

Worship transcript for April 18, 2021

Prelude (All Souls Jubilee Singers; Akbar Sharieff, call to prayer)

“Kyrie/Call to Prayer” from “African Sanctus” (David Fanshawe)

The English translation of the adhan is:

God is great! I bear witness that there is no god except one god. I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of God. Hurry to the prayer! Hurry to salvation! God is great! There is no god except the one god.

English translation of Kyrie is:

Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.

Call to Worship (Rev. Louise Green)

Hello everyone. I'm Rev. Louise Green, your Minister of Congregational Care. Welcome to this Zoom watering hole, a place of inspiration, accompaniment, and worship. Glad you are here!

We gather today in Ramadan, the global Muslim time of spiritual practice, fasting to evoke gratitude, and nightly Iftar and prayers. Ramadan looks different in social-distance times, yet the spiritual imperative remains to give abundantly to those within, and outside of, your own community, all month long. Thank you for this wonderful choir medley, and particularly, the beautiful Arabic Call to Prayer offered by Akbar Sharieff. Ramadan Kareem, which means Generous Ramadan, to all of us who are observing this holy month.

Thursday will be the 51st Global Earth Day, in both an ongoing climate emergency, and increasing action on behalf of our one precious planet. Our worship theme today is ecosystem, the interconnectedness of organisms with each other and their environment. The metaphor of rivers evokes that connection in our music throughout the service. A water story of generosity in other communities might inspire us, as we continue to explore our monthly theme of Miracle. We will ponder how ecosystems flow in the All Souls caring networks which flourish among us.

I'd like to welcome our Chalice Lighters now: Kari Rowe, Jack Baker, and Theron and Lia Baker.

Chalice Lighting (Kari Rowe, Jack Baker, Lia & Theron Baker)

For the gift of this day and for our community of spiritual nurture and compassion, we give thanks.

We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith.

May our many sparks meet and merge in communion of heart and soul.

Hymn

“I’m Gonna Lift” (Faya Rose Toure)

I’m gonna lift my brother up, he is not heavy (3x)
If I don’t lift him up, if I don’t lift him up, if I don’t lift him up,
I will fall down.

I’m gonna lift my sister up, she is not heavy (3x)
If I don’t lift her up, if I don’t lift her up, if I don’t lift her up,
I will fall down.

I’m gonna lift my family up, they are not heavy (3x)
If I don’t lift them up, if I don’t lift them up, if I don’t lift them up,
I will fall down.

I’m gonna lift my people up, they are not heavy (3x)
If I don’t lift them up, if I don’t lift them up, if I don’t lift them up,
I will fall down.

Welcome (Elizabeth Andrews Zitelli)

Welcome to All Souls Church. My name is Elizabeth Andrews Zitelli and my pronouns are she/her.

Since 1821 the members of this church have been walking and rolling together toward an important place, a place that Martin Luther King called the Beloved Community.

Now, two hundred years later, we have members joining in Zoom church from all over the country, and the world! We celebrate our church both for our expansive reach and our neighborhood roots. Located in the vibrant, multicultural neighborhood of Columbia Heights, Washington, DC, we are steeped in the work of community building on the ground, and we acknowledge that this ground, the grounds of our physical church, is the ancestral homelands of the Piscataway Conoy Tribe, whose existence pre-dates All Souls church.

With joy and determination we journey together, regardless of where you began your journey, how much or how little you carry with you, or with whom you choose to hold hands along the way. We all lend our hands to the creation of a diverse, justice-seeking, spirit-growing community that is true to the dream of all souls. We invite you to join us on this grand adventure, in this important work. We invite you to discover how in joining together we are more than the sum of our parts. To discover that even as we zoom into church from our couches we are a vital part of something greater than ourselves. So for members of All Souls – Welcome! For those of you visiting us for the first time – Welcome! For those of you who make up our virtual church – We are glad you are here!

If we were in the sanctuary, we would turn and physically greet one another. We can still do that – only in a ritual which we are calling “Beholding” We invite you to remain on mute, but to scroll through the gallery of faces. Express gratitude for one another in the chat – for being able to safely see each other while listening to music.

Announcements and Prayer (Rev. Rob Keithan)

Good morning! I’m Rev. Rob Keithan, my pronouns are he/him, and I serve as the Minister for Social Justice here at All Souls. I will say more about some of this week’s events in a moment, but I want to recognize two milestones here.

First, a happy first birthday to the pantry for all souls, which has provided food and basic life supplies to people for one year now from its location on the 15th Street side of the building. I can testify to the importance of the pantry, because every time I’m at the church I see it constantly in use. Some people are stopping by to add items, but most are looking for things to take. So I want to say a special word of thanks to Maya Hermann, the primary force behind the pantry, the other people that served on the initial planning team, the volunteer stewards who stop by to check the pantry, and to all who have stopped by to donate thus far.

One of the two units was damaged recently, but the other is still going strong. You can celebrate the pantry’s anniversary by stopping by at any time to donate items, to pick up items, or just to see it. Some of the most needed supplies are toiletries like shampoo and soap, cleaning supplies, and baby supplies like baby food and diaper wipes.

Second, this past Friday, April 16th, was Emancipation Day, marking the day that slaves in DC were freed. It was declared a DC holiday in 1996 by Mayor Anthony Williams following years of organizing and advocacy from longtime All Souls Church member Loretta Carter Hanes.. Also on Friday, I joined a group of more than 51 clergy on the steps of National City Christian Church calling for DC Statehood. The House of Representatives is scheduled to vote on statehood this coming Thursday, April 22. It’s expected to pass, so organizers have been focusing on generating support in the Senate. The All Souls Reeb Project and the Silver Souls are working together on an advocacy campaign—stay tuned for more information in the next week or two.

After today’s service, there are three opportunities for deeper connection. You can stay in this same Zoom for coffee hour, or to attend our Sermon Talk-Back with Rev. Louise Green.

Third, you can attend a session on “Governance as a Spiritual Practice,” which will include a review of our governance system and conversation about why good governance is also a spiritual discipline and practice. Look for separate zoom info in the chat.

Also later today, the children’s clothing swap continues! It’s from 1-4 PM in Pierce Hall, which is a big space and well-ventilated. There are still LOTS of great clothes for children from newborn to teens. Masks are required, and donations are no longer accepted.

This coming Wednesday, April 21st, the Adult Spiritual Development Team is offering a one hour dive into poetry as sacred text. The zoom link is on the website.

And next Sunday, April 25, our guest minister is the Rev. Mykal Slack, who serves as community minister for Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism, Rev. Slack's sermon is entitled "Unleashing a Radical Imagination."

Pastoral Concerns

As we turn to pastoral concerns, we must start with the solemn and shameful recognition that this past week saw more lives lost at the hands of law enforcement and civilians with guns. Our hearts and our souls cry out for healing and action. For mourning and for change. Not for piecemeal reforms, but real and radical change.

We pray for Daunte Wright, killed by police in Brooklyn Center, MN last Sunday.

We pray for Dominique Williams and James Lionel Johnson, killed on Wednesday in Takoma Park, MD, by an off duty Pentagon Force Protection Agency officer.

And we pray for the eight people killed, and the others injured, in the FedEx facility in Indianapolis on Thursday.

Turning inward, we offer healing prayers to Gregory Ford, who went into the emergency room last Friday with chest pain and was eventually diagnosed with pulmonary embolism. He was released from the hospital on Monday morning, and is in ongoing treatment and recovering well. We send love and support to Gregory.

Jose-Luis Sanchez is doing well, living with his friend Peter during continuing medical treatment for colon cancer. He hopes to resume chemo this week and appreciates All Souls prayers and caring cards.

We rejoice that Cynthia Durham has recovered from her medical treatment, and will have her next post-surgery appointment and scan this week. Please wish her well for this consultation with her doctor.

The Celebration of Life for Emily Dyer, re-scheduled for April 24, has been postponed once more. Her sons would like additional time to process a difficult death, and we send them love as they grieve.

The Celebration of Life for Bob Bloomfield has been set: Friday, June 11 at 4 pm. The Zoom link will be on the All Souls calendar. Our hearts are with Barbara McCann and Bob's family in the preparation for this event.

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

Prayer

Spirit of Life and Love,
God of Understanding and Liberation,
Hold us as we mourn more lives lost to senseless anger and state violence.
Strengthen our courage and creativity and resolve as we work for real, lasting, transformation in our laws and in our culture.
Help us to stay mindful of what we know—that we are part of an interconnected web of life.
That we are part of one human family, and that the fate of our human family is inseparable from the planet that sustains us.
May this connection ground us and guide us, this day and in all the days to come.
Amen.

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.

Reading (Elizabeth Andrews Zitelli)

Excerpt from “Enacting Public Theology Through Effective Religious Institutions” (Rev. Megan L. Foley)

As March 2020 began, UU congregations often still ran under the implicit mission of the 1950s – maintain the independent, full-service corner church at all costs...The shifts in American culture in the past 70 years have drained our volunteer pool, our family constituencies, and our financial base, and yet our congregations continue to act as if those social changes do not make a difference to the functioning of church...

People seeking religious community do so these days because they want to make meaning of a chaotic world and make a difference in it, not so they can run a motley social club...Although change is very hard, keeping one’s organizational head in the sand is simply not going to work...

The rate of change needed for individuals and organizations to thrive is disorienting for church leaders.

[As Paul Light wrote in *Sustaining Innovation* back in 1998]: “Permanent white-water conditions are regularly taking us all out of our comfort zones and asking things of us that we never imagined would be required. Permanent white water means permanent life outside one’s comfort zone.”

The challenge for all is how to handle it. [Light asked]”Will [we] hunker down against the surf, holding on for dear life, or will [we] turn into it, harnessing the power it contains to take control of [our] own destiny?” This question became prescient as March of 2020 developed.

Sermon (Rev. Green)

“The Ecosystem of Congregational Care”

The reading we just heard is Rev. Megan Foley’s soon-to-be-published work on her Doctor of Ministry in Public Theology. I was grateful to get a copy this last week and loved what she had to say. Megan reminds us that Public Theology is not just external to congregations, it is also expressed within an institution, shows up in the systems. She studied a group of congregations adapting this last challenging year, and identified three things needed to thrive: a clear mission, nimbleness in change, and seeing building wide Beloved Community as key to navigating well. If you are going online to the General Assembly of the UU denomination in June, her workshop will be: Stronger Now: Congregations’ Lessons from the Pandemic.

Megan observes that we live out our public theology within the congregation, for better or worse, often ineffectively as we struggle in times of transitions. Which seems to be all the time right now! Pandemic has created the dissolution of systems, and we need new images for what we imagine congregation to be. The metaphors of what we envision matter. There is an old paradigm from the that 1950’s church: the minister does pastoral care with a few lay leaders who are specially commissioned for this specialized work. Imagine this as one small pond of pastoral care where people come fishing, with a limited capacity which prioritizes emergencies.

Much excellent work to change this metaphor of pastoral care to Congregational Care already occurred at All Souls in recent years. By early 2020 you shifted to the idea that the entire congregation is involved in caring, and had build some systems for that shared ministry. This broad structural work paused sharply in March 2020, morphed in the pandemic, and is still changing into new iterations. It will not disappear.

Over the 9 months since I returned to All Souls, it has become clear that all congregations are navigating very different times. Congregational Care will need to evolve again and again, as all institutional systems must. As we heard in the reading: “Permanent white-water conditions are regularly taking us all out of our comfort zones and asking things of us that we never imagined would be required. Permanent white water means permanent life outside one’s comfort zone.”

Imagine many active rivers flowing in an abundant ecosystem. Water pouring in and flowing through. You might see Rock Creek and other tributaries pouring into the Potomac and Anacostia, and out into the enormous Chesapeake Bay. A metaphor of generosity in offering and receiving. Asking for help, and letting resources come. Giving and offering when a situation for caring flows in front of you. Understanding the system is too large for just a few to manage entirely.

All Souls has opened fully into that larger ecosystem, with so many relationships, small groups, and the rapid decentralization of Congregational Care in the pandemic. This was a planned shift that grew exponentially in the shut-down for COVID-19. And to be sure, it is way more challenging to feel the whole Beloved Community which is All Souls right now.

Worship is central for only a smaller portion of us, and we have not gathered in person for months. Our website and communications online reach only a slice of the congregation. People are meeting in Zooms of their own creation, and in the congregational spaces, outside and not at all. Some have moved to other communities that met their needs now. In these ongoing transitions, which will not end, we must tend the ever-changing work of Congregational Care.

The Minister of Congregational Care, an interim position I am now grateful to hold, has half-time hours, which mean only so much is possible. Even if it were a full-time position, this would remain true. This is the reality of time, space, and mathematics. All Souls is a large congregation of over 1000 people. The dispersed population is now expanding ever wider across the country, with some international participants. The ministers tend the whole, however the wider responsibility of clear mission, nimbleness in change, and building Beloved Community must be broadly held and shared by all of us. Each of you, as lay participants and leaders, are also balancing complex changes and the disruption of many months, seeking to manage family, work, social, health and economic challenges.

This can feel daunting, and the complexity is real. However, we will never have clear mission that inspires from a perspective of scarcity. We need to imagine our abundance, many tributaries into rivers into a broad ecosystem of caring. We must infuse a dynamic of caring into the whole community and become more nimble in our responses. This has already been happening, over some years of stresses, tensions, conflict and change. This is what is happening now. The Minister of Congregational Care is a kind of lighthouse keeper in the broader water ecosystem, just one role among many, with a shared responsibility for creating and being Beloved Community.

I'd like to pivot to share a water story of a modern miracle, which landed in my part of the river in the last few months. I see this as a parable: responding to unlikely circumstances and trusting the generosity to flow abundantly. In mid-February, Dr. Schuwan Dorsey called from Houston, Texas, asking for assistance with water. Her very large Baptist congregation was working with thousands of people through their non-profit, Bethels Heavenly Hands, to respond to extreme weather, power outage, and disruption in Texas. Bethels Heavenly Hands had been doing direct service and empowerment work for 27 years, impacting hundreds of thousands of people in primarily Black SW Houston. Providing meals after the storm expanded to thousands weekly, in multiple sites created quickly. Dr. Dorsey, and Bethels Family Church, were organizing huge

systems providing water and food, so she reached out on faith to a number of congregations nationally that she felt might assist. She went online and found All Soul Unitarian in DC.

This unlikely phone message from Dr. Dorsey landed, and I heard the request for water. She had no way of knowing I was following the Texas storm stories closely, with many relatives in El Paso, Austin, and San Antonio. My decision to call her was to be supportive, with no clear idea of what she was proposing. When I asked Dr. Dorsey what she was asking, she said: we need money for water. I'd like to you to talk to our Senior Pastor Walter August, at Bethels Family Church, and the Executive Director of Bethels Heavenly Hands, Rev. James Lee. Dr. Dorsey also added, you could organize an 18-wheeler of water to come to Houston as soon as possible. To say the very least, this was all more than I expected, and I hung up to ponder my next move.

I began by contact Pastor August, quite dubious about the reason, yet unable to put aside the internal prompting to make that call. It immediately became clear this was a dynamic man of action, purpose, and decades of strong impact in Houston. He set some clear parameters: they only work in partnerships that involve reciprocity, their paradigm was empowerment not just aid, and they work on behalf of an abundant Spirit of God. What can I do for you right now, he said?

Startled, I mentioned that I was anxious about my own relatives, and the wide impact of this storm in my home state. Let's pray, he said. Pastor August offered extemporaneous prayer that definitely touched my UU spirit, even as the language he used was not my own. He then suggested I call Rev. Lee, which I did, and I was again struck with the clear mission, nimbleness in change, and the huge systems of building Beloved Community which they had exhibited for decades. The numbers impacted were huge, the territory large, and the faith compelling.

Pastors August and Lee reminded me of another dynamic Baptist preacher I knew well, Rev Robert Turner at St. John Baptist in Columbia MD. We worked closely together for over two years, and I consider him a mentor and interfaith colleague. So I called him, explained what was happening, and asked, tentatively, if he would consider a Zoom meeting with Dr. Dorsey, and the two clergy. Again, most unexpectedly, he said yes with enthusiasm. It turned out members of his large congregation were asking about Houston, and how to help relatives and neighbors there. We set up the Zoom call, and I still wondered what was happening. This was about to get stranger...

A few days before that scheduled Zoom gathering, I went to another international Zoom meeting: Harvard alumni from around the world were looking at cases of global allyship that involved indigenous nations, from the 19th Century and to the present moment. One detail in one of the many stories caught my full attention: A company called Mananalua, that produces pure water in recyclable cans, founded by the Hawaiian actor Jason Mamoia, sent an 18-wheeler of water to the Hopi Nation in Arizona for COVID relief. What?! What could it hurt to ask them about sending water to Houston now? I wrote that strongly worded request in an email to the website info contact. It was like sending a message out in a bottle, not knowing if it would ever be found or read

Within 6 hours I had an email reply from Lloyd Evans, the business manager for Mananalua, which is a national company. It turned out he lived in Houston. Yes, they were very much

interested in giving to Bethels Heavenly Hands. We started their own nimble process of delivering 7000 pounds of water stored in Utah, in an 18-wheeler to Pastor Lee in Houston. This increased awareness of their clear mission to reduce single-use plastics for the good of our rivers and oceans. Dr. Dorsey jubilantly sent me several iPhone movies of the unloading of the heavy pallets, and declared she is visiting All Souls in September. Pastor August and Rev. Turner met on Zoom after our larger group meeting, and St. John Baptist sent \$3000 from their community emergency relief funds, in their own nimble pivot to support their mission around emergency relief. Their two Baptist churches are also discussing a potential partnership in work in Louisiana as well, and some joint projects with lay leaders.

In my mind, this is Miracle. When we respond to the call of generosity and giving, and just take each step as it arrives. Sometimes the results are astounding, and the synchronicity aligns, in ways that are far beyond what we can imagine. I'm still amazed by this unfolding of events, and at the end of the sermon, we will put a link in the chat. I hope you take a look at Bethels Heavenly Hands website, and I hope you consider donating, as we seek to eventually match the \$3000 offered by St. John Baptist. If you give, let me know, and I'm also asking family and friends to broaden the pool of giving. This is my commitment in the Miracle occurring.

This experience inspires me to imagine a broader ecosystem, one which trusts in the abundance of generosity. I think of congregational care as infusing our entire system, and moving beyond, the essential work of building Beloved Community. It is shared expression, not the province of just the Minister of Congregational Care, or only networks we rebuild to deliver services over time. It must be stronger and wider, more like rivers that run through an entire ecosystem. Water everywhere.

This is not just when you find yourself in need, traveling a tough desert situation, but in regular times, all the time. In particular rites of passage like Child Dedication, Coming of Age, Weddings and Memorials. Flowing care, infused everywhere. All Zooms. All offerings. All programs. All worship. Every staff meeting. If the caring is not flowing, the systems are dry and cannot be sustained. This is part of clear mission, nimbleness in change, and actually living into Beloved Community.

This mission requires an internal orientation: an expanded sense of giving from shared abundance, with gratitude for many, many different kinds of gifts. Even when you are not sure what to do! When a phone call or opportunity comes that you did not expect, you can still be the one to respond. From a place where you don't need to see or control the outcomes, and where you surrender the action into a larger flow of Spirit. Opening to that widest sense of connection to the whole, all the parts of the All Souls ecosystem you know, and the places you don't see, don't visit, and yet may care deeply about all the same.

This internal guidance system of caring is not just about "me and mine," my group and my relationships. We hold the belief, and share the mission, that this is ours to create together for All Souls. We trust in the abundance of flow, rivers moving everywhere, impossibly large and generative, generosity creating generosity creating Beloved Community everywhere.

In that way, we create miracle upon miracle, in human connections which honor the inherent worth and dignity of all beings. May it be so. Amen.

www.bethelsheavenlyhands.org/

www.mananalulu.com

Anthem (Women's 8)

“River” (Coco Love Alcorn)

The river is a healer, the river is a sage
The river knows no end and the river feels no age
The river is a leader every single day
It's living in the moment and it always finds a way
Water heal my body, water heal my soul
When I go down, down to the water
By the water I feel whole

The river calls me over, it's calling out my name
In the day and in the night, I hear that river all the same
It's calling me over, calling out my pain
Oh a river gathers tears just like a river gathers rain
Water heal my body, water heal my soul
When I go down, down to the water
By the water I feel whole

The river is a traveller, always on the go
A river never worries if it's fast or if it's slow
River take me to where I need to go
Oh, and I will just relax and let the river flow
Water heal my body, water heal my soul
When I go down, down to the water
By the water I feel whole

Offertory (Joe Feuer)

Good morning! My name is Joe Feuer and I'm a member of the All Souls Board.

As a boy, I attended Unitarian Sunday school at a church in Stamford, CT but then went off to college and pursued a spiritual journey that led me through explorations of other traditions including Judaism and Buddhism.

When I first crossed the threshold of All Souls one chilly fall Sunday morning back in 2003, I had just moved to DC, and was looking to re-connect with Unitarianism. I was seeking both community as well as a place to be inspired on a Sunday morning. After hearing the rousing

sounds of the Jubilee Choir, and a very inspirational sermon from Rev. Hardies, and seeing the friendly smiling faces around me, I knew I had found something special.

I also felt drawn to the vision of All Souls- a church where “all people are welcome, and where we recognize ourselves as one human family.”

All Souls quickly became my go-to place for replenishing my spirit; a place where I could be lifted up by stirring words and music, and find true community. I’ve been coming back ever since.

These are the reasons why I both serve on the board and give to All Souls.

We are currently in the midst of the All Souls All In annual pledge campaign with a goal of raising \$1.2 million in pledges for the upcoming 2021-2022 Fiscal Year.

All Souls has come through a year like no other in the history of the congregation. We’ve learned a valuable lesson: The congregation is resilient and support of the church is strong.

We anticipate that we’ll be able to safely open the doors of the church in the Fall and this will require that All Souls is ALL IN!

We are asking for Extraordinary Giving for Extraordinary Times.

Please remember to make your pledge to All Souls. Pledges indicate our intended financial commitment to the church and are the basis of the church’s budget.

All members are encouraged to increase their pledge this year by at least 10%. And to give a little extra if you can.

Your support will help the church to cover:

- increased costs for re-opening,
- technology for hybrid services,
- paying fair and equitable salaries to staff according to UUA guidelines
- funding of the 200th anniversary celebration, commencing later this year
- and will help make up the difference for those in the All Souls community who cannot give because they are suffering from the financial impact of the pandemic.

Now is the time for All Souls to be All In!

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

Hymn

“Kundalini Mantra”

Bountiful am I, blissful am I, beautiful am I

Benediction (Rev. Green)

“Book of Hours: Love Poems to God” (Rilke)

May what we do flow from us like a river
no forcing and no holding back
the way it is with children.

Then in these swelling and ebbing currents
these deepening tides moving out, returning,
we will sing you as no one ever has,
streaming through widening channels
into the open sea.

Go in bountiful generosity, return in love to care and to receive.

Amen.

Music (All Souls Choir; Rochelle Rice, soloist; Mark G. Meadows, piano; Romeir Mendez, bass; Dante Pope, drums)

“River” (Leon Bridges)

Been travelin’ these wide roads for so long
My heart’s been far from you, ten thousand miles gone
Oh I wanna come near and give you every part of me
But there’s blood on my hands and my lips are unclean
In my darkness, I remember, mama’s words reoccur to me:
Surrender to the good lord and he’ll wipe your face clean

Take me to your river, I wanna go
Take me to your river, I wanna know

Dip me in your smooth waters, I go in
As a man of many crimes, come up for air
As my sins flow down the Jordan
Oh I wanna come near and give you every part of me
But there’s blood on my hands and my lips are unclean

Take me to your river, I wanna go
Take me to your river, I wanna know

Wanna go, wanna go, wanna go
Wanna know, wanna know, wanna know