

Worship transcript for February 7, 2021

Prelude (Women's 8)

"Trouble Me" (Natalie Merchant)

Trouble me, disturb me with all your cares and your worries
Trouble me on the days when you feel spent
Why let your shoulders bend underneath this burden
When my back is sturdy and strong?
Trouble me

Speak to me, don't mislead me, the calm I feel means the storm is swelling
Speak to me, there's no telling where it starts or how it ends
Speak to me, why are you building these thick, thick walls to defend me?
Speak to me, when your silence is my greatest fear?
Why let your shoulders bend underneath this burden
When my back is sturdy and strong?
Speak to me

Let me have a look inside these eyes while I'm learning
Let me, please don't hide them just because of tears
Let me send you off to sleep with a 'there there, now, stop your turnin' and tossin''
Let me know where the hurt is and how to heal

Spare, don't spare me, don't spare me of anything troubling...

Trouble me, disturb me with all your cares and your worries
Speak to me, and let our words build a shelter from the storm
And lastly, let me know what I can mend

There's more honesty than, my sweet friend, you can see
Trust is what I'm offering
If you'll trouble me.

Call to Worship (Rev. Kathleen Rolenz)

We rise. We breathe. We gather.
We give thanks. We greet. We remember.
We are new. We are regulars. We are children.
We are animal companions.
We are bodies. We are spirits. We are separate. We are one.
We rise. We breathe. We gather. We give thanks.
We are here – come. Let us worship together.

In screens across the country this morning, people huddle around a single flame, such a small thing that represents the light of truth, the warmth of community, the fire of commitment. This morning we welcome Steven Stichter and Mark Ewert to light our chalice.

Chalice Lighting (Steven Stichter and Mark Ewert)

Hymn

“Come Sing a Song with Me”

Come, sing a song with me, come, sing a song with me,
come, sing a song with me, that I might know your mind.
(Chorus) And I’ll bring you hope when hope is hard to find,
and I’ll bring a song of love and a rose in the wintertime.

Come, dream a dream with me, come, dream a dream with me,
come, dream a dream with me, that I might know your mind.
(Chorus)

Come, walk in rain with me, come, walk in rain with me,
come, walk in rain with me, that I might know your mind.
(Chorus)

Come, share a rose with me, come, share a rose with me,
come, share a rose with me, that I might know your mind.
(Chorus)

Welcome (Annmarie Dinan Hansen)

Good Morning! Welcome to All Souls Church!

Good morning – I’m Annmarie Dinan Hansen and I am your worship associate this morning. I’m also a seminarian, attending (seminary); inspired to explore ministry because of my relationship with All Souls.

Welcome to All Souls Church, where our name says it all. Where we seek to create a community where ALL people—people of all races, creeds, sexual orientations, gender expressions, those with differing abilities—where ALL people are welcome at the table of love and human fellowship.

In an effort to acknowledge and support Indigenous communities, it is important to recognize the land on which our church stands. We acknowledge that Native Americans were here before us, are here with us now and will continue to be with us as we look forward to the future. Let’s take a moment of silence to reflect whose land we’re on. (silence for a moment)

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! I'm Rev. Rob Keithan, your Minister for Social Justice, and I have a few announcements this morning.

After today's service, the Board of Trustees will hold a breakout conversation 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 the conversation. See the chat for the Zoom information.

Registration for the class with Rev. Dr. John Buehrens on his latest book, entitled "Conflagration: How the Transcendentalists Sparked the American Struggle for Racial, Gender, and Social Justice" closes at noon today. The class is four sessions on Sunday evenings at 7:00 PM, starting tonight. You can register via the church calendar or the Adult Spiritual Development page.

This coming Wednesday February 9 is a 2nd Wednesday, meaning that it's our monthly Vespers service. All are invited to ground and renew your spirit in these contemplative services, from 7:30-8:30 PM.

Finally, I want to acknowledge that it's Black History Month, and invite you to stay tuned this coming week for more information related to two upcoming opportunities for racial justice education and reflection.

First, the Beloved Conversations curriculum—which All Souls has offered twice in the past—has been updated and adapted to a virtual experience. It's being released in three parts, and the first phase "Within" focuses on the internal work that each of us needs to do, as we engage personal exploration of race and our work for racial justice. This work is different for white folks and for Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and other racially targeted groups (BIPOC+)* so the "Within" phase will be done entirely in race-based caucuses/courses. Each course has 9 meetings over the span of 3 months. There are two options for people who identify as Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and/or other racially targeted groups, and one option for people who identify as white. There is a registration fee, but no one will be turned away for lack of funds. Registration ends February 26 and the course starts March 16.

<https://www.meadville.edu/fahs-collaborative/fahs-curriculum-catalogue/beloved-conversations/registration-details/>

Second, later this month All Souls is launching an Introduction to Anti-Racism for White People course. Communities of color have specifically asked White people to take initiative and responsibility for their own education. This class is intended to complement and/or prepare people for the Jubilee training; it is not a replacement. It will be facilitated by Jennifer Langer Smith, me, and others. It's 4 sessions from 7:00-9:00 PM on Monday nights starting Feb 22.

Again, look to your inboxes this week for more info and registration links for both these courses.

We turn now to our pastoral concerns. Our hearts are with Barbara McCann, who will travel soon to Seattle to visit her father and family. Barbara's stepmom has gone into hospice care, and her father needs some additional support.

We send our love to Shelby Ferncrombie, who has been hospitalized for a week for mental health support in Massachusetts. Our hearts are with Shelby as she navigates treatment, and with her parents now in MA: Jennifer Abercrombie and Kurt Fernstrom. Her brother Jasper is with family in New Jersey, and we hold him in our prayers as well.

Our thoughts remain with Goldia Hodgdon, in COVID treatment at Washington Hospital Center. We are heartened to hear that she is going to be cleared soon for discharge and is feeling much stronger! Goldia will go to a rehab facility to continue her recovery, probably next week. Prayers to Goldia, her husband John, and her extended family household.

We are also sending healing care to Marita Lee-Huang, who continues to recover slowly at home. Marita has ongoing heart and lung issues and had some weaker days this week. Many thanks to Margery Myers, who is keeping very close watch on Marita, with neighbor Michael, and Marita's children.

Finally, this week we offer prayers for all those families navigating mental health issues during the pandemic. The nationwide rise in depression and anxiety has impacted many people in our congregation. We hold all in love and pray that you reach out to family, friends, and professional support networks. We lift up NAMI DC, the local chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, for resources on how to support others. www.namidc.org

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 connection and community,

In a time without easy answers or easy solutions, help us to appreciate what we do have. Remind us of the power and potential of friendship, across differences and across time.

Help us find the courage and vulnerability to open up. Help us find solace and support in one another.

And remind us all, each and every one of us, that we are worthy, and beautiful, and loved. Today and forever.

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.

Reading (Rev. Keithan)

“Old Friends” (Freya Man Fred)

Old friends are a steady spring rain,
or late summer sunshine edging into fall,
or frosted leaves along a snowy path—
a voice for all seasons saying, I know you.
The older I grow, the more I fear I’ll lose my old friends,
as if too many years have scrolled by
since the day we sprang forth, seeking each other.

Old friend, I knew you before we met.
I saw you at the window of my soul—
I heard you in the steady millstone of my heart
grinding grain for our daily bread.
You are sedimentary, rock-solid cousin earth,
where I stand firmly, astonished by your grace and truth.
And gratitude comes to me and says:

“Tell me anything and I will listen.
Ask me anything, and I will answer you.

Sermon (Rev. Rolenz)

“Just Friends”

It was May of 1887 and Frederick Douglas was on a man on a mission. While touring Europe that spring, he arranged to take an overnight train from Rome to Florence for one reason; to visit the gravestone of his good friend, the Unitarian minister, Theodore Parker. The friendship between Theodore Parker and Frederick Douglas was one of equals and allies. Frederick Douglas saw in Theodore Parker more than a white ally – he found in Parker, an activist; a man who was shunned by some of his own Unitarian colleagues for his radical, abolitionist and anti-slavery stance. So Douglas, upon visiting the plain brown gravestone, wrote this to his friend and journalist Theodore Stanton, son of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “our first move after coffee was to visit the grave of Theodore Parker...I am not an advocate of costly monuments over the decaying bodies of the dead...but the stone at such a man’s grave should be a sermon.”

In 2005, when my husband and I were on sabbatical we too, visited Parker’s grave, but thanks to Douglas, it is no rotting brownstone. Instead, it stands with a bas relief medallion of Parker and

underneath his likeness Douglas has put: “His name is engraved in marble/his virtues in the hearts of those he helped to free from slavery and superstition.”

Theodore Parker and Frederick Douglass were not just colleagues in the struggle to end slavery, they had a spiritual friendship. Spiritual friendship is the theme for this month’s series of sermons and it was indeed inspired by a recent book authored by Rev. Dr. John Buehrens called “Conflagration,” how the Transcendentalists sparked the American struggle for racial, gender and social justice.” I’ve invited Rev. Buehrens to lead a four part series beginning tonight on this book. So I want to give credit this morning to both Rev. Buehrens and to your former minister, the Rev. Dr. Rob Hardies, who wrote extensively about the spiritual friendships that existed between our 19th century Transcendentalist ancestors – and of the relevance these relationships have for us today. What both Buehrens and Hardies highlights are the astonishing intersections between race and class; gender and theology that forged the legacy of Transcendentalism and gave us a model for spiritual practice in the 21st century.

What makes a friendship – spiritual? To answer that, I have to look back again to the 19th century and in particular the brilliant Margaret Fuller who led a series of women’s conversations on the subject “What were we born to do? And how shall we do it?” Fuller cultivated these conversations to help the participants grow in their relationship to God and to deepen in their own understanding of what the transcendentalists called “Self Culture.” Self culture was the development of one’s mind or capacities through one’s own efforts – or as William Ellery Channing would write “to whet our appetite for truth, to carry our thoughts beyond their old tracks.”

As the popularity of these conversational salons grew, the participants realized it wasn’t only about intellectual inquiry (although they did) nor was it solely focused on social justice (although most were ardent abolitionists), they were vehicles for nurturing and assessing one another’s character. Fuller believed that her mind and spirit required conversation to develop. “Conversation is my natural element” she wrote, “I need to be called out and never think alone, without imagining some companion.” As Rev. Hardies writes “For Fuller, this process of being called out by another – when their soul elicited a response from deep within her own – was a revelatory moment that could only occur in a relationship context. It was central to her and other Unitarian’s relational theology.”

In our covenant drop in group this past Thursday we contrasted the way that Margaret Fuller uses the phrase “calling out” and the way it is more typically used today. Most of us are pretty familiar with calling someone out. I’d venture to say that the most public call out that just happened this week was regarding calling out Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene for her racist, anti-Semitic comments and bullying – to call out only a few of her odious behaviors. There is definitely a place for calling out reprehensible words and deeds. I’d venture to say that many of us may feel pretty comfortable calling out injustice. But that’s not what Margaret Fuller meant when she spoke about her spiritual friendships. Again, citing Hardies work here: “She believed that certain persons enter our lives with “some peculiar errand to us,” some latent gift that they must “call out” of our soul – a gift that, without that person, might never emerge...Spiritual friends exhibit constancy and forbearance to one another.” Spiritual friendships are what I would call the 3 AM friends; the ones whom you know would take your call – even at 3 in the morning.

So a spiritual friendship is different than the casual friendship we might make because of shared interests, habits or hobbies – and this is not to say that one is better than the other. We need a large network of people who weave the social fabric of our lives. This ranges from the barista who starts making your triple soy decaf latte the minute you step through the coffee house door; to the Lyft Driver with whom you share a love of go-go, to the members of your fellow parenting group; to church friends whom you enjoy chatting with in Pierce Hall but don't know that well. These are all part of the connective tissue of our lives and the pandemic has temporarily suspended the ease of these comfortable relationships.

Yet, spiritual friends are ones with whom we can go deeper. They know us because we've invested time in the relationship. They trust us – and we trust them – because we have been lovingly called out when we have not been our best selves – and we have been called back into relationship with one another – because the relationship is worth saving. But then there's a third aspect that Fuller writes about in her description of these conversational salons. Fuller hoped that the participants would move from the circumference of their being...to the center. "Through conversation, Fuller hoped for women to find the voice that emanated from their spiritual and intellectual center, their soul. Fuller lamented that if, during a conversation, a person was never truly called out, but she would delight when it seemed that a woman had all her best self...called up." Your best self called up, instead of out.

A spiritual friendship can be found anywhere, but I contend that it is in the church – where we are encouraged not only to plan and plot about building the world we dream about, we have the opportunity to know each other as soul friends. Rob Keithan's sermon on January 24th, entitled "This is the Way" speaks about the power of relational organizing and one-on-ones. That's a term used by faith and community based organizing and it is literally the foundation of all organizing and justice work. This model, along with our current model of Small Group Ministries, locates the discussion first and foremost in relationship. We start with one another's stories and then, over time, after building trust, we begin to name, discuss and challenge our assumptions. We don't begin by calling each other out – we begin by calling one another in and up. Too often the only models we have for building friendships are based on either personal interest, ego affirmation or shared activities. But I think the way we change as human beings; whether is articulating our values more clearly or confronting our own implicit biases is by being called up by someone with whom we are building this beloved community.

And, again, I quote Margaret Fuller, she hoped that her friends would "learn by blundering." With that as its baseline, the participants weren't intimidated by the prospect of being less than brilliant or erudite; or by saying the wrong thing. We learn by blundering, but we do so within the embrace of a spiritual friendship – that calls us out – calls us in – and calls us up to the perfectly, imperfect, flawed and heartfelt human beings that we are.

I was called out, in and up by a friend and her comment changed my life. I was a second year seminarian and while visiting her one summer, told her all about the big spiritual concepts I was learning in seminary. I was saying stuff like: "my ontological epistemology and soteriological beliefs were being radically challenged by my social location..."or something like that. She listened for a long while and then she said "you know, I hear a lot of intellectual stuff, but I thought you were going into ministry because you cared about spirituality – your own and others. I thought you were going to be a minister because you cared about people. I don't hear or see any

of that in what you've been saying." When I get too high falutin' in my theological intellectual interests, and forget about the relationships that are at the center of my own theological longings, I think of my friend Kelly, whose personal deep well of spirituality continues to influence me to this day. Her candid, but loving challenge makes me a better minister, a better person and a better friend. That's what friends are for – or at least one aspect of friendship. Truth telling. Calling each other out, in and up – into the circle of love and care and respect for one another.

I don't like to be called out – even by a friend. It's hard. It's embarrassing. It flies right in the face of one key aspect of white supremacy culture – perfectionism! But this is where our Universalist ancestors have so much to offer us – we have to remember we are pre-forgiven. Our Universalist ancestors would say that God's love is the starting point and the ending point; and that that love is made manifest through our most intimate relationships; our lovers, our companions, our partners and of course, our friends. The purpose of this entire service is encourage you to ponder your friendships; and to consider the depth, the breadth and the quality of them. And if you haven't done so in a while, reach out to your friends. And if you are feeling bereft of friends or that the pandemic has narrowed your ability to stay connected, remember that even during this pandemic – the church is a place where we build relationships – through covenant groups, affinity groups, through coffee hour conversations and one-on-ones – this is the way we build spiritual friendships that can sustain us – and others – through the hard days and nights.

When we say we're "just friends" the meaning beneath the phrase is that somehow that friendship is not the pinnacle of one's relationship. The "just" diminishes the word "friend." But I think of friendship – and particularly those whom I call my spiritual friends – as justice seeking friends; as friends who know me and love me enough not to allow my worst impulses to go unchecked. To call up that core of inherent worth – of birthright dignity – to challenge every prejudice, every tendency towards arrogance or self-flagellation – to be a mirror of the divinity that lives within, among and beyond us. This more than just friends – it's the very essence of spiritual friendship itself. In these times of such distance and despair, ain't it good to know – you've got a friend.

Musical Interlude (Lila Benavente and Rochelle Rice)

"You've Got a Friend" (Carole King)

When you're down and troubled
And you need some love and care
And nothing, nothing is going right
Close your eyes and think of me
And soon I will be there
To brighten up even your darkest night

You just call out my name And you know wherever I am
I'll come running, to see you again
Winter, spring, summer or fall
All you have to do is call And I'll be there
You've got a friend

If the sky above you grows dark and full of clouds
And that old north wind begins to blow
Keep your head together and call my name out loud
Soon you'll hear me knocking at your door

You just call out my name And you know wherever I am
I'll come running, running, yeah, yeah, to see you again
Winter, spring, summer or fall All you have to do is call
And I'll be there, yes, I will
Now, ain't it good to know that you've got a friend

When people can be so cold?
They'll hurt you, yes, and desert you
And take your soul if you let them, oh, but don't you let them

You just call out my name And you know wherever I am
I'll come running, running, yeah, yeah, to see you again
Winter, spring, summer or fall All you have to do is call
And I'll be there, yes, I will You've got a friend You've got a friend

Spotlight on Friendship (Judith Bauer and Brenda Barron)

Anthem (Rochelle Rice and Jen Hayman, vocals; John Lee, guitar)

“Old Friends” (Paul Simon)

Old friends, old friends
Sat on their park bench like bookends
A newspaper blown through the grass
Falls on the round toes Of the high shoes
Of the old friends

Old friends, winter companions, the old men
Lost in their overcoats, waiting for the sun
The sounds of the city sifting through trees
Settle like dust On the shoulders
Of the old friends

Can you imagine us years from today
Sharing a park bench quietly?
How terribly strange to be seventy

Old friends, memory brushes the same years
Silently sharing the same fears...

Time it was And what a time it was
It was A time of innocence A time of confidences

Long ago, it must be I have a photograph
Preserve your memories—They're all that's left you.

Offering (Annmarie Dinan Hansen)

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

My name is Annmarie Dinan Hansen, and it was a friendship that first brought me to All Souls. I had just moved back to DC from Philadelphia, where I was part of a left-wing, non-denominational Christian Church, and was seeking a spiritual community where I could feel supported and be part of something bigger than myself in order to help better my community.

My housemate at the time, who had a longtime fascination with religion, but is not religious herself told me I should “go to that church at sixteenth and Harvard”. She had heard good things about it, and honestly, receiving a church recommendation from her was downright intriguing.

It took me three years before I started going to coffee hour, and when I started attending at last, I became integrated in the community quickly. I started going to Adult Spiritual Development classes, and when I began pursuing my life-long goal of going to Seminary and pursuing a religious education, I had all the earnest support I needed. The most important part of this support is that it is rooted in friendship. The support I received was- authentic, and that was empowering. I pledge because I know that places like this exist only through individual generosity. 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.

Hymn

“Lean on Me” (Bill Withers)

Sometimes in our lives we all have pain, we all have sorrow.
But if we are wise we know that there's always tomorrow.
Lean on me when you're not strong and I'll be your friend, I'll help you carry on,
For it won't be long 'til I'm gonna need somebody to lean on.
Just call on me brother when you need a hand. We all need somebody to lean on.
I just might have a problem that you'd understand. We all need somebody to lean on.
Lean on me when you're not strong and I'll be your friend, I'll help you carry on,
For it won't be long 'til I'm gonna need somebody to lean on

Benediction (Rev. Rolenz)

May you go forth from this place knowing you are good and knowing you are loved.
May you go forth from this time knowing you are cherished and supported.
May you go forth from this moment, able to give more than you receive,
Shine on friends – Shine on now and every more...

Music (Women's 8 +)

“That’s What Friends Are For” (Burt Bacharach and Carole Bayer Sager; arr. by Trey McLaughlin)

And I never thought I’d feel this way
And as far as I’m concerned
I’m glad I got the chance to say
That I do believe, I love you
And if I should ever go away
Well, then close your eyes and try
To feel the way we do today
And then if you can remember

Keep smiling, keep shining
Knowing you can always count on me, for sure
That’s what friends are for
For good times and bad times
I’ll be on your side forever more
That’s what friends are for

Well, you came in loving me
And now there’s so much more I see
And so by the way, I thank you
Oh and then for the times when we’re apart
Well, then close your eyes and know
The words are coming from my heart
And then if you can remember

Keep smiling and keep shining
Knowing you can always count on me, for sure
That’s what friends are for
In good times and bad times
I’ll be on your side forever more
That’s what friends are for

I’ll be there, I’ll be there
Just call my name, and I’ll be there
Just look over your shoulder, honey....