

Worship transcript for February 14, 2021

Prelude (All Souls Jubilee Singers)

“A Peaceful Place” (Richard Smallwood)

Call to Worship (Rev. Kathleen Rolenz)

These words by the late Rev. Dr. Hope Johnson: We are one, a diverse group of proudly kindred spirits, here not by coincidence but because we choose to journey together. We are active and proactive. We care deeply. We live our love as best we can. We are one, working, eating, laughing, playing, singing, storytelling, sharing, and rejoicing, getting to know each other, taking risks, opening up, questioning, seeking, searching, trying to understand, struggling, making mistakes, paying attention, asking questions, listening, living our answers, learning to love our neighbors, learning to love ourselves, apologizing and forgiving with humility, and being forgiven through grace, creating the beloved community together. We are one.

We invite Sunu and Satya Chandy, Erika Simmons and Grandma Elaine to kindle the flame in our chalice of hope this morning.

Chalice Lighting (Erika Symmonds, Sunu Chandy, Satya Symmonds Chandy, and Grandma Elaine)

Hymn 34

“Though I May Speak with Bravest Fire”

Though I may speak with bravest fire, and have the gift to all inspire,
and have not love, my words are vain as sounding brass and hopeless gain.

Though I may give all I possess, and striving so my love profess,
but not be given by love within, the profit soon turns strangely thin.

Come, Spirit, come, our hearts control, our spirits long to be made whole.
Let inward love guide every deed; by this we worship, and are freed.

Welcome (Jana Owens)

Welcome to All Souls Church! Welcome to a community where our search for spirituality and our passion for justice meet and mingle. Where our heads and our hearts are divided no more. Where reverence for the Earth and belief in the dignity of every person inform our ethics. Where music is an expression of our joy, prayer a sign of our faith, and acts of justice a symbol of our hope.

Welcome to a place where when we say All Souls we mean it, a place where ALL are welcome at the table of love and fellowship. Welcome one and all! I want to extend an especially warm

welcome to all who are joining us for the first time. Do stay on afterwards for coffee and conversation.

In an effort to acknowledge and support Indigenous communities, it is important to recognize that all of us –wherever we are – are living on ancestral lands. We acknowledge that the First Nations 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 together in the building, we would turn and greet one another. While we are still on-line, we do something called “beholding.” Take a moment to scroll through the gallery view, say hello in the chat to one another, and behold one another’s faces as we together, creating community. Again, welcome to All Souls.

Children’s Dedication

Kathleen: Gathered today we perform a ceremony of dedication to recognize these children by name and to pledge our support. In this ceremony, we declare not only these children’s parents’ responsibility for their upbringing, but also this entire congregation’s responsibility to help nurture them as they grow up in our midst. This church and our larger Unitarian Universalist faith are important parts of their spiritual development.

Question for parents: Jen & Eric Armakan, Eric and Coco Downey – by participating in this ritual today, you seek the blessings of this community and commit yourselves to teach this child to walk a spiritual path. Do you also commit yourselves to helping this child discover the source of love at the center of life? If so, please unmute respond, “we do.”

Question for grandparents/godparents: it is an honorable and loving tradition that you commit yourselves to this day. Will you, to the best of your abilities, promise to help with the love and care of this child and this child’s parents? If so, please respond “we will.”

Kathleen: “Jen Armakan & Eric Armakan. What is the name of this child? Camila Mahvash Armakan. I bless you with fire. May you come to know the spark of the divine that dwells within you.” “I bless you with the rose. May your life unfold in wondrous beauty like this flower.”

Eric and Coco Downey. What is the name of this child?. Quentin René Downey. I bless you with fire. May you come to know the spark of the divine that dwells within you.” “I bless you with the rose. May your life unfold in wondrous beauty like this flower.”

Please join Olivia Fields and the Johnson/Falk/ Null/Johnnullson family in our responsive reading. We ask that you remain muted while speaking the responses aloud.

Olivia: It is our faith that each child born is one more redeemer.

Johnnullsons: By this Service of Dedication, we commit ourselves to the nurture of these children.

Olivia: Are you ready to dedicate yourselves to Camila and Quentin?

Johnnullsons: We are prepared. We dedicate our minds and hearts to these children, and to their parents.

Olivia: Will you strive to love and cherish them in times of struggle as well as gladness?

Johnullsons: We will love and cherish them always.

Olivia: We acknowledge the divine spark within each child.

Johnullsons: May we be worthy guardians of these young lives. May we build a community in which they will grow old surrounded by beauty, embraced by love, and cradled in the arms of peace.

Congregational Concerns and Prayer (Rev. Louise Green)

I'm Rev. Louise Green, your minister of Congregational Care.

Let me start by wishing all a good Valentine's Day. Years ago I re-purposed this day as a celebration of Love in many forms. Whether you are grieving the love loss of beloved family or friend, celebrating the beauty of chosen soul friends, marking the anniversary of a partnership, or enjoying the delight of nieces & nephews you mentor—happy day of Love.

A few announcements from the life of our congregation:

You are invited today to a dialogue group on Transformative Justice, led by the Committee for Right Relations. This will be 11:30, or directly after the Benediction in music. The Zoom link will be in the chat and is on the website calendar.

Or, stay on this very same Zoom for our weekly Coffee Hour, with large and small group opportunities to visit, catch up, and reflect.

Join me for February drop-in Covenant Group on the theme of Spiritual Friendship. We will look at the Celtic concept of Soul Friends, Anam Cara, this Wednesday, 7:30-8:30 pm. Zoom link on the home page calendar.

Each week we name people and situations we want to lift into this sacred circle.

Celebrate Goldia Hodgdon is home from the hospital, recovering gradually from COVID with support from family and home health aides.

Sending strength to Shelby Ferncrombie, out of the hospital and back with parents and brother, and in mental health treatment in Virginia.

Wish healing and peace to Jose-Luis Sanchez, in ongoing treatment for colon cancer.

Sending blessings to Barbara McCann, in Seattle with her father, with stepmother in hospice care. Diane died peacefully early this morning, and we hold her and family in the Light.

Sending prayers of comfort and peace to Janet and Jack Powers for a dear aunt in North Carolina. She has ended two years of treatment for cancer and is now in hospice.

Finally, sending stamina for all those federal workers and Capitol Hill staff, coming through another difficult Washington week of re-trauma. And, perseverance for all of us watching stories unfold in arduous political times, full of both promise and peril.

Your names/silence

Millions around the world, including many of us here, are celebrating the New Year of the Ox, this year in the Metal Element of Chinese medicine. I attended an exuberant and inspiring celebration of Lunar New Year online on Friday night. Lunar New Year is Losar in Tibetan culture, Tet in Viet Nam, Solnal in Korea, sometimes Spring Festival in China.

Today I invite you into meditation, with themes drawn from this 2nd New Moon after Winter Solstice, Lunar New Year. Find a comfortable seat, tune in to body, with the words of Thich Nhat Hanh:

Breathing in, we calm body and mind. Breathing out, we smile.
Dwelling in the present moment, we know it is the only moment.

We reflect on new beginnings, on the always present chance to start again. Turning to the New Year, we anchor what will carry us for the next 12 months.

Letting go of last-year accumulations, we embark upon the next passageway. Our awareness embraces the element of Metal, lung meridian, deep energy and breath powering the heart. We meditate on the quality of grief, moving through loss, and the power of release. Setting down what no longer serves, we embrace unknown emerging with lighter Spirits.

On this New Year we return home, in ways literal and symbolic, and make space for new dwelling place. We ponder the qualities of the Ox, persistent and loyal, steady and solid. Taking the long view, without undue focus on passing fame, and the traps of drama and ego attachment. We name the strength of family, blood or chosen, honoring parents and grandparents in all their complexity, lineage of ancestors known and unknown.

Generations of those who went before, generations of those to come, all inspire us to live with purpose for a better future. The Ox brings stamina and strength, the wisdom of slow recovery. We remember what lasts, qualities of enduring Love, relationships which sustain us. We honor ties which are generational, the broad power of connected community, our ability to design collective future for the benefit of all beings.

Breathing in, we calm body and mind. Breathing out, we smile.
Dwelling in the present moment, we know it is the only moment.

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. Green)

“On Love & Grief” (adrienne maree brown)

If there happens to be a multitude of griefs upon you, individual and collective, or fast and slow, or small and large, add equal parts of these considerations:

- that the broken heart can cover more territory.
- that perhaps love can only be as large as grief demands.
- that grief is the growing up of the heart that bursts boundaries like an old skin or a finished life.
- that grief is gratitude.
- that water seeks scale, that even your tears seek the recognition of community.
- that the heart is a front line and the fight is to feel in a world of distraction.
- that death might be the only freedom.
- that your grief is a worthwhile use of your time.
- that your body will feel only as much as it is able to.
- that the ones you grieve may be grieving you.
- that the sacred comes from the limitations.
- that you are excellent at loving.

Sermon (Rev. Rolenz)

“The Splinters We Carry

The inspiration for this title was born out of pain. Not a major pain, mind you, but a small, irritating pain that has probably happened to you, at some time or another. In my case, it was an irritation caused literally, by a splinter – a tiny fragment of wood that got under my skin. Every time that part of my finger touched something, I could feel it, but I couldn’t see it. I took a magnifying glass to it – still nothing. I tried probing around with tweezers, but it was in too deep to try to pull out. So when faced with a splinter that’s just under the skin – you’re faced with a choice – do you leave it and live with the constant irritation? Do you try to dig it out and risk the possibility of infection? Or – do you write a sermon about it? You can tell which one I chose.

But first – I want to wish you all Happy Valentine’s Day! It’s a ambiguous holiday isn’t it? In the broadest sense of the word, it’s a wonderful opportunity to celebrate love in our life – not only our intimate partners but our spiritual sweethearts; those dear souls who sustain us through thick and thin. And, If you were here last Sunday, you’ll recall that the theme for the month is Spiritual Friendship. You heard about the friendships that were forged by our 19th century Unitarian ancestors – and you met two friends who’s friendship was born here at All Souls. It was a wonderful, heart-warming service. We needed to be reminded of the ways in which our relationships – and our friendships – support us.

It's important to remember the sustaining power of relationships, because In just a couple of weeks, we will approach the one year anniversary of the shut down of the church, the District and the country. We will commemorate that event in some way – whether at Vespers, the Sunday morning service or both. We'll also acknowledge that when Covid is over, we will be facing a different kind of pandemic. I predict that the nation and the globe will be left reeling with a national and global form of PTSD – and that collectively, we'll be struggling to understand how best to deal with the aftermath of trauma.

Intellectually, we all know that this global pandemic presents one of the largest mental health challenges in the history of the world. Even if you have not lost a loved one to this pandemic, all of us have been touched by varying degrees of trauma. What has been revealed these past 11 months is that as human beings we are incredibly resilient, strong, resourceful, courageous and we also the walking wounded. I think it's safe to say that this pandemic has irritated, aggravated and exacerbated the wounds that many of us already have and are doing our level best to handle. So this service is about both the splinters we carry and the wounds they create – and the ways in which we – as members of a church community can and do heal from them.

This global crisis has helped me to understand that trauma exists everywhere. Bessel Van Der Kolk, author of *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma* writes: “One does not have to be a combat soldier or visit a refugee camp in Syria or the Congo to encounter trauma. Trauma happens to us, our friends, our families, and our neighbors...one in five Americans have been sexually molested as a child; one in four was beaten by a parent to the point of a mark being left on their body, one in three couples engage in physical violence. A quarter of us grew up with alcoholic relatives and one of eight witnessed their mother being beaten or hit.

I want to acknowledge that I am not a specialist in trauma or trauma recovery. However as a minister in over six congregations, I have seen my share of trauma. Parishioners who die by suicide. A beloved church member murdered in her office at the Capital Gazette in Annapolis. The long, on-going heartbreak of Alzheimers; the heart-arresting shock of a sudden death. The re-lived memories of childhood trauma. What I've discovered is a truth that's powerfully detailed in both Van Der Kolks book, mentioned earlier and Resmaa Menakem's book “My Grandmother's Hands.” All of these traumas remain in the body. It's the splinters we carry that need to be healed.

What I do know is that healing, like grief, is not a linear process. Sometimes it feels like two steps forward, one step back; one step forward, six steps back. Western European and white-supremist culture is more often focused on progress and moving forward – moving on – get over it – get past it. Find the splinter, dig it out, slap on a band-aid and fudgetaboutit. But the body keeps the score – the body has a wisdom that is both intimately connected to our minds, and yet is not always beholden to it. And there are some wounds that have been created by centuries of patriarchy, sexism, homo and trans phobia, xenophobia, racism and white supremacy culture. Racialized trauma –so eloquently addressed in Menakem's book, *My Grandmother's Hands*, reminds us that we can't heal our minds until we get in touch with our bodies.

What is so confusing and confounding about the way trauma shows up in our lives is that it too, is not linear. It's more like the experience of microaggressions that black, brown, Indigenous,

Asian-Pacific Islander and all people who do not identify as white experience on a regular basis. It's the experience of transgender and non-binary persons who are regularly wounded in mind, body, heart and spirit. In the chapter, *Assaulting the Black Heart*, Manakem describes the death by a thousand microaggressions, small, but persistent and pervasive. When they happen over and over again, he says, they create a toxic hazy trauma. "Hazy trauma is trauma that can't be traced back to a single specific event – unhealed trauma acts like a rock thrown into a pond, it causes ripples that move outward, affecting many other bodies over time. After months or years, unhealed trauma can appear to become part of someone's personality. Over even longer periods of time, as it is passed on and gets compounded through other bodies in a household, it can become the family norm. And if it gets transmitted and compounded through multiple families and generations, it can start to look like culture."

As an Interim Minister, I'm trained to observe and describe the culture into which I enter, Just as a physician takes a family history, so does the interim. I come into a church and ask questions about the equivalent of your church's family system. Family systems theory has often been applied to churches –born of the realization that all of us come from families which forms us. Those family systems then, are – for better or worse – the norms which shape the voluntary associations in which we participate. They create the culture of an institution – and in our case – a church. So, for example, when a church has been steeped in secrecy, or conflict-avoidance, that creates a culture. If a minister has been involved in sexual misconduct and the system has conspired to deny, diminish or conceal that truth – it affects the church's culture. If a church has patterns and habits of under or over-functioning – it shapes the church's culture. If a church has suffered several serious traumas, it may not be evident in the daily operations of the church, but it's still there, like the splinter under the skin. What do we do with it, is the bigger question? Can you pull it out? Should you dig deeper? Or leave it alone?

It's no secret that All Souls has survived several significant traumas to the church body. While I'm sure there were issues with ministers prior to Rev. Dan Aldridge's ministry, his short tenure and departure from All Souls as your Senior Minister in 1998 created a rupture in the body of the church. Many came back – some didn't. For some, that wound is like my splinter – an irritation when rubbed against, but not felt on a regular basis.

The second trauma involved the departure of your former Associate Minister, The Rev. Susan Newman Moore in 2018. Her ministry began with much enthusiasm; and embraced as part of our commitment to racial diversity in the ministry team. Her pastoral ministry particularly to our black and brown members of the congregation was deeply appreciated. Her sermons, while some thought of as unorthodox in their presentation, delighted some and annoyed others. When it became apparent that Rev. Newman Moore's ministry was ending, sides were taken, and trust was frayed. Large public gatherings were held in the spirit of openness and transparency; with the hope that healing could happen. From this outsider's perspective, many church leaders were involved in an earnest attempt to heal from that wound. For some, this wound is still close to the skin – for others, they never knew it existed. As is the case with all trauma, there is no one singular, story that can be told which will reveal the Truth with a capital T. What IS true is that healing takes time and intention. Sometimes it means building up the body's strength so that the body heals itself.

Remember the splinter I began this sermon with? I never found that splinter. It was too deep and to dig for it would only do more damage than good. So, I had to live with the irritation for a while, trusting that a healthy body will do its miraculous work. My job was to keep my body strong and healthy; so that the body's job could eventually dissolve the splinter. One day I woke up and I didn't feel it anymore. I have a memory of it, but it no longer hurts. It's healed.

After the anthem, you'll hear from Macani Toungara, one of the co-chairs of the Committee on Right Relations. They have submitted a proposal for funding that involves engaging the congregation in a process of Transformative Justice also called Healing Justice. Healing justice moves beyond conflict between individuals to include an understanding of how systemic injustice and oppression contribute to or shape conflict. This process would involve facilitated conversations, provide new tools to address underlying sources of conflict with the intention of transforming how we learn from conflict. So, it's not just about healing from this one wound or previous ones; it's both a personal and systemic attempt to strengthen the body of the church. Come healing of the body, come healing of the mind, we'll hear the Jubilee Singers echo the words of Leonard Cohen.

No one is naïve enough to believe that going through such a process will cure us of conflict; that we – as a church body – will never find we've got a splinter under our skin. But – it will help us figure out the best way to deal with it. Right now, this is an internal process, but I can see that it will have implications on how we – as a church community – also heal relationships with communities of color outside these walls – which includes not only our black and brown communities, but our Latino, Latina, Latinx, Asian-Pacific Islander, our queer and trans communities, our partners in activism and more. It's going to take some time. Healing happens – but not on schedule.

As I imagine a world that represents my best hope for Beloved, Community, I often refer to the visionary work of adrienne maree brown. For Brown, grief work and justice work are part of the same process. She reminds us that grief is the growing up of the heart that bursts boundaries like an old skin or a finished life; that your grief is a worthwhile use of your time; that the ones you grieve may be grieving you; that the sacred comes from the limitations and that you are excellent at loving. I've been with you but seven months, but anyone can see the truth in that...oh...you are excellent at loving. Let's go love some more. May it be so.

Anthem (All Souls Jubilee Singers; Mary Eveleigh, Ann Watters, Chris Bassett, Steve Finner, vocal leads)

“Come Healing” (Leonard Cohen)

O gather up the brokenness Bring it to me now
The fragrance of those promises You never dared to vow

The splinters that you carry The cross you left behind
Come healing of the body Come healing of the mind

And let the heavens hear it The penitential hymn
Come healing of the spirit Come healing of the limb

Behold the gates of mercy In arbitrary space
And none of us deserving The cruelty or the grace

O solitude of longing Where love has been confined
Come healing of the body Come healing of the mind

O see the darkness yielding That tore the light apart
Come healing of the reason Come healing of the heart

O troubled dust concealing An undivided love
The heart beneath is teaching To the broken heart above

Let the heavens falter Let the earth proclaim
Come healing of the altar Come healing of the name

O longing of the branches To lift the little bud
O longing of the arteries To purify the blood

And let the heavens hear it The penitential hymn
Come healing of the spirit Come healing of the limb

O let the heavens hear it The penitential hymn (penitential hymn)
Come healing of the spirit Come healing of the limb

Testimonial from the Committee on Right Relations (Macani Toungara)

In 2015, the Board of Trustees approved the creation of a Committee on Right Relations as a tool to assist in the implementation of our Covenant of Right Relations, which asks each of us “to engage in the spiritual and everyday practice of loving better.”

The committee’s responsibilities are to educate the congregation about the Covenant and how to strengthen our relationships and deepen our sense of community; provide training for church leaders to identify and proactively address conflict recruit and train facilitators and mediators; process all requests for assistance in managing interpersonal conflict.

Last year, the committee decided to expand on our mission and to support a new goal of building an anti-racist, spirit-rooted Transformational Justice framework and practice for All Souls Church (ASC). This work will: create a shared language and practice for congregants, congregational committees, lay leadership, and church staff around conflict; build-up a network of similarly-trained restorative justice practitioners in the church; and lead to healing and transformation over time.

This approach is often called Transformative Justice, or Healing Justice. It moves beyond looking at conflict between individuals to see where institutional weaknesses and systemic injustice and oppression contribute to or shape a conflict. It creates opportunities for healing and growth through community accountability and by addressing conflict’s root causes.

Racialized trauma lives within individuals and communities, and each conflict can either deepen that trauma or address it and begin to heal. The methods and approach of Transformative Justice can also be used to address harm from other sources of conflict in order to allow us to move towards a Beloved Community.

This approach is grounded in healing the harm from racial oppression purposefully and makes it particularly applicable to All Souls as it seeks to live out the 8th Principle.

The Committee seeks to create a different set of tools to address underlying sources of conflict and transform how we learn from conflict.

We are currently seeking funding to bring in an external facilitator to work with a set of All Souls volunteers to develop these new practices and tools for our community.

The facilitator would Facilitate conversations and understanding within the church about Transformation Justice; Provide training and skilled advising in order to develop and adopt Transformative Justice ; Help the community transition into ongoing collective conflict transformation.

We are at the beginning of this process and will seek volunteers to participate in this work. We need the voices of members like you in this process so that new practices will be rooted in our collective identity. If you are interested in hearing more or participating, please join us during coffee hour after the service. The separate zoom link will be in the chat.

Offering (Jana Owens)

At this point in the service, we reflect on the meaning of giving and the role that this community plays in our lives. As we reflect, we give these gifts freely, we receive them gratefully, and we dedicate them to the realization of the things we hold dear—affirming human wholeness, caring for the Earth that holds us all, ensuring religious and intellectual freedom, welcoming the stranger, and loving one another.

Offerings can be made via the All Souls website (simply navigate to all-souls.org and click on “Donate”) or via text message. Instructions on how to donate via text message can be found in the chat box. This morning’s offering will now be received.

Hymn 318

“We Would Be One”

We would be one as now we join in singing our hymn of love, to pledge ourselves anew
To that high cause of greater understanding, of who we are, and what in us is true.
We would be one in living for each other to show to all a new community.

We would be one in building our tomorrow a nobler world than we have known today.
We would be one in searching for that meaning which binds our hearts and points us on our way.
As one, we pledge ourselves to greater service, with love and justice, strive to make us free.

Benediction (Rev. Rolenz)

Music (All Souls Jubilee Singers; Nicole Rumeau, soloist)

“Healing” (Richard Smallwood)

Don't be discouraged joy comes in the morning, know that God is nigh.
Stand still and look up God is going to show up, God is standing by.

There's healing for your sorrow, healing for your pain,
Healing for your spirit, there's shelter from the rain.
Lord, send the healing for this we know, there is a balm in Gilead,
For there's a balm in Gilead, there is a balm in Gilead to heal the soul.

There is a balm in Gilead, for there's a balm in Gilead,
There is a balm in Gilead to heal the soul.

Healing for the soul.