

Worship transcript for March 7, 2021

Prelude (Women's 8 of All Souls UU DC: Juliene James, Loyce Pace, Norah Quinn McCormick, Rochelle Rice, A. Tianna Scozarro, Melinda St. Louis, Jennie Wasserman, and Jen Hayman- director and accompanist)

“Don't Be Discouraged/Hold On” (Glen Ballard and Chynna Phillips; arranged Trey McLaughlin)

Welcome (Rev. Kathleen Rolenz)

Good morning All Souls! I'm Rev. Kathleen Rolenz, serving as your interim senior minister and as a member of the Executive Team, with Traci Hughes-Trotter. I want to welcome all to All Souls Church Unitarian. We are a member of the wider Association of Unitarian Universalist Churches; of which there are about 1,000 congregations. All Souls is one of the largest UU congregations in the country.

In an effort to acknowledge and support Indigenous communities, it is important to recognize the land on which our church stands. The closest tribe was Nacotchtank, (nah-caught-cha-tank) from which the name Anacostia is derived. They were part of the Piscataway 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. [Silence]

This morning's service will be a bit different from our usual format. The Unitarian Universalist Association has produced as a gift to UU congregations, a worship service that features a sermon from UUA President Susan Frederic Gray, liturgists from prominent UU ministers and our own music director, Jen Hayman, was chosen to create the music for today's service. UU churches all over the country are using parts of this video service this morning.

This Sunday marks the kick off of our Annual Stewardship Campaign; which is the time we ask all members to make a pledge of financial support. Our theme for this year's campaign is “All Souls, All In,” and by that, we expect All 1, 100 souls who are currently registered as members will make a pledge to the church. Executive Director Traci Hughes-Trotter and I will be saying more about the values and vision of the 2021-2022 budget later, but for now, we hope you'll sit back on your couch, or edge forward in your seat – and join with congregations across the country, in this mutual pledge of support.

We turn now to the symbol of Unitarian Universalism; the kindling of light in our common chalice.

Chalice Lighting

Chris: These are times of isolation and loneliness. Our hearts long for connection, and for one another.

Vail: Illness has visited our lives. Struggle and pain are in our communities. Our children's lives are disrupted. There has been such great loss.

Jen: And yet...we are surrounded by beauty, by grace, by the music that blesses us.

Erika: All the while we are surrounded by love. We are loved into courage. <breath>

Mariela: We are loved into community. We are loved into generosity. We are loved into being.

Susan: Come, let us open our hearts and grow the SIZE of our souls. Come, let us worship together.

Story for All Ages (Dolores Miller and All Souls children)

“A Penny for Candy”

Announcements (Rev. Rolenz)

Pennies from Heaven! What a great gift to all of us! Although the building has been closed for almost a year, the church has never shut down. We have been able to provide you opportunities to connect with one another, to grow in spiritual depth and to serve needs greater than your own. I want to highlight a few opportunities that are coming up in the week ahead, which can be found in the weekly e-newsletter. A link to the newsletter is in the chat. <https://conta.cc/2OvKoY9>

After today's service you are invited to attend one of two gatherings. The first is an Intergenerational Racial Justice Panel between the Young Souls and the Silver Souls. You can register for this conversation on the church's website or in the chat: <https://all-souls.org/events/intergenerational-racial-justice-panel/>

Because this is our Annual stewardship Kick off, Executive Director Traci Hughes Trotter and members of the Board and Stewardship Team would love to meet with you to hear your thoughts about the vision and values of the campaign. Stay for coffee hour and you can request being sent to a Zoom Room with Traci.

It's hard to believe that we are coming up on the one year anniversary of entering into a full year of living through this pandemic. This Wednesday, our monthly Vesper's service will happen at 7:30 PM. It will be a special service in that the March 2020 Vespers was the last in-person service All Souls held.

Next Sunday, March 14, from 4 – 4:30, join Rev. Rob Keithan and other churches for a community vigil of grief, resilience, and a renewed commitment to justice. Information. <https://conta.cc/2OvKoY9>

Adult Spiritual Development's offering on Sacred Texts/Sacred Conversations has expanded to 3x a month; they are now held every Wednesday except for the 2nd Wed of the month. The times were listed incorrectly in the e-newsletter; they are from 7:30 – 8:30 PM.

And finally, this Sunday we are starting a new program, called “After Hour Conversations,” which will be held at the same time as coffee hour. These brief, 45 minute gatherings are programmed around a variety of topics. Check the e-newsletter for more information.

Today marks the anniversary of Bloody Sunday, the day when the nation’s eyes were turned on the brutal response to a peaceful march for Voter’s Rights. Today we recall the courage of many, but in particular Representative John Lewis – whose legacy of activism and public service remain with us today.

We now turn to our joys and concerns of our own members and friends. Although we are aware of many who are struggling in mind, body, heart and spirit, we do not have any names to offer you this morning. Instead – we focus on our collective grief and our collective joy; knowing that to be human is to experience all the vicissitudes of life. So we join now in prayer, led by the Rev. Chris Long, serving as part of the ministry team at the Community Church of New York.

Prayer (Rev. Chris Long)

Hymn

“Comfort Me”

Sermon (Rev. Rolenz and Executive Director Traci Hughes-Trotter)

[Rev. Kathleen Rolenz]

It’s the stories that get me. They astonish me. They inspire me. They anger me. They make me teary. They make me want to bust out dancing. They make me want to jump for joy. It’s the stories, you see – the stories of All Souls – the stories that you tell about this place that come alive with each new hearing. And maybe that’s becoming true for those of you who are brand new –perhaps logging on for the first time, but not the last, because there is something here drawing you on and drawing you into this place known as All Souls Church Unitarian.

It’s the stories of a church that was built in a city back then full of mud and horses. It’s a story of ancestors – slave holder and abolitionists alike; of preachers and leaders; teachers and children; classes and movies; artists and poets, dancers and dreamers; pew sitters and generous givers. It’s blessing of the animals and children; it’s the children’s drawings on the wall; it’s the pipes in the organ; in the pipes in our singers who bring magic to our ears out of thin air. It’s the excruciating and exhilarating work of creating a multi-racial; multi-cultural, theologically and spiritually diverse community. It’s commitment, every year, to stay here, even when it’s hard, when you’re not happy, when the preacher’s sermons are too long or the music too loud or the children too distracting. It’s the story of wounds and pulling back and stepping in and up; it’s the story of search and discovery; the realization that somehow in this disorienting corner of the world your heart has wandered and stayed and found a spiritual home. It’s the stories you hear; and everyone of you listening right now is in the story – this story that is just one story among the thousands of churches in the District – but it’s our story – and it’s one that’s being created even now.

These stories that we tell reveal much about what we value – and what we are willing to save when all seems lost. It goes without saying – but say it I must – so much has been lost in the year since lockdown. Lives, Health, Jobs and yes, even churches. Churches have folded or merged during this pandemic and many more will fail in the years ahead. The pressures are too great; the thread connecting person to place to Spirit becomes invisibly thin and finally fade.

But at least one needful thing has not been lost – our souls have not been lost to this pandemic; nor has our church. If anything, it appears to me, that you – as a congregation – are growing stronger – wiser and deeper. Your reach now far extends beyond the walls of the church – beyond the boundaries of the district or eventual State – you are now a global church with Soul at the center which cannot be permitted to weaken or fade away. And what feeds that soul is a very real, and very palpable love that beats at the heart of this place – regardless if we gather in Zoom rooms or in the sanctuary or in places in between. It's powerful. It's beautiful. And it's worth preserving.

That's why the leaders of the congregation are asking All Souls to be All In to the Stewardship Campaign. Some gift is better than none. No gift is too small or too large. We are asking for extraordinary giving for these extraordinary times. What your pledge to the church will do is to enable you to come back to church so that ALL who want to attend can do so safely and fully. What your pledge will enable us to do is to close the gap between the vision and values we profess and the money it takes to fund that vision. We are asking you to prayerfully and thoughtfully consider your pledge. Then consider doubling it – and if that seems like too far a stretch; we ask that you simply increase it commensurate with your ability. No gift is too large or too small.

I loved the Story for All Ages concluding with the song “Pennies from Heaven.” We know that the financial gifts to the church don't come like pennies from heaven, or from an outside source. They come from all of us, in the role of the beneficent relative who sees the need, steps in and makes a difference. Step in, step up, make a difference because. Now is the time. Today is the day. Because we've got something here worthy of our love and our pledge of financial support. All Souls, All In – All Right! Amen and May it Be So!

[Traci Hughes-Trotter]

Hello all Souls.

If there is one thing that the past year has made painfully and abundantly clear is that we long to belong. Our common condition, our shared humanity is that we need to feel connected. It is a biological, physiological, and emotional urge. And when we feel connected, we feel better. / Somehow, we feel more complete — even when we are slightly shattered or utterly broken. When we can see one another. When we can laugh and cry with one another. When we can rally around a cause with one another. We. Are. Energized...By one another. When we connect, we create places of belonging that are nurturing, sacred and safe. That is the wonder of the many communities of All Souls.

Friends, after a year of upheaval, it is the coming of the dawn, and we are preparing to open the doors of the church. Reverend Kathleen, the staff and I are eagerly awaiting the moment when

we can welcome you all with open arms. Our goal is to raise 1.2 million dollars in pledges for the new church year.

We need your support to continue to provide the connection of worship both in person and online; to bring you the music that moves you /and to provide religious education and adult spiritual development that support us and our families on our faith journeys.

2021 will be a year of celebration — it's the 200th anniversary of All Souls. This will also be a year of transformation as a result of our many racial justice initiatives in support of Black, Indigenous, People of Color and Asian/Pacific Islanders in the All Souls Community.

Your generosity will ensure that the staff is compensated fairly and equitably.

My heart is always filled with gratitude that I have the honor of working on behalf of all of you. You meet my heart's desire to connect.

Because when we connect, we create space for belonging. In our togetherness we manifest love's divine.

Music (Rochelle Rice, vocals; Todd Simon, piano; Romeir Mendez, bass; Dante Pope, drums; and the Loved Into Being virtual choir, directed by Jen Hayman)

“Love's Divine” (Mark Batson and Sealhenry Samuel)

Sermon (Rev. Susan Frederick Gray)

“Love Is What I Need to Help Me Know My Name”

All Souls All In! (Libbie Buchele, President, All Souls Board of Trustees)

What a treat to hear from Reverend Susan Grey, the UUA President! Hi I'm Libbie Buchele, the President of the All Souls Board of Trustees.

At an All Souls auction 15 years ago, my husband Eric gave congregants the chance to bid for seats at a friendly texas hold em poker tournament. We offered snacks and drinks for the lucky auction winners, but the only real prize was companionship – and bragging rights. Many of the people who signed up for that tournament ended up playing poker regularly at our house ever since. We now play for money, and the extortionate fee for entry is \$5.

As you may know, “all in” is a poker term. It's that moment when are trying to double, or even triple your stakes, so, you push all of your poker chips into the center, and declare “all in.” Non poker players may remember this gesture from watching James Holzhaur on Jeopardy. Whenever the daily double came up, he would push his hands forward, and with that awkward grin, he'd say “make it a true daily double.”

Betting it all, going All In, is a risky thing to do. If you win, you have the chance to win big. If you lose, well, better luck next time. But it's always exhilarating. For just a moment, you are

risking everything. You are wiping that smug grin off your brother in law's face, just knowing that your triple sevens are a sure winner. You don't know if you'll win, so you take a leap of faith.

And speaking of faith, just 11 months ago, during the pandemic, the Board was facing some tough decisions. We didn't know how long we would be closed, our senior minister was leaving, we were searching for an interim minister and we were attempting to set a budget. We weren't sure how to budget for a pandemic,. We weren't sure if we would be able to raise the funds to pay our staff, let alone continue to offer services. We were even considering an austerity budget, one which would cut back our church and staff to the bone. And yet, instead, we decided to invest in our staff and the future of All Souls. We set a principle of continuing to pay everyone, because equity and justice are important to us, and we wanted to assure all our employees could rely on the church in uncertain times.

So, our new Executive Director, who we'd hired to make decisions on par with a senior minister, applied for a PPP loan, and she set an ambitious fundraising goal that would allow us to keep every staff member on. Everyone pitched in to set up the means to transmit services virtually, and together they created the operational framework that would allow all souls to continue its ministry work. Our new interim minister brought with her some much needed expertise in preaching, and together, and she's helping us she's helping us examine ourselves and learn from our past. Our All Souls staff went All In.

And, it worked. The systems they set up reached you, and you responded. From around the world, you attended All Souls online, and in a time of uncertainty, you went All IN with the church. You donated generously. The Board trusted the congregation and you came through.

So yay us! But....now here's the hard part. And you knew this was coming. Many of you know that we have a Board policy that requires that the church "establish compensation and benefits that are consistent with UUA fair compensation guidelines." The UUA's compensation guidelines take into account church size and geographic location, and sets pay bands based on that information. All Souls, under these guidelines, has recently moved into the "very large church" categorization, or pay band 6.

In the Board's annual review of salaries, we have determined that many of our most beloved staff members, the very people who have made Sunday service happen in the most unbelievable circumstances, are underpaid. Some are not even at the minimum salary for pay band 6.

It is our strong opinion that all our staff should be fairly compensated, and not just at the minimum. To do so, this year we are again taking a leap of faith, one that sets an ambitious fundraising goal, one which will enable us to pay our staff closer to what they are worth.

So this year, we're going to ask you to go all in. again. Go all in on the programming that's been offered. Go in on the staff who have made this programming possible. Feel that risk with us, that little twinge of excitement that comes from leaping into the unknown. And once again, bet on All Souls.

Take a minute to think about what ASC means to you and pledge now!

<https://all-souls.org/donate/all-souls-all-in/>

Music (Nicole Rumeau, lead vocals; Todd Simon, piano; Romeir Mendez, bass; Dante Pope, drums; and the Loved Into Being virtual choir, led by Jen Hayman)

“Rise Up (for Something)” (Andra Day)

Sending Forth

Vail: Dear friends across time and space, As worship comes to a close, may we Remember the strength and beauty that can be found in our faith.

Erika: May we feel the power generated by the giving and receiving of gratitude and generosity in our lives.

Vail: May we feel ourselves held in the embrace of the covenant that we share, and in the tender care of the larger community that has loved us into being.

Erika: Through it all, we are held by a love that will never let us go.

Mariela: May we grow, may we expand, may we flourish, may it be so!

Chris Long: Dear Ones, know that we are being held in LOVE, even as we struggle with the holy work that is ours to do.

Jen: May we carry a song of love on our hearts as we embark on the work that lies ahead.

SFG: May we go out in peace, and may we give back love.

Music (All Souls Choir; Rochelle Rice and Shacara Rogers, soloists; Gordon Kent, piano; Corey Null, bass; Dante Pope, drums)

“Nina Cried Power” (Andrew Hozier Byrne)