

Worship transcript for March 21, 2021

Prelude (All Souls Bluegrass Band)

“Jesus Etc.” (Wilco)

Jesus, don't cry
You can rely on me, honey
You can combine anything you want
I'll stick around
You were right about the stars
Each one is a setting sun

Tall buildings shake, voices escape
Singing sad, sad songs tuned to chords
Strung down your cheeks, bitter melodies
Turning the orbit around

Don't cry, you can rely on me, honey
You can come by any time you want
I'll be around, you were right about the stars
Each one is a setting sun

Tall buildings shake, voices escape
Singing sad, sad songs tuned to chords
Strung down your cheeks, bitter melodies
Turning the orbit around

Voices whine,
Skyscrapers are scraping together
Your voices is smoking
Last cigarettes, all you can get
Turning your orbit around

Our love
Our love
Our love is all we have

Our love
Our love is all of god's money
Every one is a burning sun

Tall buildings shake, voices escape
Singing sad, sad songs tuned to chords
Strung down your cheeks, bitter melodies
Turning the orbit around

Voices whine,
Skyscrapers are scraping together
Your voices is smoking
Last cigarettes, all you can get
Turning your orbit around

Call to Worship (Rev. Rob Keithan)

Chalice Lighting ()

Hymn

“I Know This Rose Will Open”

I know this rose will open
I know my fear will burn away
I know my soul will unfurl its wings
I know this rose will open

Welcome (Kirsten Lodal)

Good morning, and welcome to All Souls! My name is Kirsten Lodal, I use she/her pronouns, and I'm honored to be your worship associate today. All Souls has been my spiritual home since 2001, and it is because of my experiences within this beloved community that I am now a seminarian in ministerial training, attending divinity school at Union Theological Seminary.

We welcome you to a community where our search for spirituality and our passion for justice meet. 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 and meditation 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. This is a place where ALL are welcome at the table of love and fellowship. 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 mailing list so that we may stay in touch with you, please send a direct message to Gary Penn in the chat. And do stay on afterwards for coffee and conversation so we may greet you.

As an important part of welcoming All Souls into our fellowship, we acknowledge and support our Indigenous communities, who were here before us and are here with us now. We recognize that our church building was erected on Piscataway homelands, and more specifically Nacotchtank and Anacostan tribal homelands. [Please pronounce the tribal names slowly, because the ASL interpreter needs to finger spell them.] We honor these beginnings and recognize the ongoing dedication and importance of Indigenous culture within our communities, and within the

land on which we gather, live, work and worship. Let us take a moment of silence and deep breaths to reflect on whose land we each reside, in our individual and collective locations around the United States and around the globe. [Silence of 4-5 breaths long]

Now is the time in our service when, if we were together in the building, we would turn and warmly greet one another. Since moving online, we've adapted this to what we call "beholding." If you feel so moved, please turn on your camera, turn your Zoom to gallery view, and scroll through the pages of beautiful souls, say hello in the chat, and behold one another as we continue to create community together.

Child Dedications

Announcements (Rev. Louise Green)

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.

Sermon (Rev. Keithan)

"What's a Kayak?"

Over the Thanksgiving holiday this past November, when my wife and I were facing the proposition of a week with no school and no safe opportunities to visit or host family, we hit upon the idea of an impromptu beach trip with the DC family with whom we are bubbled. We found a great deal on a house in Ocean City Maryland, so off we went.

The house was located on the bay, and had the unexpected but welcome feature of a kayak for our use. I don't kayak much, but I really enjoy it, and frankly I was THRILLED at the opportunity to get a little exercise and be entirely alone for awhile. After one of my daily trips, my two-year-old, Clara, who had recently entered what I will graciously call "the question

phase” of child development, asked what I’d been doing. I told her that I had been paddling her kayak, to which she replied “What’s a kayak?” Fair question, I thought. She has no idea what that is. So I gave her a simple exclamation about what it looked like, and how it worked, to which she replied, but “What’s a kayak?”

I still felt like I could make some progress, so I said come here. She came over, I lifted her up, and I pointed out the window at the kayak and gave her the simple exclamation again. To which she replied, “What’s the kayak?” As I said here, let’s go outside. So we went outside. And we looked at the kayak, we touched the kayak, I gave her the explanation again. And again, [to congregation—can you say it with me this time?] she said “What’s a kayak?” So I said well, let’s sit in it. So I turned it over, and sat down. And lifted her in and I said this is a kayak. And again she said “What’s the kayak?”

There are times when, as a parent, you just have to admit that you have lost. And that whatever learning or action you might have hoped for is gone. It’s times like these where the you just have to go with the old saying: if you can’t beat’m, join’m. And so I decided to ask myself the same question: What is a kayak? Does the kayak know it’s a kayak? Especially when it’s not in the water? Right now, it’s just an oddly shaped chair that’s kinda damp.

The inclination to ask questions is a part of child development, for sure. But it’s also a critical part of our religious history. Unitarianism, and Universalism, and Unitarian universalism exist because our ancestors asked questions. In some cases they asked the same questions, again and again. And when the answers presented were not satisfactory, they went off and created their own answers.

The theme of the month at All Souls is Revelation. This word can bring to mind some very powerful images, especially if you are thinking of the final book of the Christian Bible. It’s apocalyptic imagery is intense. I’ll say a little bit more about that later, but for now suffice it to say that it is talking about the end of the world, a capital “R” kind of revelation. And know that it’s not Revelations plural, as in motion. It’s Revelation, singular. As in, knowledge.

In a more traditional and practical sense, revelation in the Christian tradition has been the interpretation of Scripture that is passed down from clergy. One of the principles of the Protestant Reformation was that people could access Scripture directly.

But in their rejection of the dominant answers, and independence in seeking their own, our religious ancestors were implicitly and explicitly putting value on still a different kind of revelation. A kind of revelation that was grounded in human experience and human relationship. And most of all, in love.

Although I identify strongly as a religious humanist, I still find great value in the concept of revelation. After all, I think seeking truth and wisdom is one of the most fundamental parts of our human existence. Revelation is simply a way to talk about how we seek and access this wisdom, both individually and collectively.

In the course of this process, it’s become clear to me, and it gets clearer every year, that the way each of us sees the world is profoundly impacted by our particular identities and experiences.

The way I see the world as a cisgender white man is profoundly different than an Asian American woman, or a transgender black man.

So, if each of us individuals only have a piece of the truth, the closest we can come to understanding the fullness of the world is to experience it through each other. Through each other's stories, and perspectives, and experiences. To me, this is what revelation looks like! It's a central requirement, and practice, of being part of a congregation that is dedicated to building Beloved Community: we need to know each other's stories.

It's easy to think of this work as being primarily about connecting with people with whom we have obvious differences in identity, and that is certainly part of it. I suspect that many of you, like me, value All Souls especially because it does have significant obvious diversity. But there is also great value in connecting with people who have similar identities, and realizing the diversity that exists there as well.

Just this past Monday, I finished leading an introduction to anti-racism for white people class with Jennifer Langer Smith. Some of the topics we ask people to talk about, such as their formative experiences related to race, are ones that I have literally engaged with dozens of times over the past 20 years. But every single time I am in a situation like this, in addition to me learning about other people and them learning about me, hearing other's stories always, always helps me to recognize and understand aspects of my own life better. I am able to see nuances or patterns that I didn't see before, or I just straight-up remember something that I'd forgotten.

Helping each other learn is one of the most important things we can do together in spiritual community. Now, as some of you know, both my wife and I teach flying trapeze. She's an expert and helps run the school; I am just a basic instructor. One of the phrases I heard early on in my training, from a senior staff member named Scout Day, was that "the danger is in the repetition." In that context, it meant that we could never be on auto pilot when we were working to keep people safe. Just because 99 people had followed instructions didn't mean that person 100 would as well. We always had to be prepared for something unusual.

The more I've thought about it, the more I believe that "the danger is in the repetition" is a powerful and necessary life lesson as well. And, frankly, the same principle applies: we can never be on auto pilot when we are working to keep people safe.

Back to the book of capital R revelation. In that text, all the violent imagery centers on overthrowing the evil empire, which is Rome. But now, for much of the world today the United States is Rome. We are the product of and perpetrator of colonial domination.

This is where there is the most profound danger in the repetition: when we're just on auto pilot, we can't effectively challenge the colonialist patterns that pervade our ways of thinking and being. In this case I'm thinking about the subtle, complex, and often unconscious ways that white supremacy shows up in our individual and relational lives. And I'm thinking that the best antidote for this is being in community, sometimes with people who are very different from us, and sometimes for people who are similar. It's about each person and each group figuring out what they need to do to heal, and to create right relationship. For some it's more about not perpetuating oppression, for others it's more about recovering from oppression.

The transformative justice framework, which we will be engaging with a lot more in the coming years, encourages us to come with the approach that every person perpetuates harm in some situations and experiences harm in others. And recognizing that mutuality can help unlock healing through a process that is focused on learning rather than punishment. For example, in the wake of this week's violence in Atlanta, it's tempting to focus on how to punish misogynists and white supremacists. Of course people need to be held accountable for their actions. However, in cases like this it's often far too easy to blame others rather than looking at the work WE have to do. So, as we consider the systemic remedies that need to happen, I invite and encourage us to also consider what we need to do in our own congregation and our own communities. Knowing other people's stories and experiences is a good place to start.

In this work, and in life generally, I think we will all be well served by a spirit of curiosity. By a willingness to keep asking questions of each other and with each other. I mentioned this in a previous sermon, but I think it bears repeating: there isn't much we can do to change the magnitude of the challenges we face. Racism, this pandemic, climate change—these are huge and complex problems. There's no sugar-coating that. However, what we CAN change is how we feel about approaching these problems. We can change how isolated or connected we feel. We can change whether we feel lost or that we have a path. And we can change whether we bring joy to the work, or just doom.

Sometimes the innocent, genuine, and endless questions of a child can lift us out of the mundane repetition. But it's also something that we can do together as adults. We can intentionally cultivate and appreciate each other's curiosity and wonder. We can use the time we spend together in meetings for more than just work output; we can draw out the beauty and joy and meaning from each other. Because sometimes life is so hard or so ridiculous that you just have to laugh. I mean, would you ever, in your lifetime, have guessed that every bank in this country would have a sign on the front door that says mask required for entry? These are such weird times!

So, let's ask questions,
let's do what we need to do to find answers,
let's do the necessary hard work together, and
let's help each other learn and laugh along the way.
So may it be, and Amen.

Anthem (All Souls Bluegrass Band)

“Grown Ocean” (Fleet Foxes)

In that dream I'm as old as the mountains
Still as starlight reflected in fountains
Children grown on the edge of the ocean
Kept like jewelry, kept with devotion
In that dream moving slow through the morning

You would come to me then without answers
Lick my wounds and remove my demands for now

Eucalyptus and orange trees are bloomin'
In that dream, there's no darkness a-loomin'
In that dream moving slow through the morning time
In that dream, I could hardly contain it
All my life, I will wait to attain it
There

I know someday the smoke will all burn off
All these voices I'll someday have turned off
I will see you someday when I've woken
I'll be so happy just to have spoken
I'll have so much to tell you about it then
In that dream, I could hardly contain it
All my life, I will wait to attain it
There

Wide-eyed walker
Don't betray me
I will wake one day, don't delay me
Wide-eyed leaver
Always going

Offertory (Kirsten Lodal)

Now is the time in our service when we reflect on how much this community means to us, we reflect on the meaning of giving, and we consider how much we can give back to this community.

For the last 20 years of my life, All Souls has offered me spiritual sustenance in a free thinking, non-judgemental, justice seeking community of faith. I grew up Protestant, but by the time I left for college, I felt largely detached from Christianity. I spent years without a spiritual home, having never heard of Unitarian Universalism, and not believing that there really was a place for someone like me. Someone who longed for the fellowship, and the music, and the sacred pause of church, but who also simply could no longer abide a certain kind of doctrinal and social orthodoxy and intolerance of much organized religion. When I found my way to All Souls after graduating from college, I knew I was home. Here, I have been able to reconnect with some of the elements of my childhood and family faith practices that still mean a lot to me. But I have also discovered this liberatory, expansive Unitarian Universalist community that embraces the sacred practices of so many faith traditions; that embraces the sacred content of so many different kinds of texts, the sacred wisdom of nature and of children, and the sacred joy conveyed through so many genres of music, from gospel and R&B to bluegrass, as we've heard today.

This is a community that never stops seeking to grow, and evolve, and improve – and it challenges and invites all of who are part of it to do the same. This is why I give and give generously to All Souls, both every week through our “virtual” plate and through my annual pledges.

We are currently in the midst of our “All Souls, All In” annual pledge campaign with a goal of raising \$1.2 million to support the outreach and operations of the church next year. Every year at this time, we ask members of the community to not only continue your weekly giving, but to also make an annual pledge to the campaign. We also know that this has been a hard year for many, and we celebrate that there are many different ways to contribute to All Souls, including through your time and talent. If you are in a position to increase your pledge this year, we ask you to consider doing so, because we also know that, for others, this has been a very challenging time.

Please look to the chat box for instructions on how to give to this week’s offering, as well as how to make a pledge to our annual campaign.

This morning’s offering will now be gratefully received.

Hymn

“Blue Boat Home”

Though below me, I feel no motion
Standing on these mountains and plains
Far away from the rolling ocean
Still my dry land heart can say
I’ve been sailing all my life now
Never harbor nor port have I known
The wide universe is the ocean I travel
And the earth is my blue boat home

Sun, my sail and moon, my rudder
As I ply the stormy sea
Leaning over the edge in wonder
Casting questions into the deep
Drifting here with my ship’s companions
All we kindred pilgrim souls
Making our way by the lights of the heavens
In our beautiful blue boat home

I give thanks to the waves upholding me
Hail the great winds urging me on
Greet the infinite sea before me
Sing the sky my sailor’s song
I was born upon the fathoms
Never harbor nor port have I known
The wide universe is the ocean I travel
And the earth is my blue boat home.

Benediction (Rev. Keithan and Clara)

Rather than the end-times focus of the Book of Revelation, I want to close with the sentiment expressed in the Book of Mark, Chapter 10 Verse 15: “Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And rather than coming from me, it’s going to come from my daughter Clara. And it’s going to come in the form of her favorite knock-knock joke, which she developed entirely on her own.

What does it mean? That’s for you to decide. Yes, maybe it’s meaningless. But, on the other hand, maybe it’s the key to everything and we just don’t understand yet. So here’s the final word from Clara:

Music (All Souls Bluegrass Band)

“End of the Line” (The Traveling Wilburys)

Well it’s alright, riding around in the breeze
Well it’s alright if you live the life you please
Well it’s alright doing the best you can
Well it’s alright as long as you lend a hand
You can sit around and wait for the phone to ring
Waiting for someone to tell you everything
Sit around and wonder what tomorrow will bring
Maybe a diamond ring
Well it’s alright even if they say you’re wrong
Well it’s alright, sometimes you gotta be strong
Well it’s alright as long as you’ve got somewhere to lay
Well it’s alright, every day is judgement day
Maybe somewhere down the road away
You’ll think of me and wonder where I am these days
Maybe somewhere down the road when somebody plays
Purple Haze
Well it’s alright even when push comes to shove
Well it’s alright if you got someone to love
Well it’s alright everything will work out fine
Well it’s alright, we going to the end of the line
Don’t have to be ashamed of the car I drive
I’m just glad to be here, happy to be alive
And it don’t matter, if you’re by my side
I’m satisfied
Well it’s alright even if you’re old and gray
Well it’s alright, you still got something to say
Well it’s alright, remember to live and let live
Well it’s alright, the best you can do is forgive
Well it’s alright, riding around in the breeze
Well it’s alright if you live the life you please
Well it’s alright, even if the sun don’t shine
Well it’s alright, we’re going to the end of the line