometimes I Cry” (Chris Stapleton)

There are days that I can walk around like I’m alright,
And I pretend to wear a smile on my face,
And I could keep the pain from comin’ out of my eyes,
But sometimes, sometimes,

Sometimes I cry,
Cry,
Sometimes I cry,
When I can’t do nothing else.

Everybody keeps tellin’ me to move on,
Oh but I can’t seem to go anywhere without you,
Cause ever since, and every single night you been gone,
Sometimes, sometimes,

Sometimes I cry,
Cry,
Sometimes I cry,
When I can’t do nothing else

Sometimes I cry
Sometimes I cry
Sometimes I cry
When I can’t do nothing else.

Call to Worship (Rev. Louise Green)

I’m Rev. Louise, one of your worship leaders today. We gather in this Zoom community, in this online ritual, to grieve. To feel pain with others. To turn grief into resistance, through group alchemy which is greater than the sum of the parts.

This last year brought waves of sorrow that tapped into long-held lamentation.
Piercing pain that can feel unbearable. Repeating deaths that overwhelm the brain.
Individual heartache and family loss. Collective struggles that broke out into movements rising.

As we grieve, we yearn for solace. We call in all angels, seeking some way.
Sometimes we cry, when we can’t do anything else. We keen, and rage, and march.
We lie down exhausted in great silence. There is the sharp absence, the added insult to injury, the bitter frustration, the accumulating and heavy losses.

Grief work is holy work, and we each need spaces for sacred pause.

We search for ways to digest experience, integrate intensity. The layers are deep, and the stories vast. Each of us carries lament in the body itself, within our ancestral history, our individual constellations of grief.

Beloveds, this is all more than we can fathom in talking mind or typing chat. We need creative forces to express all that is happening now. Music, image, movement, all sounding forth from the depths is needed.

Experience this worship time as whole body, held in this special community. Grieving in our home spaces, yet in collective Zoom sanctuary. We will ride powerful waves of sound and word in this sacred circle of digestion and integration. Together we will weave our Sunday space for solidarity. Blessings on this journey.

We kindle the chalice flame as Unitarian Universalist community each Sunday, as element of fire, and symbol of hope. I welcome David Jackson and Jennifer Keller to lead us now in chalice lighting.

Chalice Lighting (Jennifer Keller and David Jackson)

Hymn

“Within Our Darkest Night”

Within our darkest night
You kindle the fire that never dies away
Never dies away

Welcome (Rev. Maybelle Taylor Bennett)

Good morning. I’m Rev. Maybelle Taylor Bennett, and I am your worship associate this morning. Welcome to All Souls Church, where our name says it all. Here we seek to create a community where ALL people—people of all races, creeds, sexual orientations, gender expressions and nonbinary, those with differing abilities—where ALL people are welcome at the table of God’s love and human fellowship.

In a world of division, our mission at All Souls is to build what Dr. King called the “Beloved Community,” a diverse, spirit-filled, justice-seeking community that bears witness to the unity of the human family. I want to extend a special welcome to our visitors and guests. We invite you to join us on this journey of faith and hope.

If we were in the sanctuary, I’d invite you to turn and greet one another, but for our virtual gathering, we do something called “beholding.” We take a few moments to scroll through the gallery view of faces. Some will be familiar to you – others you won’t know – but today, we are

part of the Great Family of All Souls. Hold each soul in your mind and heart as we begin our worship together.

Congregational Concerns and Prayer (Rev. Rob Keithan)

Good morning, All Souls. Happy first snow of the year! I'm Rev. Rob Keithan, your Minister for Social Justice, and I have a few announcements this morning. First, our virtual Find Your Ministry Fair launches today. We encourage you to visit the special page on our website where you can see videos from many of the different ministries here at All Souls. If you want to feel more connected, I encourage you to get active in one of our groups.

Also after our service today, and next Sunday as well, the Board of Trustees will hold breakout conversations on whether or not to extend our time of interim ministry for another year. They only want to make such an important decision with input from the congregation, so you are invited to join today or next Sunday. See the chat for the Zoom information.

Also, our two monthly drop-in covenant groups have meetings this week: tomorrow, Monday, at 1:00 PM with me; and Thursday, February 4, at 7 PM with Rev. Kathleen. The groups will explore the February theme of "Spiritual Friendships." All are welcome to these drop-in groups; the Zoom info is on the church homepage.

This coming Saturday, there will be a presentation entitled "Racial Trauma: What Is It and How Do I Cope?" It is open to all those who do not identify as White. Facilitator Stacey Thompson has over nine years of experience as a Clinical Social Worker and specializes in working collaboratively with adults to address trauma, depression, anxiety, and loss and grief. She utilizes techniques from body-oriented psychotherapies, mindfulness, brain-based therapies, and Reiki. That's Saturday, February 6, 1-3 pm. There's a zoom link on All Souls Calendar.

And last, there are still spaces available for the class with Rev. Dr. John Buehrens, former President of the Unitarian Universalist Association, reflecting on his latest book: *Conflagration: How the Transcendentalists Sparked the American Struggle for Racial, Gender, and Social Justice* which was published last year by Beacon Press. It's four sessions on Sunday evenings at 7:00 PM, starting February 7. You can register via the church calendar or the Adult Spiritual Development page.

We turn now to our pastoral concerns.

First, our condolences to Valerie Fowlkes-Bynum, All Souls' Bookkeeper, who has lost two aunts in two weeks. Our hearts go out to Valerie and her family.

And we send love to Colleen and Patrick Fitzgerald as they mourn the loss of their good friend Jeff, who died unexpectedly this month. They miss him terribly and are also holding Jeff's partner Charlie in their hearts.

We have three All Souls members struggling with serious health conditions.

Let us send healing prayers to Goldia Hodgdon, who was hospitalized with COVID this week. She is stabilizing but is still in serious condition. Her extended family household is also dealing with COVID, so we extend our prayers to them as well.

Marita Lee-Huang was hospitalized for heart and lung issues last week, recovering at home now, and still needs home support. Healing prayers for Marita.

And we continue to pray for Brian Barger, and wife Tia. Brian is still hospitalized in New York City for treatment of pancreatic cancer.

And finally, we celebrate Gregory Swanson, the first black student at UVA Law School—after he sued them to attend. His daughter Karen asked that we remember her father. (Every year UVA School of Law presents the Gregory H. Swanson Award annually during a law and race symposium.). And we celebrate her mother, Betty Swanson, now in her 90th year and a member of All Souls since 1969.

In the silence that follows, please say aloud the names of those you carry on your heart this morning.

Spirit of Life and Love, God of transcendence and transformation,
These are strange and challenging times. Help us to make it through the paths each of us must follow. The circumstances and struggles we face have some commonalities—such is the nature of a pandemic. And yet there are stark differences as well, by economic status, by race, by age, by health. By the nature of one's job. By whether or not there are children at home. Great Spirit, we pray for the courage and resilience to help ourselves and each other. We pray for the strength and fortitude to keep going, to remain steadfast in our values. May we draw strength and purpose from this community and our shared tradition. For thousands of years, people have fought for love and liberation—even in the harshest of conditions. May we take inspiration from their example. May we claim the power to be authors of our own history. We pray for grace, and we pray for resolve, for they are intertwined and inseparable. 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.

Offering (Rev. Bennett)

Each Sunday we consider how much this congregation means to us, and what we might give back to our church community.

I was introduced to All Souls most recently through an invitation to join a friend for the vespers service. I fell in love with the taize-style chanting, insightful readings, meditation, the serene atmosphere and the warm fellowship. Since then, almost five years ago, I have sung with the Vespers Choir, served as liturgist during the service, and found a mentor here at All Souls, all of which have enriched my life. It is a joy for me to give generously of my personal energies and material means.

As the plates pass this morning, I invite you to consider the importance of this church in your lives, and to give generously. The morning's offering will now be received.

Anthem (All Souls Choir; Shacara Rogers, soloist)

“Ohio” (Neil Young; arr. by Jon Batiste, Gary Clark Jr., and Leon Bridges)

Tin soldiers and Nixon's callin'
We're finally on our own
This summer I hear the drummin'
Four dead in Ohio
Gotta get down to it
Soldiers are cutting us down
Should've been done long ago
What if you knew her and found her dead on the ground?
How can you run when you know?
Four dead in Ohio.

Sermon (Rev. Green)

“Turning Grief Into Resistance”

We hold silence after this elegy for Black lives. Breathing gently for those who no longer breathe. Holding space for lamentation. (Pause)
Spirit of Life, Web of Creation, hold us in your deep Love. We rest in this Love. Amen.

This reflection is a litany of remembering, naming and honoring experience.
Moving from loss to action and change, from brokenness to wholeness.

In 1970, the powerful song Ohio lamented the shooting of four students at Kent State.
The song itself galvanized resistance out of grief.

The impulse grew to rise up ever stronger, against the Viet Nam war, against military force used on protesting students, with accumulation of deaths rising, harm increasing.

Reimagined in 2017, the song lamented those lying dead every single day. Black and brown bodies in the street, in the car, in the jail, in the home, over and over again. The impulse grew to rise up ever stronger, against police and military violence, with accumulation of deaths rising, harm increasing.

Experienced in 2021, the song moves to grieve deaths each minute around the world. In the heavy tick tock rhythm, trauma, the spreading of a virus, halting of life as we knew it. The impulse grows to rise up ever stronger, for the sake of humanity and the planet, claiming access to health care and vaccines — with accumulation of deaths rising, harm increasing.

Each death is a person with a lifetime of stories, connected to a range of communities. Ones who held breath, in bodies with history, lives with personality. Hearts that have given care, souls loved by somebody somewhere.

The famous 20th century labor leader Mary Harris, known as Mother Jones or MoJo, told us, “Don’t mourn, organize.” She fiercely modeled grieving loss and community inequities, then turning sorrow into the driving force for change. Getting your mojo going.

As the cumulative effect of loss ripples out, people rise up. Humans turn grief into resistance, lean into pain, use anger and sorrow as fuel for action. History is full of these movement moments:

ACT UP activists mourning isolated and unacknowledged dead friends and lovers. Organizing for research and treatment for HIV virus. Throwing ashes on the White House grounds, spilling blood in St. Patrick’s Cathedral in NYC, spreading the AIDS Memorial Quilt on the National Mall.

Parents and community members grieving from multiple shootings across the country. Lobbying for gun restrictions and control in so many cities and states, and on Capitol Hill in D.C.

Women and allies marching together for women’s lives. Naming domestic violence, moving for reproductive health and freedom. Organizing for research and treatment for breast and ovarian cancer.

LGBTQ warriors and allies fighting for rights and protection. Organizing for marriage equality. Fighting for workplace protections. Mourning transgender people murdered, lamenting youth who commit suicide when in despair.

Japanese Americans and descendants of families held in WWII internment camps in the U.S. Collecting oral histories, creating films, deciding to tell the stories of what happened.

Standing Rock Sioux and their interfaith allies. Gathering to block the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, rallying in defense of sacred lands.

Muslim, Sikh, Jewish, African American communities mourning violence in places of worship. Gathering with those of many faiths and humanist values, declaring unity in Love.

Millions of people across this country and around the world. Pouring into the streets to say Black Lives Matter, in the wake of countless murders by law enforcement and military personnel. Fighting to be seen, heard, and mourned.

New actions are rising up in the Covid-19 pandemic. Creating public art memorials: flag displays at RFK Stadium in Washington, rows of empty chairs in Philadelphia on Independence Mall, braided flower ropes in outdoor sites in Manhattan. Communities of care forming. Organizing around our long global road to equitable access to vaccines.

All collective action comes from individuals joining forces, each one holding layers of grief. In my ministry, I hear many of these stories. From you at All Souls, as a national chaplain with Faith Matters Network, as a spiritual director and organizing trainer. To name a few:

A chaplain in a Texas hospital who must tell families the cremation organizations are full. The minister in Minnesota who finds mutual aid efforts for food overwhelming and draining. A Tennessee worker in tornado disaster relief counseling and providing services to unhoused residents and disrupted families. The chaplain in an Ohio hospital running short on beds, responding to patients from the nine prisons in the region. The teenager battling anxiety and depression by creating graphic novels and becoming immersed in music. The mother, overwhelmed by caring for children, parents, and constant Zoom work, who begins Nature walks in to restore. The isolated senior wishing for embodied human contact, who communes with others online. Being with families in all manner of illness, treatment, dying and memorials.

Images and stories, individual and group losses, collective actions. All must be digested in some way, integrated into the body. Grief will take you into a deep ocean, where you must learn to swim, surf, or drown. Anger will take you into a raging fire, where you will refine down, create strategic action, or be consumed in flame.

This is the personal transformative work of turning grief into resistance. To care for yourself in grief is restorative healing, repair and renewal. Healing is the necessary foundation for moving well, responding clearly, and being able to act again in Love.

Resistance can be healing, as you refuse to give up and fuel desire to live another day. Resistance can be energizing, when you decide to thrive while others say you will not survive. Resistance will be humbling, as you come to deeply understand that you have human limits. In defiance of the odds, we must design lives that do not drain, defeat, and demoralize. Resistance is eventually embracing wholeness in the face of great loss. Seeing beauty, solidarity, and creative force. Naming communities of care that will lift us up, when we simply cannot lift ourselves.

Turning grief into resistance takes collective action for change.

Turning grief into resistance is a decision to be whole.

Choose Love, which is holding us, so that you may fully rest in that Love, now and always.

Hymn

“There Is a Love”

There is a love holding us
There is a love holding all we love
There is a love holding all
We rest in this love

Benediction (Rev. Green)

Our closing words come from the youngest souls among us, the prophets of a future many of us will not see or experience in these bodies. Listen as they greet our new leaders in the White House and ask for powerful action emerging out of grief.

Messages to new Biden/Harris administration from ASC children & youth

Music (Jen Hayman, piano and vocals; Norah Quinn McCormick, vocals; Kate Saylor, violin)

Our benediction in music was written by blues/rock artist Nathaniel Rateliff during the pandemic. The video for the song features isolated streets and public places in big cities all over the world. Very powerful. The line that got caught in our throats as we were recording, and for many days after, was, “I can’t raise my hands so I’m raising my voice.” Thank you, young people of All Souls, for raising your voices today. We stand for you, we stand with you, and we will work to build a future worthy of your dreams.

“Time Stands” (Nathaniel Rateliff)

For a moment I could wait to see it fall apart
Every empty bed in every city I’ve been
I sit and contemplate all the moments you said
Time stands in a duel and I stand for you

What’s that you used to say? Find a love that you can wait for
Or do you feast upon the weak and weary of heart?
I can take the pain but I can’t take all the hatred
Laziness of mind and simplest of thoughts

Are you just too old or too young to carry?
Time stands in a duel and I stand for you

Now you’re pouring out your hate at every difference you found
You won’t even listen to reason at all
Not questioning your faith, far be it from me
But you would speak of love while tying one’s hands

Are you just too old or too young to carry?
Time stands in a duel and I stand for you
Are you just too old or too young to carry?
Time stands in a duel and I stand for you

Now lean and use your weight
That's what a shoulder's made for
Carry all the dead and children from here
Curses on the men and the greed that seems to plague them
I can't raise my hand so I'm raising my voice

Are you just too old or too young to carry?
Time stands in a duel and I stand for you
Are you just too old or too young to carry?
Time stands in a duel and I stand for you

Time stands in a duel and I stand for you
Time stands in a duel and I stand for you