

# **Worship transcript for March 28, 2021**

## **Prelude (All Souls Choir)**

“Hold On!” (Jester Hairston)

Keep your hand on the plow,  
Hold on, hold on!

Norah, Norah, let me come in,  
The doors all fastened and the windows pinned  
Keep your hand on the plow, hold on, hold on!  
Norah said, ‘you done lost your track,  
You can’t plow straight and keep a-lookin’ back’  
Keep your hand on the plow, hold on, hold on!

Hold on, hold on!  
Keep your hand on the plow, hold on, hold on!

If you wanna get to heaven, let me tell you how  
Just keep your hand on the gospel plow  
Keep your hand on the plow, hold on, hold on!  
If that plow stays in your hand,  
land you straight in the promised land  
Keep your hand on the plow, hold on, hold on!

Hold on, hold on!  
Keep your hand on the plow, hold on, hold on!

Mary had a golden chain,  
Every link spelled Jesus’ name  
Keep your hand on the plow, hold on, hold on!  
Keep on climbin’ and don’t you tire,  
Every rung goes higher and higher  
Keep your hand on the plow, hold on, hold on!

Hold on, hold on!  
Keep your hand on the plow, hold on, hold on!

## **Call to Worship (Rev. Kathleen Rolenz)**

We gather together this day at the beginning of Passover  
An ancient story of liberation from slavery  
Of how the forces of destruction passed over the Jewish people  
How precious is freedom;  
How powerful that impulse

How wondrous to find, through wandering, a home.  
We gather to honor the persistence of a people who continue to survive and thrive.  
In this ancient story, we find fragments of our own,  
Knowing that each morning we rise, we have lived to see a new dawn.  
We gather this day to see, to know  
To feel in our bones the terrible tenderness of a community gathered in common cause;  
Come, let us worship together by kindling a small flame. We invite the Mendenhall-Miller  
family to kindle that spark.

### **Chalice Lighting (Maury Mendenhall, Andrew Miller, Naia & Nile Mendenhall-Miller )**

#### **Hymn**

“Gonna Keep On Moving Forward”

Gonna keep on moving forward  
Never turning back, never turning back

Gonna keep on moving forward  
Never turning back, never turning back

Gonna keep on moving proudly  
Never turning back, never turning back

Gonna keep on singing loudly  
Never turning back, never turning back

Gonna keep on loving boldly  
Never turning back never turning back

Gonna keep on moving forward  
Never turning back, never turning back

#### **Welcome (Kirk Freeman)**

Welcome to All Souls Church! My name is Kirk Freeman and my pronouns are he, his, him.  
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. They were part of the Piscataway group of tribes. 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 on whose land we each reside, in our individual and collective locations around the U.S. and our planet Earth. [Silence of 4-5 breaths long]

If we were together in the building, we would turn and greet one another. While we are still online, 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. Louise Green)**

Good morning All Souls! It is so good to be with you this morning.

It is my distinct pleasure to welcome the Reverend Elizabeth Nguyen (win) to our pulpit this morning. Rev. Elizabeth Nguyen roots for the Wisconsin Badgers, lives in Boston, and is learning all the time about liberation, solidarity, courage, and cowardice. She is the Immigration Bond Coordinator with the National Bail Fund Network and previously did faith-based justice work and youth organizing. She is a Unitarian Universalist minister and part of the founding team of the Beyond Bond Fund in Boston. She is passionate about progressive organizing in the Vietnamese American community, and building power across prison walls. I am so delighted to welcome you to All Souls this morning, Rev. Nguyen

Although the building has been closed, the church has never shut down. We continue to provide programs and opportunities for you to connect, to grow and to serve. Let me tell you about a few of those opportunities coming up in the weeks ahead.

Next Friday, at 7:30 PM Rev. Louise Green, lay readers and I will be hosting the Good Friday Service. This is a special service, remembering the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. Link to that service can be found on the calendar page of the church' website.

After Hour Conversations continue. Today at 11:45 I'll be hosting a Zoom breakout room on the topic of "If These Walls Could Talk." I'd like to hear some of your stories about important events that have happened in the building since your time at All Souls. What stories would those walls tell if they could talk?

Tonight at 7 PM, church member Shige Sakurai is hosting a conversation about Japanese Unitarians and their connection to All Souls. This is a wonderfully rich and meaningful part of our history and I encourage all to attend.

Looking ahead – our New Member Orientation Class, entitled Roots and Wings, starts on Tuesday, April 6th. If you want to know more about Unitarian Universalism, and are thinking about joining the church, we encourage you to sign up!

Now we turn our hearts and minds to the needs of those joys and woes which touch us – for what touches one, touches us all.

This week begins Passover, and Jews all over the world and in our own church may be gathering virtually or in small groups to celebrate this most important holiday of liberation and freedom. At the end of the Seder meal, it is not uncommon to say “next year, In Jerusalem.” And for all our members missing our own Seder meal, we say “next year, At All Souls.” For Christians, this is Palm Sunday, which begins Holy Week – as the story of Jesus of Nazareth life, death and resurrection unfold and are told.

Yesterday was the day of Transgender Visibility. We take time to celebrate the transgender and non-binary people and we acknowledge the courage it takes to live openly and authentically. We also want to raise awareness to the violence and discrimination that trans people face on a daily basis.

This week we faced the horrific news of ten people killed in Boulder, Colorado by a young man with an automatic rifle and gun. In fact, CNN reports that there have been seven mass killings in seven days. We are heart sick and sick of thoughts and prayers directed towards the victims and families of these killings. We say their names out loud to honor them, their families and to state clearly our desire to never have to do this again: Denny Stong, 20; Neven Stanisic, 23; Rikki Olds, 25; Tralona Bartkowiak, 49; Suzanne Fountain, 59; Teri Leiker, 51; Kevin Mahoney, 61; Lynn Murray, 62; and Jody Waters, 65 and Officer Eric Talley.

### **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. Elizabeth Nguyen)**

“It’s Hard to Ride a Bike That’s Not Moving”

Excerpts from How to Ride a Bicycle

by WikiHow, coauthored by Jonas Jackel, Owner of Huckleberry Bicycles

Do you want to go outside and ride a bike? Are you trying to teach someone else? Many adults never got the chance to learn and many kids want to learn. There's no reason to be embarrassed. Instead, get eager to start one of the healthiest, most environmentally friendly, and most satisfying forms of self-transportation possible. It requires preparation, technique, and a little falling.

Part 1: Riding Safety:

- 1) Find a fitting location.
- 2) Wear riding clothing.
- 3) Put on a helmet.

Part 2: Mounting a Bicycle

- 1) Adjust the bike seat.
- 2) Test the brakes.
- 3) Plant one foot on the ground.
- 4) Start gliding.
- 5) Keep your eyes straight ahead.
- 6) Start pedaling.

Start with one foot on the ground. Your other foot should be flat on a pedal pointed upwards. Push off, put that foot on the other pedal, and go! Keep going! Note: Going faster makes balancing easier.

I went mountain biking for the first time a couple of summers ago. I was at a family reunion where our main bonding activity was loading our rented mountain bikes onto ski lifts that were repurposed for summer activities and then bouncing down ski trails, all of us trying to stay upright from my elderly aunts to my smallest cousins. The first time I mountain biked I was mostly terrified, wearing sneakers and athletic pants, hoping that proper clothes might make up for utter lack of experience. In front of me as a throttled down the mountain was my 9 year old cousin wearing flip flops and a sequined pink shirt, standing up the whole time so that her feet could reach the pedals, confidently flying down the trail. I learned the hard way what she already knew – that when you slow down, you fall. Your tire gets stuck in the muddy ruts in the trail and you go flying off that bike. When you go fast, your bike skims happily over the muddy ruts, momentum and gravity conspire and you whizz down the mountain, upright and full of adrenaline and with less grace but just as much joy as the 9 year old.

As spiritual people, as Unitarian Universalists, we are often quite good at being intentional. We've listened well to the words of Thoreau – we want to live deliberately, to turn away from the hurried and wasted life. We are deeply aware of that for many of us, the demands on our time – family, work, feeding ourselves, responding to emails, just getting to where we need to go, leave us bereft, unobservant, lost in the blur of the business.

Busyness, writes Omid Safi, is the thief intimacy. Safi, says, "Tasks are finite. They come at us with an endless barrage. We check them off, and more follow. So what's the price we pay for being busy? It's not that being busy makes us more stressed, or less efficient, or less pleasant. It's that we miss out. We miss out on an extraordinary amount of time, of being present, of living

in intimacy with the people we love the most.”

And so we try heed the urgings of so many spiritual teachers to SLOW THE EFF DOWN. To free up our schedules and cut down on commitments that don't feed us. Around New Year I turned my phone off for a day – well not even a full day just most of one – and it was amaZing.

Intention, slowing down, brings powerful gifts.

Someone told me about a bike race where the goal was to ride a bicycle as slowly as possible without falling over. I have this amazing image I have in my head. People of all ages struggling to stay upright, fighting the urge to pedal, teetering from side to side, knowing that balance and stability could easily be theirs if they could just moved forward.

I have totally been that person. Not literally maybe, but definitely been that person stuck at inaction, feeling like a have a billion questions I can't answer and no way to make a decision, teetering from one anxiety to another, knowing, that if I just made a decision and moved forward, even if it was a bad decision, motion would allow me more stability, more balance.

We are so often stuck at inaction and indecision. How many COVID related meetings have I had with my housemates this past year looking at the data and our lives and trying to decide what made sense for our own safety, for our protection of others, for our ability to work and survive and live. We tried to plan and we couldn't. We could not be in motion, only stuck.

This guy Tom Wujec has studied, not slow bike riding or indecisive housemates but something similar – he's done this activity called the marshmallow challenge – a ton of times with a ton of different groups. He'll give a group some pieces of spaghetti and some string and tape and a marshmallow and your goal is to build the tallest tower freestanding tower that you can that will support the marshmallow in 15 minutes.

He's found that average height that groups get to is 20 inches, when business students do it, their towers are about 10 inches and who does better than average?

Kindergartners – coming in at 28 inches. Why? Because they build a ton of towers. They don't plan. They just start. They just grab spaghetti and go. Kindergartners don't strategize ahead of time or try to figure how who should be in charge. They don't try to convince their fellow teammates to use triangles or squares or to tape in a certain way. By building a ton of different towers, by experimenting, by doing what design thinkers – some of the folks who study and refine this stuff, call prototyping, they learn from doing what they could never learn from planning.

From the Christian scriptures John 1:25 Be doers of the word, not merely hearers...And being not hearers who forget, but doers who act – they will be blessed in their doing.

Kindergartners have a “bias toward action.” They just go for it. In the business of marshmallow tower building, like in mountain biking, slowing down is a recipe for falling, for short towers, and going fast, picking up momentum, skimming over the ruts, choosing action, is a recipe for tall towers and getting down the mountain.

Folks who think a lot about what makes things successful have learned that when things are ambiguous, most people plan. They don't act. When faced with uncertainty, we try to figure it all out in our heads. A planning mindset though increases our chances of failure because we are likely to waste time executing on guesses that are ultimately wrong.

We spend 14.5 minutes planning for a tower that will never stand on its own. Instead of building that tower in the first 30 seconds and realizing we need a new idea.

How freeing! What a liberating idea – that when we don't know what to do, we don't have to sit around doing nothing until we figure it out. We can build something, anything – and there are things that we cannot know until we're doing, so we might as well start taping spaghetti to table and get to it. What a relief to know that if we're not sure how to proceed our only option isn't just to try to be alone in our heads, planning.

In her poem, “What I Have Learned So Far,” Mary Oliver writes,  
Meditation is old and honorable, so why should I  
not sit, every morning of my life, on the hillside,  
looking into the shining world? ...  
Can one be passionate about the just, the  
ideal, the sublime, and the holy, and yet commit  
to no labor in its cause? I don't think so.  
The gospel of  
light is the crossroads of — indolence, or action.  
Be ignited, or be gone.

My grandmother died of COVID at the end of January was a testament to action and motion. She married three times and despite the heartbreak of the loss of each of her husbands, she found a way to begin again. To build anew and move from stuck to possibility. Our time is so precious, a lesson we live again and again especially this year, these days of so much loss. We have limited time on our mountains.

Of course, to act, risks failure. The kindergartners have 10 towers that end in piles of broken spaghetti before they build one higher than the business students. We talk about failing forward, failing fast.

I didn't actually fail terribly at mountain biking. I did fall off a few times and had the dirty pant legs to show for it. I was lucky. Sometimes we do more than just get mud on our shoes. Sometimes we full on wipe out. And sometimes the stakes are much higher than falling off a bike or a collapsed tower of spaghetti and marshmallows. I think of the scientists and policy makers and nurses and frontline public health workers of this past year and the stakes for acting – for vaccines, for guidance to wear masks, to distance, to pause schools and businesses and travel and gatherings. All while not knowing so much. Our newly confirmed Surgeon General Vivek Murthy on a recent podcast about fighting COVID said that the scientific method is not about certainty. The scientific method is about taking in the data and making a choice anyways, in the midst of uncertainty. I think of all those who rise up each day for justice and liberation for all people. We know so much about how we move this country and world toward repair in the

face of white supremacy, patriarchy and violence. We are rooted in legacies of solidarity, movements that have won freedom and safety for so many. And there is so much we don't know. Here amidst waves of violence in this country and in the world. Making the best choices we can with the data we have amidst so much uncertainty. Trying to be doers of our values, of our words. Knowing that there are truths that cannot be revealed until we risk action. We are building towers and some of them are gonna fall down and there are things we will never know unless we are mountain bikers down our mountains. In motion.

We are torn sometimes between the wisdom that says slow down, be intentional, and the wisdom that says, act and fail and learn, there are things you can never know if you haven't started, so much that can only be revealed through motion.

A few weeks ago I went back to those ski trails I had first mountain biked down so many years ago, surrounded by family, before we knew COVID or lost my grandma to it. This time it was winter. There would be no mountain biking. But what there would be was my first ever downhill skiing. With all the same lessons. You can only learn how to do a thing by doing it. Planning is not the same as acting. There are things that are only revealed in the doing. Reading the Wikihow is helpful but doing it is more helpful. Thinking about skiing is not the same as skiing.

Our world is hurting and we are hurting in it. The ruts of white supremacy, inequality and pandemic are in our path and we have spaghetti and marshmallows before us.

Yes, let us sit, every morning of our lives, on the hillside, looking into the shining world, let us refuse to let busyness be the thief of intimacy.

And also let us have a bias toward action, let us not get lost in perfecting our planning. Our world needs us to be doers of the word, to navigate those ruts, not stand at the top of the mountain analyzing them. It's hard to ride a bike that's not moving.

UU religious educator Laila Ibrahim says that the only choice is between an imperfect and community and no community. We know that the only choice is between imperfect action and no action.

And thank goodness, right? We already know how to act imperfectly. We already know how to be human. We are already saved from perfection. So go get on the bike. Be biased toward action. Be blessed in your doing. Go mountain biking.

### **Anthem (Amelia Peele, vocals; Jen Hayman, piano)**

“You Gotta Be” (Des'ree)

Listen as your day unfolds  
Challenge what the future holds  
Try and keep your head up to the sky  
Lovers, they may cause you tears  
Go ahead, release your fears



Stand up and be counted  
Don't be ashamed to cry  
You gotta be...

You gotta be bad, You gotta be bold  
You gotta be wiser  
You gotta be hard, You gotta be tough  
You gotta be stronger  
You gotta be cool, You gotta be calm  
You gotta stay together  
All I know, all I know  
Love will save the day

Herald what your mother said  
Read the books your father read  
Try to solve the puzzles in your own sweet time  
Some may have more cash than you  
Others take a different view  
My, oh my, hey...

You gotta be bad, You gotta be bold  
You gotta be wiser  
You gotta be hard, You gotta be tough  
You gotta be stronger  
You gotta be cool, You gotta be calm  
You gotta stay together  
All I know, all I know  
Love will save the day

Time asks no questions, it goes on without you  
Leaving you behind if you can't stand the pace  
The world keeps on spinning  
Can't stop it if you tried to  
This time it's danger staring you in the face

Listen as your day unfolds  
Challenge what the future holds  
Try and keep your head up to the sky  
Lovers, they may cause you tears  
Go ahead, release your fears  
Stand up and be counted  
Don't be ashamed to cry  
You gotta be...

You gotta be bad, You gotta be bold  
You gotta be wiser

You gotta be hard, You gotta be tough  
You gotta be stronger  
You gotta be cool, You gotta be calm  
You gotta stay together  
All I know, all I know  
Love will save the day

### **Offertory (Ed Novak)**

Good morning! My name's Ed Novak. I'm joining you today from [sunny/freezing/rainy] Greenbelt, Maryland. If you don't recognize me, here is what I looked like last year, right before the pandemic closed everything [turn off video camera to profile photo], including our sanctuary and my barber shop. I figured that I would get my hair cut again after I was vaccinated, so here's what it looks like when you have passed up haircuts for a year. [turn video camera back on]. I have been a member of All Souls since 2014 and got married in our sanctuary the following year (followed by a blowout reception in Pierce Hall where everybody danced.). Thank you, Esther Strongman, for helping us with the planning.

After a long spiritual journey, All Souls has become my spiritual home...and like any homeowner, I believe that we have to provide an ongoing financial commitment to our home. All Souls is not someone else's institution or building. All Souls is our thing...and we have to be "all in"...together.

My wife Amy and I have increased our pledge for the next fiscal year:

To make sure the doors to the sanctuary can safely open again;

To make sure that All Souls can fulfill its mission and goals; and

To make sure that All Souls can continue to be a beacon of hope in our region and beyond.

I also want to recognize that the pandemic has had an adverse impact on some members' income and ability to make financial commitments. This is why we are asking those members who are able...to increase your pledges by at least 10 percent, to help ensure we meet our goal of raising \$1.2 million in pledges.

We encourage you — if you haven't already made a financial commitment for the next church year — to go to the All Souls website or simply click the link in the chat...to make your pledge.

We also want to acknowledge that this is "10% Sunday," which means 10% of today's plate offering — separate from pledging or fulfilling your pledge — will be designated for an Emergency Response Fund — enabling us to provide immediate assistance to those in need.

Thank you for your generosity and commitment to All Souls...

### **Hymn**

"I'm On My Way"

I'm on my way to the freedom land (3x)

I'm on my way, great God, I'm on my way

I asked my friend "Come and go with me" (3x)

I'm on my way, great God, I'm on my way

If they say no, I'll go anyhow (3x)  
I'm on my way, great God, I'm on my way

I'm on my way and I won't turn back (3x)  
I'm on my way, great God, I'm on my way

### **Benediction (Rev. Rolenz)**

### **Music (Amelia Peele, vocals; Jen Hayman, piano)**

“Hope” (Jason Robert Brown)

I come to sing a song about hope  
I'm not inspired much right now, but even so  
I came out here to sing a song, so here I go  
And, look, it's here  
One verse is done  
The work's begun  
I come to sing a song about hope  
In spite of everything ridiculous and sad  
Though I'm beyond belief depressed, confused, and mad  
Well, I got dressed  
I underestimated how much that would take  
I didn't break  
Until right now  
I sing of hope and don't know how

So maybe I should substitute “strength”  
Because I'm strong, I'm strong enough  
I got through lots of things I didn't think I could  
And so did you, I know that's true

And so, we sing a song about hope  
Though I can't guarantee there's something real behind it  
I have to try to show my children I can find it  
And so today, when life seems crazy and impossible to bear  
It must be there  
Fear never wins  
I sing of hope  
The work begins.