

Worship transcript for March 14, 2021

Prelude (All Souls Jubilee Singers)

“Breaths” (Ysaye M. Barnwell)

Listen more often to things than to beings.
Listen more often to things than to beings.
‘Tis the ancestors’ breath when the fire’s voice is heard.
‘Tis the ancestors’ breath in the voice of the waters.
Zah__, Whssshh__, Zah__, Whssshh__,

Those who have died , have never, never left. The dead are not under the earth.
They are in the rustling trees, they are in the groaning woods.
They are in the crying grass. They are in the moaning rocks.
The dead are not under the earth.

REFRAIN

Those who have died, have never, never left. The dead have a pact with the living.
They are in the woman’s breast, they are in the wailing child.
They are with us in the home. They are with us in the crowd.
The dead have a pact with the living.
REFRAIN (a la round)

Call to Worship (Rev. Louise Green)

Listen more often to things than to beings, to the ancestors’ breath. Yes. Thank you Lenard Starks, musicians, Jubilee Singers and composers, for the musical breaths which sustain us today. I’m Rev. Louise Green, Minister of Congregational Care. Welcome to our Sunday service, which honors the broad one-year set of anniversaries of the COVID pandemic. Hear these words from Dr. Bonnie Thurston, a retired theologian now in West Virginia:

In rare moments
when I am home to myself,
my heart is still,
my pulse is a psalm.
I know obscurely
I receive my life from a power beyond me,
Live by a life not my own.

This morsel of life,
Its ephemeral beauty,
Its searing sorrow,
Is on loan.
Marginal to a greater agency
That always, all ways

Engages the darkness,
Brings life from death.

In the many poignant days of this week, honoring massive changes within the pandemic, I felt a wild range of emotions. I mourned hard losses again, remembered how rhythms fell away suddenly, noticed the deep nurturing habits developed over months.

In this year unlike any other, we must bear witness. Bear witness to the loss and the beauty, within that steady drumbeat matrix of Earth, our planetary home. Continuing in seasons both terrible and lovely, we observe all the ways we maintained and held on. For we are here this morning, and millions are not. Let us remember the privilege of that embodied living witness, and worship together in Spirit and Truth.

I invite Mary Borland and Thad Ring to now light our collective chalice, with beautiful words and flame. This is our UU symbol of the worth and dignity of each creature, and the interdependent web of existence which connects us.

Chalice Lighting (Mary Borland and Thad Ring)

In the rich, brown earth,
a glimpse of green rises up
A hopeful stem, seeking and growing
And In that moment, our mind's eye can already imagine,
(How amazing that we can still imagine)
The yellow trumpeting of the open daffodil, and many flowers that follow
Attracting visitors with wings,
and those whose heart's wing at the sight of such beauty.
We light this chalice, our symbol of Unitarian Universalism
Because with its yellow flame, it reminds us
To imagine beauty as yet unseen
To continue to rise up as hopeful, seeking, growing people.

So we may blossom one and all. May it be so.

Hymn 38

“Morning Has Broken”

1. Morning has broken like the first morning, blackbird has spoken like the first bird. Praise for the singing! Praise for the morning! Praise for them springing fresh from the Word!
2. Sweet the rain's new fall sunlit from heaven, like the first dewfall on the first grass. Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden, sprung in completeness where God's feet pass.
3. Mine is the sunlight! Mine is the morning born of the one light Eden saw play! Praise with elation, praise every morning, God's recreation of the new day!

Welcome (Paree Roper)

Welcome to All Souls Church! My name is (here) and my pronouns are (here.) Welcome to this 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. 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.

In an effort to acknowledge and support Indigenous communities, it is important to recognize the people who lived on the land where our church now stands. The closest village was Nacotchtank, from which the name Anacostia is derived. This settlement was 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.

If we were together in our building, we would turn and greet one another. While still on-line, we do something we call "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 are together, creating community.

Announcements (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. There are two events happening today. The first is part of our new "After Hour" series of structured conversations after the Sunday service. In addition to the regular coffee hour, today we'll also open a breakout room for a sermon talk-back with Rev. Louise. What are your stories of Nature from Year One of the pandemic? Come share your experiences, whether they involved looking out your window, rambling in a park, or driving somewhere new. To participate, just stay in this same zoom and then join that break out group.

Second, this afternoon from 4:00-4:30 PM, All Souls will hold a Quarantine Anniversary Vigil with the theme "We're Still in This Together." This gathering is a public witness for (1) Our GRIEF at loved ones lost; (2) Our RESILIENCE and PERSISTENCE in the face of these challenges; and (3) our renewed commitment to JUSTICE, which includes equity for those disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and the ongoing need for systemic change.

Participants are invited to bring signs with messages related to any combination of the three themes: Grief, Resilience, and/or Justice. Or just show up and enjoy being together! But, you know, not too close together. We will still practice physical distancing, and masks are required. There will be a short program at 4:30. We will livestream the event as well; check the church Facebook page for details.

And hopefully you've seen that we've launched our pledge campaign for the next fiscal year, with the theme All Souls All In! We invite you to let us know how you'll support the church in the coming fiscal year, which starts July 1. Simply click the All Souls All In! graphic on the homepage.

Finally, it's time to start planting, because the 2021 All Souls Mother's Day Plant Sale is a socially distanced go! This year, the sale will be held on Saturday, May 8. We are looking for volunteers to grow and donate plants for the sale itself. Indoor and outdoor plants, hanging varieties, cuttings, vegetables, flowers, herbs, and noninvasive species. We will begin collecting donations in very early May. Please contact Rose via email if you plan to commit to donating plants (reaton@allsouls.ws).

We turn now to our pastoral concerns. First, we recognize that the murder trial of Minneapolis Police Officer Derek Chauvin, who killed George Floyd, started this past week. So our first prayer is a national pastoral concern for racial justice, and a concern for the racialized trauma that impacts so many, even over generations.

And as we pass the one-year anniversary of the pandemic, we know that so many are marking the loss of a parent, family members, friends, or coworkers in the last year. Whether or not COVID was the cause, every death has been complicated by the systems impacted in the shutdown. We grieve with so many who could not observe the usual rituals for dying and death.

We mourn with Jonathan Neeley on the unexpected death of his father Mark in February, after a lifetime of health struggles. Sending blessings to Jonathan and family as they prepare for Zoom memorial in early April.

We grieve the February death from cancer of Sr. Dianna Ortiz. Sr. Dianna was a nationally known Roman Catholic leader based in DC who founded the Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition and was famous for her accompaniment of others after torture and assault. Sr. Dianna was also the godmother of Javier, the child of member Meredith Larson, dedicated at All Souls. We send condolences to Meredith and Javier, and to the very wide community grieving the loss of this remarkable and visionary woman.

Two Zoom Celebrations of Life approach, and are on the All Souls calendar with links:
This Saturday, March 20, at 5 pm, for Marshall McVadon, the mother of long-time member Erin McVadon Albright, husband Jim Albright, and son Eduardo.
And Saturday, March 27, at 6 pm, for Silver Soul and All Souls leader Emily Dyer. We are thinking of Emily's sons Emile and Phillip as they plan this event.
In the silence that follows, please say aloud the names of those you carry on your heart this morning.

Meditation, 551 in SLT

I invite you to join me in mediation, with these words from the Ute Indians of North America:
Earth teach me stillness as the grasses are stilled with light.
Earth teach me suffering as old stones suffer with memory.
Earth teach me caring as parents who secure their young.

Earth teach me courage as the tree which stands all alone.
Earth teach me limitation as the ant which crawls on the ground.
Earth teach me freedom as the eagle which soars in the sky.
Earth teach me resignation as the leaves which die in the fall.
Earth teach me regeneration as the seed which rises in the spring.
Earth teach me to forget myself as melted snow forgets its life.
Earth teach me to remember kindness as dry fields weep with rain.

Hymn 123

“Spirit of Life”

Fuente de amor, ven hacia mi
Y al corazon cantale tu compasion
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.

Offertory (Paree Roper)

Many of us who live in the Washington area are familiar with Skyline Drive up in the Blue Ridge Mountains. It is in an area of exquisite beauty and just a stone’s throw away from the nation’s capital. Summer and fall are when most people make the trip, but I want to talk about the experience in the winter.

The place has a totally different feel-trees have shed their leaves and this changes the view considerably. It is very quiet-totally unlike the summer when traffic can rival the hordes on the Washington Beltway at times. Many of the lodges, camping areas and amenities that are packed in the summer are closed during the winter. On a recent trip, part of the drive was closed due to a recent snowfall. While this was disappointing to my husband and me, we still felt wonder over the beauty surrounding us and were grateful that someone had the foresight to preserve this treasured landscape. We relished the thought of coming back later when it reopened. Meanwhile, the deer will keep foraging, spring will eventually produce new growth, and nature keeps working its miracles.

Our church has been through a different “winter” of sorts this past year. Our views are indeed different-we see each other through Zoom and not eye-to-eye in the sanctuary.

It may be quieter this time of year on Skyline Drive, but for us, the quiet comes when we use the mute function.

Our church building is closed. While this is disappointing, we have thoughts of coming back and what a celebration it will be when we do. Meanwhile, the church continues to serve us. The Board is working hard on governance and other policies, the music and sermons fill our spirits, and we can give thanks that others had the foresight to invest in this church in the past so that we could benefit from its presence today.

I give to All Souls because I want this sanctuary to be in good physical and spiritual condition not just for me, but for those to come. I know there are fruits that I will not harvest, but I also know that it is so very necessary to plant the seed so that there is the possibility of a harvest. The plate will pass soon, and I would encourage each person to donate. I also encourage each person to pledge-our goal is \$1.2 million, and all amounts are welcome.

All members are encouraged to double their pledge, or increase their pledge this year by at least 10%. And to give a little extra if you can. Many in our community are suffering from the economic effects of the pandemic.

Pledges are the basis of the All Souls budget. A pledge is a promise to fulfill a gift to the church. Your support will allow the church to continue to provide:

- Quality worship services.
- Stellar music
- Fun and engaging Religious Education programming for children and youth.
- Compelling Adult Spiritual Education classes
- And to support our social justice initiatives

This “winter” of a year has been a challenge. Let us respond by doing what we can to preserve our treasured landscape. The morning’s offering will now be given and received.

Anthem (All Souls Jubilee Singers; Nicole Rumeau, Esther Strongman, & Taryn Wilgus-Null, vocal leads; David Cole, guitar; Corey Null, bass; Ken Quam, percussion; Lenard Starks, keyboard)

“Canticle of Brother Sun” (Jim Scott and Paul Winter)

All praise be yours through Brother Sun,
All praise be yours through Sister Moon,
By Mother Earth, my Lord be praised,
By Brother mountain, Sister Sea,
Through Brother Wind and Brother Air,
Through Sister Water, Brother Fire;
The stars above give thanks to thee;
All praise to those who live in peace.

Ask of the beasts and they shall teach you the beauty of the earth.
Ask of the trees and they shall teach you the beauty of the earth.

Ask of the winds and they shall teach you the beauty of the earth.
Ask of the flow'rs and they shall teach you the beauty of the earth.

Brother Sun, Sister Moon (Repeat)

For the beauty of the Earth, sing oh sing today.
Of the sky and of our birth, sing oh sing always.
Nature, human and divine, all around us lies.
Source of all, to thee we raise grateful hymns of praise.
Brother Sun.

Reading (Rev. Green)

Excerpt from “The Arrhythmic Beat of the Pandemic” (Dr. Brian Glenny)

Thanks to Kirsten Lodal, All Souls congregant and seminarian, who sent this text, and began great thinking about this 1-year anniversary over a month ago.

During this pandemic’s lockdown, my “where” and “when” have changed meaning. My “how” and “why” are shifted out of position too. And now I’m asking myself: “Who even am I?” I’ve spent weeks reading a 100-page book I normally would read in a day. It’s called “Rythmanalysis” by the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre... It’s an attempt to establish a new science of knowing.

This book ironically accounts for my failure to finish it. His diagnosis? Arrhythmia. Arrhythmia is a hypothesis for explaining disruptions in the meaning of personal time and the fragmentation of people who are out of phase...

[Lefebvre writes:] Everyday life remains shot through and traversed by great cosmic and vital rhythms: day and night, the months and the seasons, and still more precisely biological rhythms.

My take: I’ve got a certain beat in life that I live by. It changes season to season, day to day, hour to hour. But I’ve become habituated to these different beats at different times in a way where I don’t even pay attention to them, until they are disrupted. They are part of my hourly, daily, yearly “songs.”

But this disaster, this pandemic, has deregulated all of my habits. I’ve never had a pandemic “season” to habituate to. I’m spending all of my energy re-habituating myself — my energy is consumed learning a new “pandemic” song.

Sermon (Rev. Green)

“Nature’s Revelation”

How is your pandemic song going? Are you still re-habituating, because the disruption of rhythms never ceases? Do you keep establishing new patterns, only to see them unravel, again? Brian Glenney’s essay, written almost a year ago, resonates deeply now. This entire week has seen recounting of disruption stories, on every media platform, in so many losses, and

recalculations.

I'm interested in his questions: During this pandemic's lockdown, my "where" and "when" have changed meaning. My "how" and "why" are shifted out of position too. And now I'm asking myself: "Who even am I?"

This is existential wondering, which we have each experienced before, prior to the advent of COVID 19. The question comes after major health diagnosis or serious medical treatment. When there is a significant death, especially the loss your parent, spouse, child or close friend. In any loss that feels jarring to your understanding of the nature of things: A heartbreaking divorce which disrupts the future you believed was secure. A job loss that sets you adrift into wrestling with work and economic security. A struggle with the mental health of a child, throwing daily life into a tailspin.

The pandemic, of course, holds all of this amplified, life events continuing in the middle of the pandemic song still sounding. As the grief continues, we have been so dislodged that adjustment is constant, and arrhythmia pronounced. Who even am I? Who are you now, after this year?

In what Lefebvre names as "disruptions in the meaning of time" and "the fragmentation of people who are out of phase," there is also amazing new life. Unmoored from the usual markers, many people just decide to do life differently. They may have shocked you. You might have surprised yourself. While this can certainly involve resources and privilege, change can also be the exact opposite—taking huge financial risks, losing everything, and risking much more.

A recent article by Amanda Long described this beautifully. In the March 7 issue of the Wash Post Magazine, she began: In our year of waiting, here are stories of people who didn't wait. Each interview title summed up someone's bold change, right in the midst of year one: I quit the restaurant business and started my own art studio. I fell in love...I don't want to wait anymore. I got divorced after 33 years of marriage. We built a house—on our own—in the woods. I got gender-affirming top surgery as part of my [gender] transition. We started IVF, in-vitro fertilization. I ran for school board and won. I moved across the country to live closer to my family.

What actions in your own life involved a leap for change, out of this painful new reality? During the last year, or way before? In 12 months of disruption most of us were doing some kind of evaluation. Am I where I want to be? Who am I when the rhythms of my habits so sharply shift? What is the meaning of this life?

Here's my biggest re-habitation. More and more, I am identifying and anchoring in Earth first, in the natural rhythms that continue despite the unraveling of human systems. There is great beauty and seasonal reassurance, along with massive species loss and climate disruption. There has been a pronounced deepening of my connection to particular places, animals, trees, waters, mountains, deserts, stones. Very local sites in most cases, and also in imagining distant geographies I once visited when travel was more possible.

Gaia, named as the Being of our planetary home and multiple natural systems, is evolving even as we devolve. This hard truth invites us to develop a different human consciousness. Albert Einstein said it this way: A human being is a part of the whole, called by us 'Universe,' a part

limited in time and space. He [she, they] experiences self, thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest – a kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desire, and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison, by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures, and the whole of nature in its beauty.

Within Nature's endless revelation, there is a way of being rooted as humans which we can choose to develop. Remembering the indigenous ways that weave underneath all human life and action. Many peoples live planted in sacred place and elements, with a commitment to all beings. They make a collective promise that transcends particularities of individual tribe, culture, family lineage, and personal identities.

This doesn't involve discounting important individual markers. Rather, it suggests we might embrace them more deeply, while simultaneously experiencing and designing a wider wholeness. As path to individual transformation, this natural rooting process moves us towards human cooperation and collective identity. If the pandemic has shown us anything, it is that our lives depend on the relationships around us. As has been widely noted, our arrhythmia may actually be our salvation, our unplanned shift the needed disruption of human being.

Nature's revelation is that we belong to Earth. We are a species long in arrhythmia with the planetary rhythms—unaware of, or disregarding, our arrogant and destructive ways. When human systems fall apart, everything is at risk, and anything is possible.

Robert Frost writes of spring green approaching Equinox in this Northern hemisphere:

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay.

Grief and loss, disruption and change, invite pondering why you remain. Who are you now, one year into the pandemic we never imagined? What is your big change going to be?

This is the time to leap into new design, as if your life depended on it. For your best and higher self, for family and friends. For the sake of many interconnected communities. For the survival and thriving of the next generations. This anniversary is your threshold into everything. Imagine an emergence which brings wholeness, honoring highest values and inclusion for all.

Nature reveals an intricate web of existence in which we each briefly shine and shimmer. And yet, nothing gold can stay. Seize this day. Amen.

Hymn 163

“For the Earth Forever Turning”

1. For the earth forever turning; for the skies, for ev'ry sea; for our lives, for all we cherish, sing we our joyful song of peace.
2. For the mountains, hills, and pastures in their silent majesty; for the stars, for all the heavens, sing we our joyful song of peace.
3. For the sun, for rain and thunder, for the seasons' harmony, for our lives, for all creation, sing we our joyful praise to Thee.
4. For the world we raise our voices, for the home that gives us birth; in our joy we sing returning home to our blue green hills of earth.

Benediction (Rev. Green)

Our benediction is an excerpt from a poem by UU minister Lynn Ungar, entitled Pandemic. Written on March 11, 2020, the poem went viral. It was the reading used in the first All Souls Sunday service recorded for after the shut-down, one year ago.

Sing. Pray. Touch only those to whom you commit your life. Center down.

And when your body has become still, reach out with your heart.

Know that we are connected in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.

(You could hardly deny it now.)

Know that our lives are in one another's hands.

(Surely, that has come clear.)

Do not reach out your hands.

Reach out your heart.

Reach out your words.

Reach out all the tendrils of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.

Promise this world your love—for better or for worse, in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live.

Go in peace. Return in love. Blessed Be.

Music (All Souls Jubilee Singers; Nicole Rumeau, Esther Strongman, & Taryn Wilgus-Null, vocal leads; David Cole, guitar; Corey Null, bass; Ken Quam, percussion; Lenard Starks, keyboard)

“The Waters of March” (Antonio Jobim)

Portuguese	English
Um pau, uma pedra,	A stick, a stone,
É o fim do caminho	It's the end of the road
É o resto de um toco,	It's the rest of a stump,
É um pouco sozinho	It's a little alone

A stick a stone, it's the end of the road,
it's feeling alone, it's the weight of your load
it's a sliver of glass, it's life, it's the sun,
it's night, it's death, It's a knife, it's a gun
a flower that blooms, a fox in the brush,
a knot in the wood, the song of the thrush.

the mystery of life, the steps in the hall,
the sound of the wind, and the waterfall
It's the moon floating free, It's the curve of the slope,
it's an ant, it's a bee, It's a reason for hope

And the riverbank sings, of the waters of March
it's the promise of life, it's the joy in your heart.

The foot, the ground, the flesh, and the bone,
the beat of the road, a slingshot stone.
A fish, a flash, a silvery glow,
a fight, a bet, the range of the bow.
the bed of the well, the end of the line,
the dismay in the face, it's a loss, it's a find.

A spear, a spike, a stick, a nail,
it's a drip, it's a drop, It's the end of the tale.
The dew on the leaf, in the soft morning light,
the shot of a gun, in the dead of the night.
A mile, a must, a thrust, a bump.
It's the will to survive, It's a jolt, it's a jump.
The blueprint of the house, a body in bed,
the car stuck in the mud, it's the mud, it's the mud.
A fish, a flash, a fish, a wing
it's a hawk, it's a dove, It's the promise of spring

And the riverbank sings Of the waters of March
it's the end of despair, it's the joy in your heart,

Um pau, uma pedra,	A stick, a stone,
É o fim do caminho	It's the end of the road
É o resto de um toco,	It's the rest of a stump,
É um pouco sozinho	It's a little alone

A snake, a stick, it is John, it is Joe,
it's a thorn in your hand, and a cut on your toe.
In the distance the shelves. rode three shadows of blue.
A stick, a stone, the end of the load,
the stump of a tree, it's a frog, it's a toad.
a sigh of breath, a walk, a run
a life, a death the rain, the sun.

And the riverbank sings of the promise of life
It's the joy in your heart, in your heart