

Worship transcript for February 21, 2021

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

“The Bones” (Richard Smallwood)

We're in the home stretch of the hard times
We took a hard left, but we're alright
Yeah, life sure can try to put love through it but
We built this right so nothing's ever gonna move it

When the bones are good, the rest don't matter
Yeah, the paint could peel, the glass could shatter
Let it rain, 'cause you and I remain the same
When there ain't a crack in the foundation
Baby, I know any storm we're facing
Will blow right over while we stay put
The house won't fall when the bones are good

Call it dumb luck, but honey, you and I
Could never mess it up, though we both try
It don't always go the way we planned it but
The wolves came and went and we're still standing

When the bones are good, the rest don't matter
Yeah, the paint could peel, the glass could shatter
Let it rain, 'cause you and I remain the same
When there ain't a crack in the foundation
Baby, I know any storm we're facing
Will blow right over while we stay put
The house won't fall when the bones are good

Bones are good, the rest don't matter
Paint could peel, the glass could shatter...

Call to Worship (Rev. Kathleen Rolenz)

Here we have gathered – as we have for almost two hundred years
We have gathered in small rooms and grand spaces
We have gathered in sanctuaries and fellowship halls
We have gathered on the front steps and on front porches
We have gathered in screens in our separate homes
Here we have gathered, the faithful, the fearful; the heart-broken and the hopeful
Here we gather because when the bones are good – the rest don't matter
Pain could peel, glass could shatter

We gather to embody these bones into a common practice of worship.
Come, let us worship together.

We invite the Smith family to kindle the flame in our chalice of hope this morning.

Chalice Lighting (Louisa, Peter, Griffin, and Sophia Smith)

Hymn

“Bright Morning Star”

Bright morning star a-risin’ (3x)
Day is a- breakin’ in my soul

Bright morning star a-risin’ (3x)
Day is a- breakin’ in my soul

Oh, how can I be lonely? (2x)
God’s loving arms surround me
Day is a-breakin’ in my soul

Bright morning star a-risin’ (3x)
Day is a- breakin’ in my soul

Welcome (Kerry Reichs)

Good morning, and welcome to our live long-distance worship at All Souls Church! My name is Kerry Reichs, my pronouns are she/her, and I’m so glad to be as your Worship Associate today. For almost 200 years, our congregation has sought to live up to the vision inherent in our name, All Souls. Our mission is to build what Dr. King called the “Beloved Community” – a vision of human community where the divisions that separate us in our daily lives come tumbling down and we recognize that *all* people are welcome at the table of God’s love and human fellowship. As Unitarian Universalists, we are diverse in many ways but united in our belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and in the obligation to express our faith through acts of justice and compassion. Where we share reverence for the Earth and where music is an expression of our joy. We invite you to join us as we seek to create a diverse, justice-seeking, spirit growing community that is true to the dream of all souls.

I want to extend an especially warm welcome to all who are joining us for the first time. If you’d like to be added to our e-newsletter mailing list, send a direct message to Gary Penn in the chat. And do stay on afterwards for coffee and conversation.

In an effort to acknowledge and support Indigenous communities, it is important to recognize the people whose land we are on. Because we are located all over the nation and the globe, we acknowledge that our ancestors governed, farmed and lived here long before us. We acknowledge that indigenous peoples 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.

If we were together in our uplifting sanctuary, I'd now invite you to turn to someone near you in the pew for a handshake or a hug. Instead, I invite you to "behold" – rather than absorbing the light streaming through our sanctuary windows, bask in the light emanating from the faces of your All Souls friends in DC and around the world. Although you'll remain on mute, please exchange smiles and waves and chats as you draw strength and joy from the exquisite gallery of this congregation. Again, welcome to All Souls Church!

Congregational Concerns and Prayer (Rev. Rolenz)

I'm the Rev. Kathleen Rolenz, my preferred pronouns are she/her/hers and I'm serving as All Souls Interim Senior Minister and as liturgist this morning. I first want to welcome our guest minister, the Rev. Dr. Jonipher Kūpono Kwong to our pulpit this morning, and as part of our visiting ministers series for 2021.

The Rev. Dr. Jonipher Kūpono Kwong currently serves as Ministerial Credentialing Director and was previously Congregational Life Staff for the Pacific Western Region. He is also a Program Leader for the UU College of Social Justice. Dr. Kwong obtained his Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry degrees from Claremont School of Theology. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Film Studies from the University of California at Santa Barbara. I first heard of Jonipher when my husband and I participated in the visiting minister program at the First Unitarian Church of Honolulu – where I told proudly of two former members of the congregation – President Barak Obama who attended Sunday School there as a child and their former minister, Rev Jonipher Kwong of whom they are still very fond. So welcome, Jonipher – we are delighted to have you at All Souls this morning.

Congregational News. Although our building is closed – the church is very much open. Our Adult Spiritual Development Team is offering a series of classes and gatherings which will be of interest to many:

First, I want to highlight some opportunities for you to engage in our 8th Principle work – which is to challenge ourselves to accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and in our institutions. Here are some ways for YOU to do that:

Beloved Conversations about Race and Identity will be offered virtually. There are two options for people who identify as Black, Brown, Indigenous, Asian/Pacific Islander, People of Color, and/or other racially targeted groups, and one option for people who identify as white.

Registration ends February 26 and the course starts March 16. This information can be found in the church's e-newsletter and we are putting a link to the e-newsletter in the chat.

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

Rev. Rob Keithan, Jennifer Langer Smith and others are hosting 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. We are offering 4 sessions from 7:00-9:00 PM on Monday nights starting Feb 22.

March 19th-21st – Jubilee Three Workshop [Jubilee Three Anti-Racism Training | Central East Region | UUA.org](#)

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. Rolenz and Rev. Dr. Jonipher Kūpono Kwong)

“We Need One Another” (George Odell)

Jonipher: We need one another when we mourn and would be comforted...

Kathleen: when we are in trouble and afraid...

Jonipher: when we despair, in temptation, and need to be recalled to our best selves again.

Kathleen: We need one another when we would accomplish some great purpose, and cannot do it alone...

Jonipher: in the hour of our successes, when we look for someone to share our triumphs

Kathleen [and] in the hour of our defeat when with encouragement we might endure and stand again.

Jonipher: We need one another when we come to die, and would have gentle hands prepare us for the journey. All our lives we are in need, and others are in need of us.

Sermon (Rev. Kwong)

“We Need Each Other to Survive”

Gong Hee Fat Choy! This is usually how our family greets one another during the Lunar New Year (technically, that was a week and two days ago, but what is time these days when you’re constantly living in liminal space?) For my family, this Lunar NY was quite different from last year or the year before. For one, I usually get a red envelope (hong bao in Mandarin). Since we

didn't meet in person, I tried to get my mom to Zelle or PayPal it to me, but alas, that didn't happen either. The biggest loss, however, is our traditional hot pot dinner, gathering together a ton of meat and vegetables, sacrificing them to the altar of boiling soup in the middle of the table, feasting on the abundance of savory goodness—foreshadowing a year of prosperity. Instead, we worshipped on the sacred platform we call Zoom, with its magical powers to connect us across time and space kinda like what we're doing now.

Nonetheless, a new year is the perfect opportunity to reflect on the old one. How many of you, show of hands, didn't want 2020 to end because it was the best year ever? That's what I thought.

A few weeks after we received our stay-at-home orders in CA, I moved out of the house I shared with my husband of over 20 years. Three weeks after that, he filed for a divorce. I'll spare you the gory details, but those of you who have gone through an uncoupling process before can testify to how horrific it is, whether it's amicable or acrimonious. Over the years, I've provided pastoral care to those who have gone through this before, though more from a more theoretical, "let me listen to you pour your heart out" perspective. Now, I can relate on a much deeper level. I am still very much in the thick of it, causing many sleepless nights and the endless rounds of coulda shoulda woulda.

As if that wasn't bad enough, three weeks later, on my birthday, my unmarried aunt came out to me. No, not as a lesbian. You see, I was extremely close to her when I was growing up in the Philippines, visiting her every summer, staying with her full-time when my parents immigrated to the U.S. for a couple of years. When I told her about my divorce, she said, "Thank God! I've been praying for you this whole time." I suspected I knew what she meant, but I didn't want to make any assumptions, so I probed further. "What exactly did you pray for?" She said, "I prayed that you would break up with him because homosexuality is a sin. The Bible is very clear about it." Is it though? I didn't want to outdo her on my knowledge of the Bible, so I tried to focus on our relationship instead. But as many of us know, it's all about the Bible and it's useless arguing with a fundamentalist about it.

It was difficult for me to reconcile the fact that she's traveled all over the world with my ex and me and she's stayed at our place on several occasions and even came to our wedding reception. The whole time, she's been harboring these thoughts and privately praying the gay away? Thank you for finally coming out—as a homophobe. Like me, you were probably thinking, good riddance. You don't need people like that in your life, Jonipher. You're probably right—but it was still a grieving process, burying a four-decade old relationship for what? A sacred book that has become weaponized, that's what! I sometimes wonder if I can stamp a "return to sender" on that prayer!

The death of an intimate and familial relationship is one thing. Many of us also have also endured the physical death of those we love—some to COVID-19 and others to unrelated illnesses or worst yet, ambiguous causes. In September, my predecessor in my current role as the UUA's Ministerial Credentialing Director for 18 years died 10 days after his predecessor who served in this same role for 12 years—both of cancer. In a little more than a week, we lost 3 decades of institutional memory. Then, towards the end of November, my friend, colleague and chaplain, The Rev. Dr. Hope Johnson, whom some of you know, died unexpectedly as well. Loss upon loss, grief piled on top of grief.

Those were just the personal losses. I haven't even gotten into the political climate of this country. I'm assuming Rev. Kathleen and other guest speakers have touched on that. You're in DC, after all, the epicenter of an exciting four years. I was commiserating with UUA President Susan Frederick-Gray that I was done with historic moments. I am so ready and looking forward to boring times ahead. Can I get an amen in the chat?

Behold, I share with you the year of the metal ox. In Mandarin, niu is the same word for 'ox' as 'cow' and 'buffalo.' Interestingly enough, according to Chinese horoscope, it follows the year of the rat, which, no offense to those who were born that year, is a carrier of diseases and is rather cunning and opportunistic. That explains a lot...The ox on the other hand, according to Jupiter Lai, is "grounded, loyal, gentle, and trustworthy." Those qualities in a person is what got me through the year of the rat.

I'm gonna own up to my privilege as a clergyperson with a ton of clergy friends who are professionally trained in this pastoral care stuff. Ones who would PM me on Facebook, just to say, "How are you doing today, really?" or "How is it with your spirit?" Ones who would challenge my assumptions and love me back into being. Ones whose shoulders I can cry on, who won't "get up and move out on me when I sing out of key" as that Beatles song I Need A Little Help says.

What I needed and what the world needs right now are not more fine-weathered friends—ones who will be on your side when everything is going well in your life and you're on the top of your game. What we don't need are "yes" friends either, who will never challenge you or call you on your stuff when you cross the line. We need friends who will get real with us and shelter us in the midst of life's many storms as well as hold us accountable. Guess what? You don't even need to be professionally trained or have a degree in being divine to be someone who is grounded, loyal, gentle and trustworthy.

I'm hoping the year of the ox is truly the year we get to rebuild better—that includes the life of our planet, our country, and our personal lives. In order to do so, we begin this rebuilding process with a strong back. That's what the ox is known for, which makes them so suitable for tilling the ground. Relationships that are strong are like houses with good bones. "When the bones are good, the rest don't matter," as Jen and Rochelle sang for us earlier. Life can throw anything at us, and our friendship will remain in tack. That's the foundation of any strong friendship.

Now, I don't want us to think that strength equals machismo, patriarchal BS, stick it out no matter what, put on a happy face all the time. I can't believe I'm about to tell you a Dr. Laura story, and in my defense, my ex was the one who forced me to listen to her in the car when I was held as a captive audience. There was this memorable call when a woman's life was falling apart and she was grieving the loss of a loved one, but felt like she couldn't show her emotions and has to be "strong" for her kids and the rest of her family. Dr. Laura stopped her and said, "Your job isn't to be strong during difficult times. This ain't the gym!" What an aha moment of what strength is not.

This may sound paradoxical, but having the strength of an ox requires courage to be vulnerable. I'm having to practice this myself by not using the old narrative of shame around my failed

marriage, or I can't even maintain a long-lasting relationship with my aunt. It's having the courage to leave when the time comes, the courage to draw firm boundaries, and the courage to ask for help when we need it. It's crying when we need to and the humility to ask for help.

I think that last part is difficult for us as UUs. We would rather give help than ask for it because we don't want to be seen as weak, needy, or inadequate. I got news for 'ya. That's part of White Supremacy culture that we are working so hard to dismantle.

The reality is none of us is alive today because we went through life by ourselves and we were able to pick ourselves up by our bootstraps. I call BS on that crappy theology. We are here because our momma fed us, because our grandma took us to church, because our daddy celebrated our birthday every year, because our neighbor put us on their Instacart account when we couldn't go to the grocery store. We are alive today because healthcare workers gave us vaccine shots and essential workers toiled day and night to ensure the places we frequent are kept sanitary. During these pandemic times, it has become painfully obvious that we literally need each other to survive. "You are important to me," Hezekiah Walker sings, "I need you to survive!" Notice the double entendre here. I actually didn't catch it until recently. On the one hand, it's saying I need you in order to survive, and on the other, it's also an imperative, as if to say, I'm gonna need you to survive! I'm so excited our virtual choir will be singing this song in a few minutes. Hope you'll sing along!

Now, I know some of you are saying, we need to do more than survive, Rev. Jonipher. We need to thrive. There ain't nothing wrong with that statement, but friends, I'm here to tell you, not all of us has the resources, the privilege to necessarily thrive during these strange times. Not all of us can just hop on a plane and fly first class to Cancun and stay at the Ritz Carlton during a power failure.

To live and survive another day can be a victory in and of itself. To burn wood to stay warm and boil snow for clean water is a win by itself. You've probably heard of the phrase "pandemic fine" or "pandemic well?" It's all relative these days, isn't it? We're all on different parts of the spectrum from surviving to thriving. Yet one thing we have in common—we need one another.

My theology of radical interdependence, based on our seventh principle, tells me that there are going to be times when I'm the one practicing pastoral care to someone, and times when I'm breaking down and need some TLC myself. I may have something I need your prayer for and you can absolutely count on me to pray for you. There will also come a time when I won't hesitate to ask for your prayers as well. Again, the Hezekiah Walker refrain rings so true..."I pray for you, you pray for me."

Another poet who summed it up so well is George Odell, who said, "All our lives we are in need, and others are in need of us."

This year of the ox, let us summon up all our strength, which includes our vulnerabilities, ask for help when we need it, give help when we have it, and make sure this doesn't turn into a Zombie apocalypse. Friends, I love you, I need you to survive. Ashé, Amen, and Blessed Be.

Anthem (All Souls Choir; Jen Hayman, piano; Romeir Mendez, bass; Dante Pope, drums)

“I Need You to Survive” (David Frazier)

I need you, you need me We're all a part of God's body
Stand with me, agree with me We're all a part of God's body
It is God's will that every need be supplied
You are important to me I need you to survive

I pray for you, you pray for me
I love you, I need you to survive
I won't harm you with words from my mouth
I love you, I need you to survive

It is God's will that every need be supplied
You are important to me I need you to survive

Offertory (All Souls Treasurer Bernard Mustafa and Daphne Mustafa)

Hello All Souls! I am Daphne Mustafa. I am Bernard Mustafa, Treasurer & BOT member. We live in Ashburn, Virginia. This morning we would like to share why we pledge & give to ASC.

After we married in 2000, we spent many years searching for a “Church Home” I was raised Catholic, Bernard was raised Baptist and both of us have an appreciation for Islam and other faith practices. Initially, we conducted our search the traditional way – referrals. We came close to finding the right church a few times, but ultimately found each experience, and/or faith practice lacking somehow.

I finally realized doing the same thing the same way over and over was, well you know, crazy. I decided to try something radical- actually, doing research based on what we were searching for. I discovered Unitarian Universalism. Our research identified ASC as one of the oldest most established UU churches in the area. We decided to start here.

As we walked up 16th Street to the church that first Sunday, we noticed a plaque at the bus stop depicting Angela Davis in the pulpit of All Souls Church. Wow!!

That Sunday, the church was packed, and the choir lined the isles of the church singing an old Negro Spiritual “Wade In the Water”. Hearing and seeing that song connected to me on a visceral level.

Purple Rain! One Sunday service shortly after Prince's passing during the meet and greet portion of the service; The All Souls Jazz ensemble featuring David Cole on guitar preformed that electrifying rendition of Purple Rain we just experienced. Prince's spirit was in the church.

These are just two examples of our incredible Music Ministry. Our Music Ministry includes multiple genres and ranges of emotion from consoling, rousing, stirring, inspiring, soulful to just wonderful.

We pledge because the work to create the Beloved Community require resources. As you know, we have much work to do, both within All Souls and in the greater community. We pledge because we recognize that this work requires our financial support, and we want it to continue.

This year will mark All Souls 200th anniversary. We encourage you to pledge and give the incredible work to create a diverse, spirit-growing, justice-seeking community.

Hymn

“Lean On Me”

Sometimes in our lives we all have pain, we all have sorrow.
But if we are wise we know that there’s always tomorrow.

Chorus

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.
Please swallow your pride if I have things you need to borrow,
For no one can fill those of your needs that you won’t let show.

Bridge:

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.

Chorus

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.
Please swallow your pride if I have things you need to borrow,
For no one can fill those of your needs that you won’t let show.

Benediction (Rev. Kwong)

“To Soulfully Survive the World’s Mayhem” (Heather Rion Starr)

May whatever gatherings or activities we engage in this Sunday afternoon
help restore us —

our connections to one another;

our sense of hope, beauty, and fun in this world;

our deep knowing that we have to take care of ourselves and each other

with love and joy if we are to soulfully survive the world’s mayhem.

Music (Gordon Kent, piano and vocals; Jen Hayman, Amelia Peele, and Rochelle Rice, backing vocals; Dante Pope, percussion)

“With a Little Help from My Friends” (John Lennon and Paul McCartney)

What would you do if I sang out of tune?

Would you stand up and walk out on me?

Lend me your ears and I’ll sing you a song

And I’ll try not to sing out of key

Oh, I get by with a little help from my friends
I get high with a little help from my friends
I'm gonna try with a little help from my friends
What do you do when your love is away?
Does it worry you to be alone?
How do you feel at the end of the day?
Are you sad because you're on your own?
Oh, I get by with a little help from my friends
I get high with a little help from my friends
I'm gonna try with a little help from my friends
Do you need anybody?
I need someone to love
Could it be anybody?
I need someone to love
Would you believe in a love at first sight?
Yes, I'm certain that it happens all the time
What do you see when you turn out the light?
I can't tell you but I know it's mine
Oh, I get by with a little help from my friends
I get high with a little help from my friends
I'm gonna try with a little help from my friends