

Worship transcript for February 28, 2021

Prelude (Rochelle Rice, vocals; Mark G. Meadows, piano; Romeir Mendez, bass; Danté Pope, drums)

“Afrasia” (Carmen Lundy)

Note: the lyrics of this song are mostly the names for God in different languages and religions.

The refrain below is also repeated:

The language of love and the spirit of one

Call for peace in the universe

Where every woman’s child will be together.

Come! Let us save the Earth for all the human race.

Save the oceans and mountains

Her so amazing grace

Call to Worship (Rev. Louise Green)

Welcome to all gathered here, in live Zoom or later viewing. I’m Rev. Louise Green, your Minister of Congregational Care.

Unitarian Universalism is a living tradition, flowing from six Sources which we name. The first Source: Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit, and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life.

Gathering elements for worship is like building a campfire towards that mystery and wonder. Our plan is in place: kindling, paper, and logs. We circle round a sacred space and begin to breathe life into the spaces in between. We light a match, and those spaces move the fire.

The Spirit moves in worship and art, with an alchemy which we cannot fully predict. This happens in creative collaboration of all kinds, among mystical friends who were designed to connect, evoke and express.

Each Sunday we light a single chalice to represent our collective campfire, and that renewal of spirit that we seek. We open to the forces which create and uphold life. I welcome Delabian and Bob to lead us in this chalice ritual today.

Chalice Lighting (The Rice-Thurston family)

Intro to Black American Music Sunday (Rochelle Rice)

Good morning All Souls. My name is Rochelle Rice, and I am the associate director of the All Souls Music and Arts Program.

I have worked at All Souls for over 10 years, first as an alto section leader and soloist with All Souls choir, and then my role expanded to include leading the 4th Sunday “Jazz worship services,” which got started under the leadership of beloved All Souls member and accomplished musician, Gordon Kent.

I realized, in leading these services, that more often than not the music I selected stretched way outside of what most folks would consider to be jazz. From rock & roll to country, from folk to pop, and straight up rhythm and blues. I, along with Jen and the rest of the worship team, cast wide our nets for music that both nourished listeners and illuminated the worship experience.

I wondered, for several years actually, why we still leaned on the term “jazz” to name something that definitely encompassed jazz music, but was also much more.

In thinking more deeply, I realized that the uniting thread of all the music I presented for these services, was that it was created by, influenced, or informed by the music and culture of Black Americans.

And so, we made the decision to rename our Jazz Sundays, Black American Music Sundays.

Black American Music is an umbrella term that encompasses and recognizes the far-reaching impact of Black Americans on past and current music genres and American popular culture as a whole. From blues, jazz, folk all the way to current day pop, country, hip-hop and more, the influence of Black American harmony, rhythm, and culture is undeniable. We choose to acknowledge, name, and honor this influence.

Today’s service centers on the mystical nature of spiritual friendships, collaborations, and the naturally improvisatory way these relationships are reflected in music, art, and life. In the same way, the music for today’s worship features music written by some of my heroes of black music and of collaboration, Valerie June and Sweet Honey in the Rock to name a few. And performed by some of my dear friends, artists like Mark G. Meadows, John Lee, and Christie Dashiell.

On this final day of Black History Month and year-round, I invite you to appreciate and acknowledge the richness and continued contributions of Black American Music and Culture.

Please remain on mute and sing with us our opening hymn, “This Little Light of Mine.”

Hymn

“This Little Light of Mine”

This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine (3x) Let it shine (3x)
Everywhere I go, I’m gonna let it shine (3x) Let it shine (3x)
Building up our world, I’m gonna let it shine (3x) Let it shine (3x)
This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine (3x) Let it shine (3x)

Welcome (Michael Koehler)

Good morning. My name is Michael Koehler and I am your Worship Associate this morning.

Welcome to our live long distance worship at 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 and abilities—where ALL people are welcome.

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. We invite you to join us on this journey of faith and hope.

I want to extend an especially warm welcome to all who are joining us for the first time. Welcome! 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 so we may greet you more informally.

In an effort to acknowledge and support Indigenous communities, it is important to us to recognize the people who lived on the land where our church now stands. The closest village was Nacotchtank (/’nakotsch,tank/), from which the name Anacostia is derived. They were part of the Piscataway (/pi’skatewei/) group of tribes. We acknowledge that indigeneous 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 on whose land we each reside, in our individual and collective locations around the U.S. and our planet Earth.

Thank you.

Even after a year online, I miss this moment where we we would turn to each other and greet one another.

And: I love our new tradition of “beholding.” that took its place. Take a moment to switch on your video if you haven’t already, scroll through the gallery view, say hello in the chat to one another, and behold one another’s faces as we are together, creating community.

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 the service today, at 1 pm, we will offer a social and support space for multi-racial/mixed race All Souls families. The zoom link will be posted in the chat now if you would like to participate.

Our two monthly drop-in covenant groups meeting this week: tomorrow, Monday, at 1:00 PM with me; and Thursday, March 4, at 7 PM with Rev. Kathleen. The groups will explore the church theme for March, which is “Revelation.” All are welcome; the Zoom info is on the church homepage.

Also on March 4, the All Souls Migrant Solidarity Team invites you to an evening program to learn about asylum seekers in the Washington Metropolitan Region. All Souls has partnered for years with a fantastic local organization called AsylumWorks, and this evening program will feature their founder and executive, asylum-seeking clients sharing their personal stories, and a time for questions and discussion. It's 7:30-9:00 PM this Thursday.

Finally, I'm very pleased to announce this event happening on Sunday, March 7th. In honor of the All Souls 200th anniversary year, the Young Souls and Silver Souls have teamed up for: "Connecting Racial Justice at All Souls in the Past, Present, and Future: An Intergenerational Panel and Dialogue." In this special program, All Souls elders and other members will share personal experiences about the church's historic moments in the fight for racial justice and how this connects to present-day efforts to achieve racial equity. They will also share reflections on how their Unitarian Universalist identity has influenced their racial equity and justice journey. Afterward, attendees can participate in small group discussions to reflect on the 8th principle and how we can foster racial justice and dismantle racism in ourselves, our institutions, and our communities. It will be on Sunday March 7th from 12:00 PM – 1:15 PM and registration is required!

We turn now to our pastoral concerns.

First, I am very saddened to announce the death of Brian Barger on February 22. Brian was recovering from surgery for pancreatic cancer in New York City and was being transferred back to DC when he suffered an aortic aneurysm. Brian was an active leader in our migrant solitary team and had many other connections to All Souls. I worked closely with Brian these last few years, and I already miss him dearly.

Our prayers are with his wife Tia, their families, and all the people in our congregation and beyond will feel his loss. The family anticipates holding an in-person celebration of life when it is possible to do so. In lieu of flowers, the family encourages donations to Asylum Works, <https://asylumworks.org/>.

We also send our loving care to Adenia Taylor, who is homebound with 24-hour care from health aides and her neighbor Sandy.

Our hearts go out to Julie, who is struggling with several challenges in the pandemic, including accompanying her friend Anya in stroke recovery.

We send love to Dave MacMillan and family, as his brother-in-law Terry is dying of lung cancer.

And we have prayers for two of our staff. We send prayers of support to our front desk staffer David Lindsay, whose mother is in closing days of hospice care in Florida. And we send healing prayers to custodian Mario Gavidia, who is recovering from a broken foot.

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

I invite you to join me in the spirit of meditation. There is much in life that the limitations of words cannot capture. Grief and beauty, loss and love, sometimes in their simplicity and sometimes in their complexity. For all this, for all that mere words cannot contain, let us hold silence together.

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.

Stewardship Testimonial (Donna Olsen)

Offertory (Michael Koehler)

We have two kinds of giving: the pledge and the plate.

We encourage everyone to pledge. If you have never pledged, do it next week. Why? Because the church — all of us — rely now more than ever on our ongoing commitments to do the important and wonderful work that brings us together, that holds us and grounds us and brings our mission to life.

And: If you'd like to support us today, please do so as well, as the virtual plate passes. You can do this by clicking on the link in the chat, or following the giving information in the slide on the screen. The offering will now be received.

Music (Rochelle Rice, vocals; Mark G. Meadows, keyboard)

“Painted on Canvas” (Gregory Porter)

We are like children
We're painted on canvases
Picking up shades as we go

We start off with gesso
brushed on by people we know
Watch your technique as you go

Step back and admire my view
Can you use the colors I choose?
Do I have some say what you use?
Can I get some greens and some blues?

We're made by the pigment of paint that is put upon
Our stories are told by our hues
Like Motley or Bearden
These masters of peace and light
Layers of colors and time

Step back and admire my view
Can I use the colors I choose?
Do I have some say what you use?
Can I get some greens and some blues?

Sermon (Rev. Green)

“Life and Art with Mystical Friends”

It's beautiful to hear Painted on Canvas by Gregory Porter, performed by the wonderful Rochelle Rice and Mark Meadows.. Thank you so much! Creating this service with Rochelle led me into a different writing form today. I'm going to read you a story from my life which evokes the consistent yearning I have for expressive freedom of the soul. The evocative song lyrics brought to my mind and heart a transformative time when creative imagination flowed. A youthful summer, when life offered many more colors than I had previously imagined.

It was the summer of 1971. Strange yet true story: I was a 13-almost 14-yr old dancer, living in San Francisco, in a Roman Catholic convent, in the neighborhood of Haight Ashbury. I know that sounds like a movie! My friend Linda and I were summer scholarship students at San Francisco Ballet School, and adventurers determined to savor the freedom of new territory. This particular Saturday, a beautifully sunny day, we were walking into the enchanting Golden Gate Park. No particular plans, just a spirit of exploration. The curated landscape was summer green, and the smell of eucalyptus trees wafted in the warm air. We took in the huge glass garden Conservatory, peered into the Academy of Sciences aquarium, strolled by a tranquil Stow Lake and Strawberry Hill. We took our time. The sounds of music, singing, and drumming were faint in the distance, and so gradually we moved towards Lindley Meadow in order to check it out.

Back in El Paso, Texas were my parents, grandparents and younger sisters; the British Ballet Academy, and Coronado High School at the desert foot of Mt. Franklin. I had just completed a rocky freshman year. Most unexpectedly, Linda and I were chosen at regional auditions to study ballet in San Francisco, in a summer school that searched for talent. We, and our ballet teacher from England, the feisty Mrs. Johns, eventually persuaded dubious parents to send us West for

eight weeks. Perhaps Mom and Dad were mostly resting on the assurances of the convent housing situation. Five and a half days a week we followed a strict dance regimen. Linda and I took the public bus way down Geary St. for full days at San Francisco Ballet studios, and returned each evening by curfew, an exact line in time maintained by the watchful Sisters. And yet: for one day and a half, every weekend, we realized we could cut loose. And so we explored with gusto, with the grateful sense that improbable miracles had occurred to land us in this spectacular situation.

Soon after our arrival, it became clear that the majority of girls with whom we resided and danced were extremely focused on one goal: getting enough notice in summer classes to move towards being professional ballerinas. This is a decision you generally make at an early age. Many of the girls were all dance, all the time—and quite content with the bus path between convent and school and back again.

To be clear: I arrived very excited about ballet, and my own love of dance was deep. I'd been taking classes since I was 5, and this was a beloved world of music, flow, and expression that I fully embraced. However, I was equally, if not more, excited about San Francisco.

I had a much wider set of intentions than ballet, and in truth, I was sorely lacking the laser focus of many of my fellow students. At home in Texas, I collected post cards from other countries, and constantly dreamed of travel. My family had been in California before, and I loved the ocean. Landing in this magical port city, in Haight Ashbury, with the independent ability get around on foot, by bus and trolley, was simply astonishing. From the first week, I planned field trips and convinced the significantly more hesitant Linda to wander far and wide.

While on daily lunch breaks, many of our fellow students stayed in. They stretched on the studio floor, talked about inside ballet school drama, and ate yogurt and Wheat Thins in the hallways. Linda and I often went outside to get some air, studied maps, and imagined the weekend. In the previous week's field trip to Ghirardelli Square and the Wharf, this included steaming fish and clam tomato chowder, warm sour dough bread, and some glorious ice cream Sundaes with fudge sauce. We imagined the sights and sounds of San Francisco: our odd and psychedelic Haight Ashbury neighborhood, the nearby delicious Mexican delights of the Mission District, the soaring Golden Gate Bridge excursion over to Sausalito, the narrow intriguing streets of Chinatown just past Union Square. There were so many places to go, and only eight weeks.

This particular Saturday, as we leisurely moved through Golden Gate Park, that music in the distance grew louder. It became clear that hundreds, no, thousands of people were streaming in a similar direction. Many of them wore traditional clothing from India, and the smell of unfamiliar spices drifted our way, as the drums pounded. Some kind of singing I had never heard before kept repeating. As we drew closer, my eyes widened when I saw the huge crowd. There was singing and dancing, musicians everywhere, long tables of food piled high with rice, stews, hot brick-oven bread and fruit. Linda and I had just entered a festival, and the vivid sight was simultaneously compelling and confusing. We had encountered the World Congress of Hare Krishna devotees, a global spiritual party in Golden Gate Park. The International Society for Krishna Consciousness was formed in 1966, to spread the practice of bhakti yoga, and this expressive dancing chanting yoga of love and devotion was their convention.

Let me just state the obvious: I had never seen anything like this before. My entire mind/body/spirit/psyche seemed to vibrate into a huge question: What? Is? This?!!! The swaying and shaking bodies, the bare feet pounding on grass to rhythms with bells and tambourines; the colors of saffron, coral, white, yellow cotton fabrics; the repetition of singing words in a language I didn't know. We did not have a clue what Hare Krishna was or even meant, but thousands of people seemed extremely joyful about it. The feast tables were all free, we were hungry, and the flow of food and sweets, juices and teas generously offered. An exuberance prevailed, and an invitation to join in, and soon I was dancing in ways that I never had before. The San Francisco Ballet studio melted into the Bay, and a wild swirling energy of movement and Spirit mystically swept in.

In that afternoon, I encountered a kind of moving prayer I didn't know existed, an unfamiliar practice in singing rhythm. It was way outside First Presbyterian Church in El Paso! This was a sweet combining of all elements present—the beautiful outdoor setting of the park and sunny skies, the musicians, the drummers, the chant leaders in call and response, the offering of food in love and hospitality. The World Congress brought Hare Krishna devotees from around the globe, and, there were also hundreds of startled guests like me. A 13-year-old from El Paso, who stumbled onto an enchanted fiesta of color and praise. The dancing crowds felt like one moving whole, music never pausing, sun radiantly shining, Golden Gate Park as Earth, holding us all. Transcending mystery and wonder directly experienced in my body. A young dancer who let loose, left the discipline of ballet barre and combination practice rounds, to fully inhabit embodied joy.

You know we couldn't stay out too long. We had to be in by 8:30 pm on Saturdays, I think. I have no clear memory of being in that convent dormitory. I do remember how the ornate iron gate shut with a clang, securing us in safely at night, in the inner courtyard of that protected space with the nuns. Yet we did get to see the magical sunset at the Pacific Ocean beach in the far end of park that day. As the luminous orange globe dropped into the sea, I marveled at the adventure. And of course, I dreamed of other journeys, and imagined new places to see, taste, hear and experience.

My friend Linda and I bonded and were transformed by the many experiences in San Francisco, changed forever by the summer of 1971. When I went back to El Paso, I branched out from ballet. Modern dance at Coronado High soon captivated me with other teachers. I added modern jazz movement and a little tap with Mrs. Johns. Eventually, I did a lot of Western swing dance to country rock bands with my high school boyfriend, a wonderful dance partner.

That astounding spirit of Hare Krishna bhakti devotion lay dormant in seed form in me, and many years passed. Then one day, over fifteen years later, something took root and began to grow. When I began Divinity School at age 30, I started the spiritual practices of yoga, meditation, kirtan chanting and dance, all as a way to stay embodied and in motion in the midst of rigorous mental and academic life.

When I look back at that summer of '71, I feel my free spirit savoring life— fed by art and dance and music and great food, with my friend Linda as sidekick explorer. Our friendship became a mystical adventure those eight weeks, an diversion into new territories. We gave ourselves permission to change the colors and forms we knew. We let the Spirit move, intuition flower, and adventure blossomed.

We're made by the pigment of paint that is put upon
Our stories are told by our hues...
Can I use the colors I choose?
Do I have some say what you use?
Can I get some greens and some blues?

Two creative streams have consistently fed me since childhood: the expression of the arts, and the nurturing of the Spirit. In a time of global restriction, many of us long for more adventure, release, and exploration. So much is off limits, and yet, a Universe of possibilities abounds.

How might our beautiful imaginations lead us to that direct experience of transforming mystery and wonder? The first Source of Unitarian Universalism. Even in the Zoom times, we may travel online to a vast international offering, a feast of the arts and Spirit, now being offered and created in new ways all over the planet.

We can renew our own spirits, let the transcendent Spirit move, and be open to the forces which create and uphold life. We create worship which holds all these elements, in a sacred fire of community. May it be so. Amen.

Hymn

“Do When the Spirits Say Do”

You've gotta do when the spirit says do (2x)
When the spirit says do
you've gotta do, O Lord,
You've gotta do when the spirit says do

You've gotta sing when the spirit says sing (2x)
When the spirit says sing
you've gotta sing, O Lord,
You've gotta sing when the spirit says sing

You've gotta dance when the spirit says dance (2x)
When the spirit says dance
you've gotta dance, O Lord,
You've gotta dance when the spirit says dance

You've gotta do when the spirit says do (2x)
When the spirit says do
you've gotta do, O Lord,
You've gotta do when the spirit says do

Benediction (Rev. Green)

(Rev. Carol Meyer)

May we open ourselves ever more fully to that Eternal Mystery which lures us onward toward life and creativity...

May we know the fullness of love without fear, and the serenity of peace without turmoil.

May we hold one another in the deep and tender places with compassion.

May we grace one another by sharing our own vulnerabilities, being ever mindful of the divinity within that makes soulmates of us all.

Music (Rochelle Rice, vocals; John Lee, guitar)

“Astral Plane” (Valerie June)

There is a light
You have inside you
Can't touch
A looking glass
Can only show you
So much
Follow the signs
Slowly but steady
Don't rush
The day will come
When you are ready
Just trust

Dancing on the astral plane
On holy water cleansing rain
Floating through the stratosphere
Blind, but yet you see so clear

Is there a way?
For you to shine
Without fear
From other worlds
But it's hard to say
What keeps you here

Dancing on the astral plane
On holy water cleansing rain
Floating through the stratosphere
Blind, but yet you see so clear

Dancing on the astral plane
On holy water cleansing rain
Floating through the stratosphere
Blind, but yet you see so clear

Blind, but yet you see so clear

Is there a way?
For you to give it
Your all
Dreaming a dream
Of sweeter things great or small

Dancing on the astral plane
On holy water cleansing rain
Floating through the stratosphere
Blind, but yet you see so clear

Blind, but yet you see so clear

There is a light
You have inside you
Can touch